

Groton Daily Independent

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Missing one red male lab Buddy and one black female lab Lucy. Call Franne Sippel 397-7949 or Marc 397-7950.

Thursday, December 31

No School
New Year's Eve

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, frosted brownie, whole wheat bread.

Anniversaries: Paul & Tina Kosel, Jake & Tiffany Unzen, Ralph & Virginia Breikreutz

Birthdays: Jill Cutler • Braiden Craig • Brian Koens

Friday, January 1, 2016

No School
New Year's Day

Anniv: Kevin & Sharolyn Jondahl

Birthdays: Lauren Harrison, Patricia Larson, Stephen Duncan, Tyler Kolb.

Saturday, January 2, 2016

Anniv: Jeff & Lisa Howard

Birthdays: Briana Nordine, Holly Walter, Kara Anderson.

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

Sunday, January 3, 2016

Birthdays: Bob Walter, Caroline Graf, Jolene Siders, Tanner Waage, Vicki Podoll

9:00am: Emmanuel Lutheran School

9:00am: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church Mass

9:00am: St. John's Lutheran Worship with Communion

9:30am: Emmanuel Lutheran Fellowship

10:00am: Heaven Bound Ministries worship at Pierpont Church

10:00am: St. John's Lutheran School

10:15am: Emmanuel Lutheran worship with baptism and communion



Hanlon Brothers
Gravel Hauling

New & Cleaning of
Stockdams with our
60' reach trackhoe

605/395-6531

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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Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Coyotes 7, Foxes 4 ½, Shih Tzus 4, Jackelopes 3 ½, Chipmunks 3, Pocket Gophers 2
Men's High Games: Brad Waage 217, 207, Roger Colestock 213, Roger Spanier 209, 200; Brad Larson 201, Doug Jorgensen 200

Women's High Games: Vicki Walter 194, Dar Larson 184, Hayley Merkel 182

Men's High Series: Roger Spanier 590, Brad Waage 585, Brad Larson 569

Women's High Series: Dar Larson 505, Vicki Walter 504, Sue Stanley 486

Friendly Fellows and Daisies

The Friendly Fellows and Daisies 4-H club met on December 6, 2015 at the Claremont Legion for its Annual 4-H Christmas Party. Members and their families included Kaitlyn, Kennedy, Stacy and John Anderson; Braden, Mandy and Mark Boe; Ethan and Laura Clark; Carly, Clay, Austin, Amelia and Colby Crawford; Dylan, Colin, Sara and Mike Frey; Landon, Nicole, Andrew, Renee and Wade Marzahn; Hanna, Mallory, Tucker, Melissa and Eric Miller; Jonathan, Hannah, Jakob, Madelyne, Stacey Sumption; Logan, Ashlynn, Greyson, Robyn and Jason Warrington; Bradyn, Denise and Kent Wieker; and Trey and Russ Wright. Guest included Janice Fliehs; Jackie Pigott; Yvonne Gibbs; Donna Schliebe; Bernice Docter; Virginia Pulfrey; Connie Anderson; Kenny and Janet Frey; Deloris Bruns; and Judy Pierson; Donnie Wright; Karen and Roy Boe; Lee and Diane Warrington; Lee Ann and Royal Tople; Brent and Barb Miller. Attendees played card bingo with lots of prizes that were won. The members sang Christmas carols and gave sun catchers as a Christmas gift to our guests. For two Community Service projects the 4-H members brought food items for the local Food Pantry and brought items for Safe Harbor to be placed at the 4-H Christmas Tree in the Brown

County Courthouse. The 4-H members made holiday greeting cards for Holdon Rivere, husband of former 4-H member Brittany Wieker who is stationed over in Turkey. Leader Mike Frey presented each 4-H member with awards for the past year. Dylan Frey gave a speech about his Dairy Judging experiences at the National 4-H Dairy Judging Contest at World Dairy Expo in Madison Wisconsin. Bradyn Wieker gave a speech about his experiences at the National 4-H Archery Competition in Grand Island, Nebraska. Trey Wright and Landon Marzahn presented the group with a Robotics demonstration. Robotics is 4-H project that has been growing in numbers over the past 5 years. The group watched a slide show of the past years activities of both the club and individual accomplishments of the members. The Christmas Party ended with a Potluck supper and desserts. The next meeting will be held January 3rd at the Brown County Extension Office following a roller skating party in Aberdeen.

-Submitted by Colin Frey, club reporter

New Year's Eve



Serving Prime Rib from 5
p.m. to 9 p.m. for \$19.50

Johnson Brothers Band will
be playing from
8:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.

Shot and drink specials
throughout the night

Andover Bar & Grill

THINKING ABOUT HEALTH

Can Shopping for Health Services Really Bring Down Costs?

By Trudy Lieberman, Rural Health News Service

Early in December David, a reader who lives in the foothills west of Denver, sent me an email. "It's scary when you go into any healthcare facility and don't know whether to bring your check book, loan application papers, or bankruptcy processing papers," he said. "Nobody seems to care or be concerned about it." He wanted to know why we aren't told all costs up front so we can make informed decisions.

David had a point. When we go in for a procedure, most of the time we don't know the total price or even what we will pay after insurance covers its share. In the last few years the lack of transparency has provided opportunities for entrepreneurs to create websites aimed at giving patients some price information for the handful of procedures that you can actually shop for. But it's one thing to shop for a low-cost stress test or a spinal X-ray. It's a lot trickier when you need heart by-pass surgery or a back operation.

I am all for price transparency that sheds light on our high-cost health system, and I want it to spark a serious conversation about why we have the most expensive care in the world and what we as a country can do about it. But don't count on turning patients into consumers who can force prices down and magically give us cheaper healthcare. That's a lot harder than something like boycotting the local Ford dealer in favor of the Chevy dealer who offers rock bottom prices.

The fundamental relationship between patients and their doctors is different from the relationship between buyers and sellers of cars and other consumer goods. Patients have to trust their healthcare providers since it's hard to judge the proposed care or treatments unless you have a medical degree. For most other products, the admonition "buyer beware" is at the heart of the relationship. Furthermore, shoppers generally have an idea of what makes a good car, and can more easily judge if the seller is giving them one.

If you buy a bad car, you live with it for a while and try not to make the same mistake again. If you pick the wrong imaging center or the wrong doctor, you could die or suffer serious harm. The stakes simply are higher.

In the last couple of weeks I came across another barrier to price shopping—marketing activities by pharmaceutical companies. Those activities are designed to help patients pay for their expensive prescriptions while at the same time keeping the underlying price of the drugs high.

An e-book I found on the website of "Medical Marketing & Media," a trade publication, advises healthcare sellers how to market their products. This book, titled "Pathway to Specialty Access," offers instructions to drug companies for using coupon programs to sell more drugs particularly the new, very costly specialty drugs and how to stop customers from not filling their prescriptions because they are too expensive. That's apparently a big problem in the drug business.

Those coupons available online or from doctors and pharmacies offer discounts on medicines especially those with high price tags like the new specialty drugs coming on the market. One example notes that a patient's out-of-pocket costs for multiple sclerosis or rheumatoid arthritis drugs could be as little as \$5 a prescription thanks to coupons and discounts. It could be hundreds of dollars without them.

Other coupons take the form of e-vouchers. A pharmacist sends a prescription to a vendor. The drug makers and the vendors establish how much they will cover of the costs insurance requires the patient to pay. While the process is going on, the patient "doesn't know what he will pay," says Andrew Pollpeter, a senior principal with The Amundsen Group, a pharmaceutical consulting firm. "But they are happier when they see a lower copay," he added.

What's wrong with this? After all, the patient gets cheap medicine; the drug company gets more sales. The high drug prices, however, are still with us. "Coupons shield consumers from the true cost of medications, and (consumers) are less likely to make decisions based on the true cost of the drug," says Troy Filipek, an actuary with the consulting firm Milliman. In short, discounts mask what the drug maker is really charging.

And that, of course, means all the advice about price shopping goes out the window.

At least when it comes to medicines, lots of middlemen are involved in what drugs you get and how much they cost. There's nothing transparent about drug pricing, and there's not likely to be.

What's been your experience with shopping for health care? Write to Trudy at trudy.lieberman@gmail.com

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Here is how the Schwan's fundraiser works.

Customers phone in the order or order online
They use the code. 25179

If they regularly order online they are asked if they want to contribute to a fundraiser

That is when they put the code in.

Between Dec 2 and Jan 16, we will earn 20% of sales

If a customer orders an ecertificate-and online gift card we get \$10 for the \$25 ecertificate.

When you get an ecertificate, you can go in and purchase right away or you can print it out

if you want to give it as a gift or save it for later.

Customers are limited to one ecertificate...BUT if you use an alternate email address you can purchase more than one

If you are not a regular Schwan's customer, when you place your order they will tell you what day
And approximate (2 hour) time they plan to deliver.

You can be a one time customer and support us.

If you order online you must give them a credit card number, however you can switch payment at the door.

It took me a few fundraisers to realize that if I purchase during the first 45 days I contribute 20% and save my ecertificates for after the Jan 16 date, duh! Before that I was purchasing ecertificates and using them right away.

Our greatest income will be during this 45 day period.
After that we will earn 5% until April 16.

Schwan's
Cares™
A Fundraising Network



Support Us

*Giving back to your community
never tasted so delicious.*

Schwan's Home Delivery offers over 350 delicious foods, flash-frozen at the peak of freshness and conveniently delivered to your door. Through Schwans-Cares.com, you can order from Schwan's Home Delivery and help our organization meet its fundraising goals. When you order by **January 16th, 2016**, 20% of product and 40% of eGift Card sales will go back to the organization.

Here are two ways to support us!

Order Online:

1. Visit Schwans-Cares.com
2. Enter Campaign ID: **25179** into the search box located in the upper right hand corner then click to open campaign.
3. Click "Shop to Give" and then select either the "Buy Now" or "Shop Now" option.
4. Select team member, if applicable
5. Start shopping!

Order by Phone:

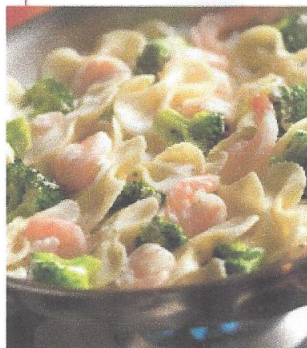
Call 1-855-870-7208 and provide Campaign ID: **25179**

Thank you for your support!

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Shop online at Schwans-Cares.com
or call 1-855-870-7208



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Today in Weather History

December 31, 1972: A winter system visited the area on the 29th through the 31st, with precipitation beginning as rain in South Dakota and snow in Minnesota during the early morning hours of the 29th. A period of freezing rain occurred across South Dakota before the precipitation there changed to all snow, while in west central Minnesota snow in the morning changed to a period of freezing rain and sleet in the afternoon. Damages from the 40-mile wide ice storm from the Wheaton-Morris-Appleton area ENE through St. Cloud and Pine City, MN were some of the largest known to date across the area. Thousands of farms and homes across the ice storm strip were without power and telephone service as the result of thousands of broken lines and/or broken poles. Many were without utilities from one to three days, and a few without utilities for nearly a week. Utility damages were estimated to be 1.5 million dollars. In South Dakota, snowfall of 2 to 6 inches was common. Strong winds of over 40 mph accompanied the snow, causing drifting and blowing snow and occasionally reducing visibility to zero. Some of the roads were blocked. The most severe conditions occurred on the 30th when the highway department advised no traveling.

December 31, 2010: A second stronger surface low pressure area moved across the region on New Year's Eve bringing widespread heavy snowfall along with blizzard conditions. Bitter cold northwest winds of 25 to 40 mph combined with additional snowfall of 6 to 10 inches brought visibilities to near zero across much of the region. This was the second blizzard in two days across the region. The blizzard conditions continued into early New Year's Day. Both Interstates 29 and 90 were closed from the 31st until Sunday, January 2nd. There were several stranded motorists along Highway 83 with five people being rescued. The total snowfall amounts from the two storms ranged from 6 to 15 inches across the region. The two day snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Eagle Butte; 7 inches at Doland; 8 inches at Mobridge and Gann Valley; 9 inches at Castlewood; 10 inches at Murdo, Clark, Ipswich, Kennebec, and Watertown and 11 inches at Clear Lake and Bryant. Locations with a foot or more of snow included 12 inches at Aberdeen, Gettysburg, Highmore, Milbank, Mission Ridge, and Bowdle; 13 inches at Eureka, Pierre, Onida, and Blunt; 14 inches at Mellette, Sisseton, Victor, and Roscoe with 15 inches at Britton, Webster, and Redfield. The snowfall began between 6 am and noon CST on the 31st and ended between 4 am and 11 am CST on January 1st.

1917 - The temperature at Lewisburg, WV, plunged to 37 degrees below zero to set a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1929 - Greenland Ranch, in Death Valley, California, went the entire year without measurable precipitation. (The Weather Channel)

1933 - A 24 hour rainfall of 7.36 inches set the stage for the worst flood in Los Angeles history. Flooding claimed 44 lives. (David Ludlum)

1941 - Snow which began on New Year's Eve became a major blizzard on New Year's Day, burying Des Moines, IA, under 19.8 inches of snow in 24 hours, an all-time record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1947 - A late afternoon tornado touched down 10 miles north of Shreveport LA, and dissipated south of El Dorado AR. The tornado, as much as 400 yards in width, killed 18 persons. It damaged or destroyed two thirds of the structures at Cotton Valley LA. (The Weather Channel)

1962 - Perhaps the worst blizzard in the history of the state of Maine finally came to an end. The storm produced 40 inches in 24 hours at Orono, and a total of 46 inches at Ripogenus Dam. Gale force winds produced snow drifts twenty feet high around Bangor. A disastrous icestorm was over Georgia and South Carolina. It ravaged the two states for days causing more than seven million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1963 - A snowstorm struck the Deep South. Meridian, MS, received 15 inches of snow, 10.5 inches blanketed Bay St Louis MS, and 4.5 inches fell at New Orleans LA. Freezing temperatures then prevailed for New Year's Day. (David Ludlum)

2016 DOG LICENSES

AVAILABLE NOW!!

Licenses due by Dec. 31, 2015

Fines start after Dec. 31, 2015








Dogs CAN NOT be licensed without providing updated rabies shot information, please bring records for each dog to City Hall


Please contact City Hall as soon as possible if you no longer have any dogs

Spayed or neutered dogs are \$5 per dog, otherwise \$10 per dog

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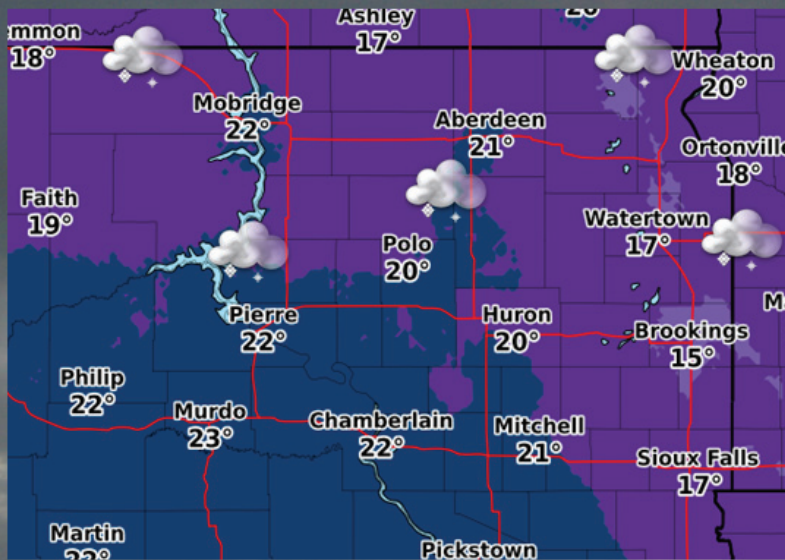
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Today	Tonight	New Year's Day	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Scattered Flurries	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Clear	Sunny
High: 21 °F	Low: 11 °F	High: 26 °F	Low: 11 °F	High: 27 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 23 °F

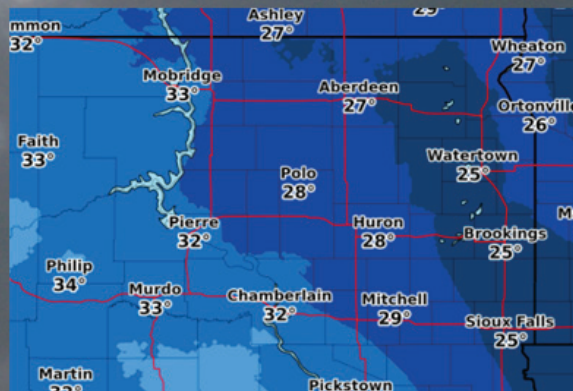


Warming Trend To Start The New Year

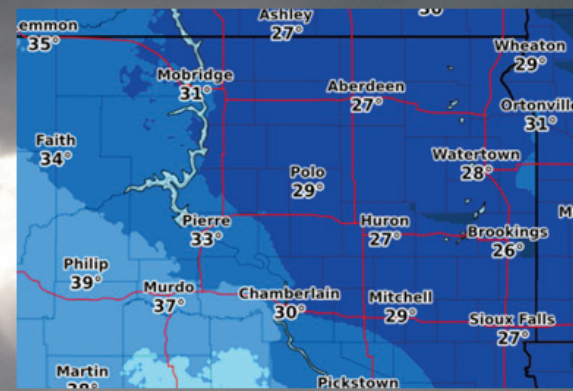
Afternoon Highs
Valid: December 31, 2015



Afternoon Highs
Valid: January 01, 2016





Afternoon Highs
Valid: January 02, 2016



National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD

weather.gov/Aberdeen

 National Weather Service Aberdeen

 @NWSAberdeen

Updated: 12/31/2015 4:43 AM Central

Published on: 12/31/2015 at 5:06AM

Aside from scattered flurries across the area today, dry conditions are expected through the weekend. Also, count on a warming trend beginning Friday and persisting into early next week.

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Yesterday's Weather

High: 20.7 at 1:51 PM

Low: 3.8 at 10:09 PM

High Gust: 16 at 5:13 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 49° in 1904

Record Low: -39° in 1967

Average High: 22°F

Average Low: 2°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.52

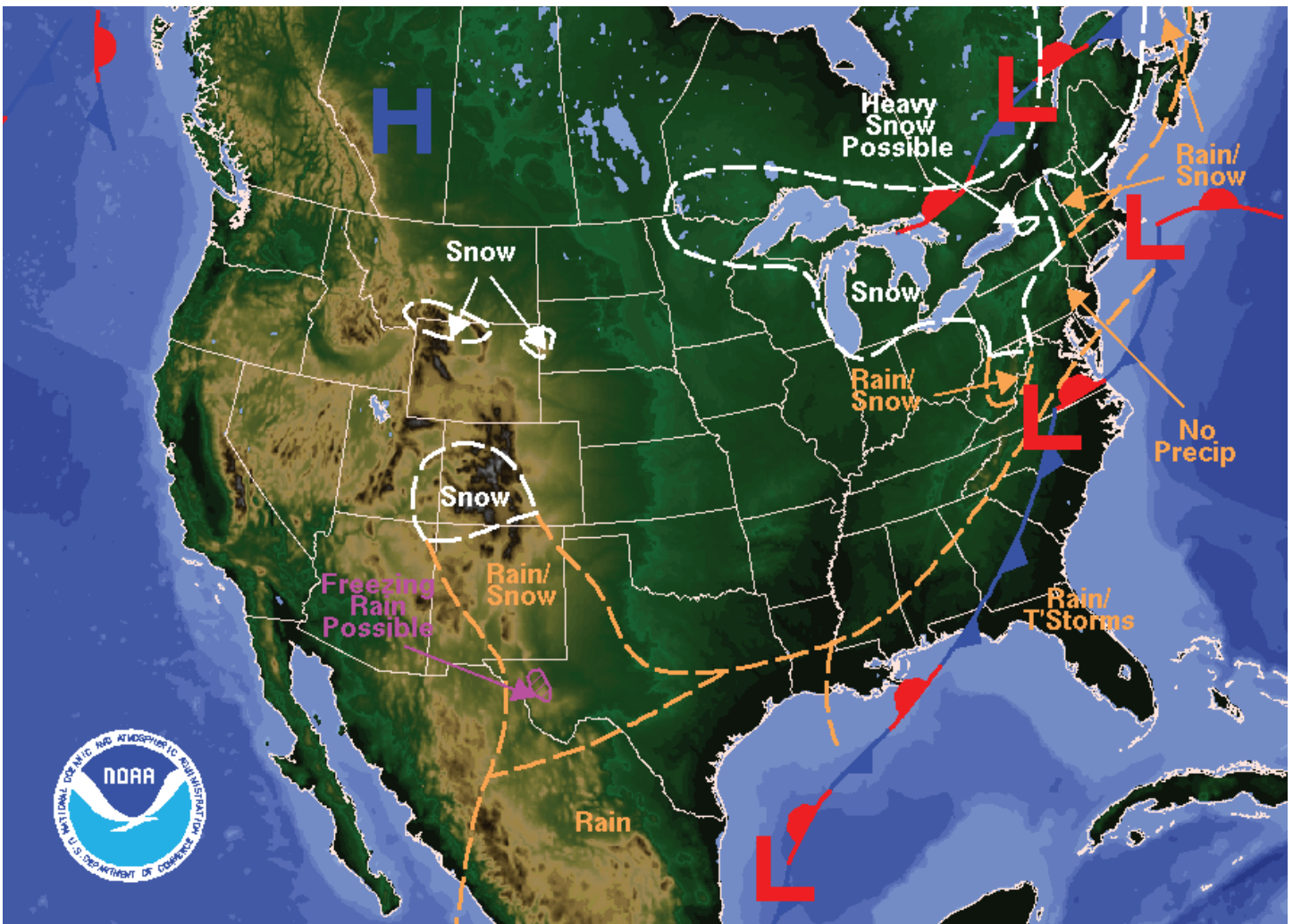
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.55

Average Precip to date: 21.72

Precip Year to Date: 20.37

Sunset Tonight: 4:59 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:13 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Thu, Dec 31, 2015, issued 3:25 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



STARTING NEW

My father came from Italy. Often he would fascinate me with stories of their celebrations and holidays. One event stands out – New Year. They would begin each year with fireworks and noise making, hugging and dancing, shouting and well-wishing.

But that was not all. Believing that they should get rid of the old and take on the new, they would go through their drawers and closets and look for worn-out clothing, old dishes and furniture – whatever needed to be replaced. They would only keep what had value to them.

Perhaps it would do us good to go through our lives and take an inventory. We may find that we are harboring hatred and hostilities, harmful habits and hurts. Perhaps we would find some shortcomings and sins, false pride and forgotten promises. We may discover that there have been some days without prayer and Scripture reading, worship and witnessing.

The Bible advises us to “Throw off your old nature...be a new and different person, holy and good.”

We do not have to wait for a new year to do this. We can do it now!

Prayer: Father, we confess with sorrow, shame and sadness our sins. We ask that You would cleanse and consecrate us for Your service. Help us to throw off our faults and failures and replace them with Your values and virtues. Give us victory through Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture for Today: Ephesians 4:20-24 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

Major Inventory Reduction Sale!

BIG SALE

Going on NOW!

- 50% OFF**
ALL Christmas Decor
ALL Kids Merchandise
- 30% OFF**
ALL Cold Weather Head & Hand
ALL Silk Florals
- 20% OFF**
ALL Everyday Home Decor

Olde Bank Floral
Fresh flowers, home decor, Dark Canyon Coffee & so much more
101 N. Main St., Groton ~ 397-8650
www.oldebankfloralsd.com

Flower Shop network.com | FTD | bloom.net | Olde Bank Floral | @ | Facebook

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News from the Associated Press

Rapid City convenience store robbed for 3rd time in 6 months

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City convenience store has been targeted by a robber for the third time in six months.

Police say a masked male entered the Common Cents store late Tuesday, displayed a handgun and demanded cash from the clerk. He fled with an undisclosed amount of money.

KEVN-TV reports that the store also was held up on June 18 and Oct. 4.

Game biologist says pheasants available for season's finale

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A state upland game biologist says hunters should still find plenty of roosters in fields this weekend as the state wraps up the 2015 pheasant hunting season.

Travis Runia (ROON'-yuh) with the Game, Fish and Parks Department says officials won't have harvest numbers until April or May, but all indications point to a more productive season than in 2014.

Brood counts in 2015 found an estimated 42 percent jump in the number of birds for the season. The pheasants-per-mile index came in at 3.8, up from 2.68 in 2014 and 1.52 in 2013. This 2015 index is similar to 2011, when hunters bagged 1.56 million birds.

Runia said the best-case scenario for further increases would be a mild winter with minimal snow cover to help facilitate nesting.

Historical society club to discuss biography of Ed Lemmon

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota State Historical Society's book club will be examining a Pierre author's book about a cattleman who played a significant role in developing the western part of the state.

The group will hold a discussion on Jan. 5 about the book, which is called "Controlled Recklessness: Ed Lemmon and the Open Range."

Author Nathan Sanderson is set to discuss his writing about Lemmon, who was a cowboy and a cattleman. Shortly after 1900, Lemmon oversaw the largest pasture in the world.

He also founded towns including Lemmon, South Dakota.

Michael Lewis is president of the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation. He says Sanderson is the first person to write a researched biography of Lemmon.

The gathering is free and open to the public.

Wednesday's Scores The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 61, Rapid City Central 47

Sioux Falls Lincoln 65, Sauk Centre, Minn. 62

Chadron Tournament

Championship

Spearfish 45, Chadron, Neb. 24

Dakota Holiday Tournament

Edgeley-Kulm-Montpelier, N.D. 45, Britton-Hecla 32

Ellendale, N.D. 65, Leola/Frederick 29

East West Shootout

Belle Fourche 57, West Central 55

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 78, Douglas 54

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Lennox 56, Chamberlain 53
Huron Holiday Classic
Gayville-Volin 65, Faulkton 63
James Valley Christian 75, Potter County 67
Marty Indian 69, Lyman 57
Miller 64, Hitchcock-Tulare 54
Wolsey-Wessington 60, Ethan 44
Swiftel Classic
Canby, Minn. 55, Rapid City Christian 45
Tiospa Zina Tribal 60, St. Francis Indian 52

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 50, Rapid City Central 46
Chamberlain 53, Douglas 46
Chadron Tournament (Invite)
Championship
Spearfish 60, Hemingford, Neb. 54
Dakota Holiday Tournament
Edgeley-Kulm-Montpelier, N.D. 56, Britton-Hecla 34
Ellendale, N.D. 54, Leola/Frederick 37
East West Shootout
Ethan 70, Philip 44
Swiftel Classic
Canby, Minn. 42, Platte-Geddes 30
Ipswich 56, Dell Rapids St. Mary 39
Sioux Valley 60, Webster 49

Vikings-Packers Capsule **The Associated Press**

MINNESOTA (10-5) at GREEN BAY (10-5)

Sunday, 8:30 p.m. ET, NBC

OPENING LINE — Packers by 5 1/2

RECORD VS. SPREAD — Vikings 12-3, Packers 9-6

SERIES RECORD — Packers lead 59-49-2

LAST MEETING — Packers beat Vikings 30-13, Nov. 22, 2015

LAST WEEK — Packers lost to Cardinals 38-8; Vikings beat Giants 49-17

AP PRO32 RANKING — Vikings No. 9, Packers No. 10

VIKINGS OFFENSE — OVERALL (26), RUSH (5), PASS (31)

VIKINGS DEFENSE — OVERALL (14), RUSH (18), PASS (9)

PACKERS OFFENSE — OVERALL (24), RUSH (10), PASS (26)

PACKERS DEFENSE — OVERALL (19), RUSH (21), PASS (13)

STREAKS, STATS & NOTES — Only other meeting between teams in regular-season finale in Green Bay came in 1996, 38-10 win for Packers. ... Win over Giants secured Vikings' first playoff berth since 2012. ... RB Adrian Peterson enters Week 17 first in league in rushing (1,418 yards), looking for third career rushing title. ... QB Teddy Bridgewater has 123.2 passer rating since Week 14, throwing for 734 yards and six touchdowns with no interceptions. ... WR Stefon Diggs is tied for third in team history with Paul Flatley (1963) and Sammy White (1976) for single-season receptions for rookie with 51. ... S Harrison Smith had franchise-record fourth interception return for touchdown last week against Giants. ... Vikings seeking first NFC North title since 2009. ... Packers seeking fifth straight division crown. ... Green Bay playing for third straight season with NFC North title on line in final regular-season game, having beaten Chicago two seasons ago and Detroit last season. ... QB Aaron Rodgers has passer rating of 121.6, for 1,548 yards with 14 TDs and three interceptions, in six career prime-time games against Minnesota. ... WR James Jones

needs 30 yards to pass his single-season career high of 817 yards receiving in 2013. ... RB Eddie Lacy's 416 yards rushing since Week 11 ranks sixth in NFL in that span. ... LB Clay Matthews needs two tackles to pass his career high of 83 set in 2010. ... Matthews has not had tackle in two straight games. ... Fantasy Tip: Lacy averaging 107 yards rushing on 23 carries in five career games against Vikings, though Packers' entire starting offensive line and Lacy were listed on injury report this week.

Globe University plans to close Moorhead campus

MOORHEAD, Minn. (AP) — Twin Cities-based Globe University plans to close its Moorhead campus after current students complete their courses.

KFGO-AM (<http://bit.ly/10tfUIU>) reports the career college cites declining enrollment in Moorhead.

Globe says it will continue to offer classes to current students through the end of next year or early 2017 so they have a chance to finish their courses. But no new students are being enrolled at Moorhead.

About 80 students currently are enrolled at Moorhead. The campus employs about 25 people, but more than half of those employees are instructors who have other positions outside the university.

Globe University and Minnesota School of Business have 18 other campuses in Minnesota, Wisconsin and South Dakota, as well as an online presence.

Prosecutors: Ex-police chief took out insurance on victim

JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A former police chief in South Dakota charged with killing his pregnant fiancée in a shooting that long appeared to be a hunting accident helped take out more than \$750,000 in life insurance policies on her months before she died, according to prosecutors.

Prosecutors in Russell Bertram's case want to present evidence of the policies and alleged past insurance fraud during the trial scheduled to begin in February. Bertram, 64, has pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder.

He was indicted in September for the 2009 killing of Leonila Stickney, who was his 26-year-old fiancée. The Gregory County Sheriff's office initially said officials believed Stickney's death was the result of an accidental shooting. State authorities took over the inquiry as a cold case in 2010.

The attorney general's office has been reluctant to discuss the case since announcing the indictment, but court documents filed this month offer a window into the case and what may have led authorities to believe Stickney's death was a homicide, not an accident.

Prosecutors want to introduce evidence that Bertram filed for bankruptcy in late 2008 and bought an insurance policy on Stickney with a \$150,000 accidental death benefit in February 2009. A month earlier, they say he was involved in taking out a \$750,000 life insurance policy on Stickney.

Bertram was the beneficiary on both policies, according to the court document.

Stickney was killed in October 2009 in Gregory County by a close-range gunshot wound to her abdomen from a 12-gauge shotgun. Bertram said at the time that he was putting a gun into a vehicle when it went off and hit Stickney, former Sheriff Charlie Wolf has said. Stickney's death certificate lists it as an accident.

An expert is expected to testify that Stickney was pregnant when she died. Bertram would go on to marry Stickney's sister.

Attorneys for Bertram weren't available for comment on Wednesday. He has declined to speak to The Associated Press from jail.

Bertram served as police chief in Harrisburg until 2004 and previously worked as a police officer. Court documents suggest prosecutors plan on stressing Bertram's knowledge of gun safety and his law enforcement experience.

Prosecutors plan to have two of Bertram's former wives testify about allegations of domestic violence. One is expected to discuss alleged past insurance fraud, and the other is set to talk about "his life insurance purchases."

The prosecution is also seeking to introduce evidence that Bertram paid women for sex and that he had

sex with other women when he was engaged to Stickney.

BNSF: Railway temporarily furloughing some employees

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A BNSF Railway spokeswoman says the company is temporarily furloughing some employees in response to a reduction in customers' freight transportation needs.

Railroad spokeswoman Amy McBeth says customers' volumes in the near term have come down somewhat from prior estimates. She says BNSF is having to adjust its workforce demand numbers down to match volume and the work required to move that volume.

McBeth says BNSF is temporarily furloughing some of its employees at different locations across its network. She says she doesn't have specifics on numbers or breakdowns by region, but it isn't concentrated in any one area.

McBeth says the company expects to call the furloughed employees back as soon as business needs require.

Sioux Falls restaurant victim of early morning burglary

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police are investigating a burglary at a restaurant.

The thief took an undisclosed amount of cash from a safe at the Cherry Creek Bar & Grill early Wednesday. A cleaning worker reported the theft shortly after 2 a.m.

Authorities say a single set of footprints was found in the snow leading up to and away from the business.

State, local authorities to perform drill at state Capitol

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — State and local authorities will be conducting a training exercise at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre.

The Department of Public Safety says the drill will happen on Jan. 6. But officials haven't provided details about exactly what will occur.

Maj. Dana Svendsen, an assistant superintendent of the South Dakota Highway Patrol, says such exercises are a good way to test the security response at the state Capitol.

Hughes County Sheriff Mike Leidholt says the training helps improve communication among different agencies.

Authorities performed a similar exercise in 2014.

Officials are publicizing the drill to make sure residents aren't overly concerned about a significant law enforcement presence at the Capitol on the day of the exercise.

Black and Blue Division classic: Vikings vs Packers

BARRY WILNER, AP Pro Football Writer

Ah, the Black and Blue Division. We remember it well.

So do the Vikings and Packers, who meet at Lambeau Field on Sunday night to determine the champion of the latest incarnation of the Black and Blue, the NFC North.

The visitors enter the game with a lot more positives than the hosts. Minnesota (No. 9 in AP Pro32) comes off routs of the Bears and Giants to get to 10-5. Green Bay (No. 10, AP Pro32), also is 10-5, but began the year 6-0 and comes off being annihilated by Arizona last week.

The Vikings are 3-point underdogs in a place where they haven't won since 2009.

"This is what it's all about this time of the year. It's time to buckle up and keep grinding. We know the opportunity is there in front of us," said linebacker Chad Greenway, one of three players on the active roster who were around for the last Vikings division title in 2009.

It's also time for the Packers to wake up, particularly on an offense that has stagnated despite having Aaron Rodgers at quarterback.

"I have faith in the football team regardless of what happened (in Arizona)," coach Mike McCarthy said.

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So do we.
PACKERS, 23-17

KNOCKOUT LEAGUE TIP: Anyone who has survived in a knockout league to this point is a genius. Pro Picks is not and fell again last week with PITTSBURGH. We'll finish off the season with DENVER.

No. 21 New Orleans (plus 3 1/2) at No. 14 Atlanta
Falcons are primed to end season the way they began it.

BEST BET: FALCONS, 30-23

No. 19 Detroit (plus 1) at No. 23 Chicago
The other NFC North game, a who-cares affair.

UPSET SPECIAL: LIONS, 29-26

No. 20 Philadelphia (plus 3) at No. 22 New York Giants
Got feeling Giants will play harder for Tom Coughlin than Eagles will for interim coach.

GIANTS, 30-28

No. 7 New York Jets (minus 3) at No. 17 Buffalo
Got feeling Jets will play harder for Todd than Bills will for Rex.

JETS, 21-20

No. 11 Pittsburgh (minus 10) at No. 30 Cleveland
Last place that Steelers want to end their season is in Cleveland. Sorry.

STEELERS, 37-20

No. 8 Seattle (plus 3 1/2) at No. 1 Arizona
Simply put, Cardinals are the better and healthier team.

CARDINALS, 20-16

No. 27 San Diego (plus 9) at No. 4 Denver
Broncos desperately need a bye in playoffs and will grab it.

BRONCOS, 26-13

No. 15 Oakland (plus 7) at No. 5 Kansas City
Can't see Chiefs slowing down against archrival, but it will be tight.

CHIEFS, 17-13

No. 24 Tampa Bay (plus 10) at No. 2 Carolina
Panthers made things tough on selves with first loss, must play regulars now.

PANTHERS, 27-13

No. 3 New England (minus 9) at No. 29 Miami

Patriots made things tough on selves with loss to Jets, must play regulars now — if they have enough of them.

PATRIOTS, 21-16

No. 25 Baltimore (plus 7) at No. 6 Cincinnati
Bengals still kicking selves after blowing 14-point lead in Denver.

BENGALS, 20-10

No. 26 Jacksonville (plus 6) at No. 13 Houston
Texans could stumble here and blow division, but we see them squeezing in.

TEXANS, 23-21

No. 32 Tennessee (plus 6) at No. 18 Indianapolis
Colts need too much to happen to get AFC South crown. Losing here ends any hopes.

TITANS, 19-14

No. 16 St. Louis (minus 3) at No. 31 San Francisco
We like how Rams have looked last three weeks, especially on defense.

RAMS, 16-10

No. 12 Washington (plus 3) at No. 28 Dallas

Redskins have little motivation other than momentum.
COWBOYS, 17-16

2015 RECORD: Against spread: Week 7-7, Season (113-110-6). Straight up: Week 9-7, Season (147-93)
Best Bet: 7-8-1 against spread, 9-7 straight up.
Upset special: 8-8 against spread, 5-11 straight up.

South Dakota Highway Patrol vehicles first with new plates

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Highway Patrol vehicles will be the first in the state to sport new license plates.

The existing plate design that has been in use since 2006 is being retired, with new plates being issued starting Jan. 1.

The Highway Patrol has worked with the Department of Revenue so trooper vehicles could have the new license plates before Friday. New plates were shipped to the Patrol's offices statewide this month. Troopers will make sure the new plates are installed on their vehicles before they begin duty for the first time in 2016.

The new design is similar to the current Mount Rushmore plate design, with different coloring.

Target's turnaround gets shoppers back into stores

ANNE D'INNOCENZIO, AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Target's efforts to draw shoppers back into its stores are paying off.

Take Annabel Bernardo, who once bought trendy clothes at Target but cut back after she felt it lost its fashion edge.

Now, Bernardo, who lives in Rockville Center, Maryland, is back: "The store is looking much better. It's looking more upscale."

That Target has had five consecutive quarters of increases in a key sales measure suggest there are more shoppers like Bernardo, who are returning to the discounter that pioneered the concept of putting affordable, chic fashions under the same roof as groceries and toiletries.

That's good news for Target, which had setbacks in recent years, including a major debit and credit card hack that impacted sales for several months and a misstep that led it to focus on groceries instead of the cheap chic fashions its customers craved.

The sales improvements come as Target continues a turnaround plan it started after it hired CEO Brian Cornell in 2014. As part of the plan, Target got rid of its money-losing Canadian operations and revamped its management team.

But the key to luring shoppers back has been changes in stores. Target has been updating its fashion, baby products and home decor. It's overhauled the fit of its jeans, resulting in at least 10 percent sales growth. It's also launched a plus-size collection for women, Ava & Viv, marking its first exclusive fashion line in over a decade.

And the discounter has worked on presentation, too. It's been adding mannequins to display some clothes instead of hanging them or folding them on shelves. Additionally, it's hired experts for most of its 1,800 locations to refresh stores with the best merchandise.

At the same time Target upgrades its stores and merchandise, the chain says it's keeping prices low. To ensure that, the chain says it's better using its large scale to negotiate prices with suppliers. For instance, for basics like sheets and towels, Target offers longer-term commitments with manufacturers, ordering for two years instead of every quarter, a move that cuts costs.

Experts say it will be key for Target to distinguish itself from other discounters while not being perceived as too pricey for its middle-class shoppers. The median household income of Target's customers is \$67,500, about \$20,000 less than Wal-Mart's customers, according to Kantar Retail, a market research firm.

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"It's a tricky balancing act," said Craig Johnson, president of retail consultancy Retail Growth Partners.

The changes come after Target wrestled with uneven growth since the Great Recession. After decades of gaining popularity with shoppers who like the idea of buying trendy clothes and home decor at a discounter that also carries soap and toothpaste, Target faced challenges when the recession made shoppers more frugal.

Target began expanding into groceries, which attracted shoppers. But because its focus wasn't on fashions, the chain lost some shoppers because it was slow to jump on trends. Then, a security breach in 2013 that affected 40 million credit and debit cards hurt its image, sales and profits for months.

Target's annual profit dropped 34 percent to \$1.97 billion in its fiscal year that ended in January 2014, but increased 24 percent to \$2.45 billion in its fiscal year that ended in January 2015. Total revenue slipped one percent during the year that covered the breach, and was roughly flat at \$72.6 billion during fiscal year 2015.

The changes have helped boost sales at stores open at least a year, a key sales measure in the retail industry. In the third quarter, the latest data available, such sales in fashion, home, children and baby items increased more than 2.5 times the average 1.9 percent growth.

The focus on presentation has also paid off. Sales of clothing on mannequins at 1,400 of its stores were up 30 percent before the holidays. And home products with new displays in 262 stores are selling three or four times faster than the average for that area.

Target reports fiscal fourth-quarter results in February.

Flooding shuts down major interstate near St. Louis

JIM SALTER, Associated Press

ALAN SCHER ZAGIER, Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Officials closed a major interstate highway south of St. Louis on Thursday morning amid historic flooding that has already left at least 20 people dead.

Interstate 55 near the town of Arnold was entirely closed early Thursday due to floodwaters from the Meramec River. The Missouri Department of Transportation authorities had already rerouted traffic Wednesday night to allow for sandbagging and pumping.

Other connections between St. Louis and adjacent counties already are closed, including I-44 over the Meramec. The closures forced traffic onto other nearby roads, creating gridlock.

The flooding also prompted evacuations in Missouri and Illinois on Wednesday. As swollen rivers and streams pushed to heights not seen in nearly a quarter-century, officials helped residents get to higher ground amid fears that already dire conditions could worsen as floodwaters began spilling over federal levees protecting communities and farmland.

In Eureka, southwest of St. Louis, firefighters and their boats have been in high demand since Tuesday, accounting for roughly four dozen rescues of people in their homes, businesses or vehicles. Television news footage showed at least one home there drifting in the swollen river Wednesday, when firefighters rescued by boat a man and a dog as floodwaters lapped at the eaves of the house roof on which they'd been trapped for a night.

"Our crews are getting dispatched to another rescue now," Scott Barthelmiss, a Eureka Fire Protection District spokesman, said mid-afternoon Wednesday as the swollen Meramec River there was cresting. "I think you're seeing people who are desperate or impatient, putting themselves in predicaments."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced Wednesday that nine levees had been topped by water. Most of those earthen barriers were meant to protect farmland rather than populated areas and another was along now-deserted, manmade Chouteau Island near St. Louis on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River.

Nearly a dozen other levees considered at risk for "possible significant distress," were holding, but people were moving out just in case. Michael Pennise, mayor of the St. Louis suburb of Valley Park, ordered mandatory evacuations for 350 to 400 homes and dozens of businesses in the section of town near the

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fast-rising Meramec River.

At least 20 deaths over several days in Missouri and Illinois were blamed on flooding, mostly involving vehicles that drove onto swamped roadways, and at least two people were still missing Wednesday.

And search teams went out for a third day in hopes of finding a country music singer from Arkansas who disappeared while duck hunting in a flooded area in northern Oklahoma. The floodwaters there also destroyed a leftover film set used in the 2003 remake of "Where the Red Fern Grows."

A 24-mile stretch of Interstate 44 was closed Wednesday at Valley Park southwest of St. Louis due to Meramec River flooding

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon has activated the National Guard to assist with security in evacuated areas and to help keep road closure sites clear.

Valley Park City Attorney Tim Engelmeyer called the governor's office to send troops to help in the evacuated area of the about 7,000-person town. He was also watching computer projections of the crest — expected to be about 3 feet higher than the record of 40 feet on Thursday — knowing that an unexpected upgrade could be enough to send water over the levee.

"We're so close," he said. "We're talking about a potential 6-inch difference."

Pennise said the corps is confident the levee, built in 2007, is safe, but ordered evacuations as a precaution.

In the southwestern Missouri tourist destination of Branson, residents of about 150 duplexes and homes had to evacuate Wednesday due to flooding from a manmade lake. But the shopping district along the lake was still open, Fire Chief Ted Martin said, adding, "it has been packed with people, and I don't know where all of them have come from."

Three-day rainfall totals of 9 to 11 inches were records in some parts of an area that stretched from southwest to east-central Missouri, said Mark Fuchs, a hydrologist for the National Weather Service in St. Louis. Rainfall totals of that magnitude occur only every 100 to 300 years, according to rainfall frequency data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

On Thursday, the Mississippi River, which runs beside the Gateway Arch and downtown St. Louis, is expected to reach nearly 13 feet above flood stage there. That would be the second-worst flood on record, behind only the devastating 1993 flood. A flood wall protects the city.

In the historic riverfront city of Alton, Illinois, some downtown business owners continued to scramble Wednesday to keep out rising water from the Mississippi.

Most of the damage in the city 15 miles north of St. Louis, a stop on the 19th Century Underground Railroad, was confined to high water in some basements. Firefighters and emergency road crews worked to pump out water from flooded storm drains behind a seven-foot-high, 1000-foot-long temporary retaining wall reinforced by gravel and sandbags.

The Argosy Alton casino, which shut down on Monday, remained closed. So did the southbound lane of the main highway connecting the city to Missouri.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker said he's "very optimistic that what we've built here will hold" as the Mississippi River is expected to crest at 38 feet on Thursday, 17 feet above flood stage.

That confidence was of little consolation to Tim Meeks, who was loading vats of gourmet olive oil from his downtown market onto a trailer headed to higher ground as other employees worked to drain a basement filled with 7 feet of standing water.

"We don't keep anything down there anymore," he said. "All of our product has to go."

Gambia's parliament bans female genital mutilation

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Gambia's parliament has passed a bill banning female genital mutilation and setting strict penalties for offenders.

The new law says a person who engages in female circumcision could face up to three years in prison or a fine of 50,000 dalasi (\$1,250).

The bill, passed Monday, comes after President Yahya Jammeh condemned the practice in November.

Female genital mutilation is practiced in more than half of African countries. It entails the complete or partial removal of the external genitalia of women and girls for nonmedical reasons.

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In 2010, female genital mutilation was carried out on nearly 80 percent of Gambian women and girls aged 15 to 49, according to UK-based charity 28 Too Many.

Dr. Isatou Touray, who campaigns against the practice, lauded the passing of the bill.

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. PEOPLE WORLD OVER ON EDGE AS CALENDAR TURNS

As the final hours of 2015 draw to a close, many bid a weary and wary adieu to a year marred by attacks that left nations reeling and nerves rattled.

2. MOTHER OF 'AFFLUENZA' TEEN BACK IN US AFTER DEPORTATION

Ethan Couch remains in Mexico after a judge grants a delay allowing the 18-year-old to argue that kicking him out of the country would violate his rights.

3. BILL COSBY'S DEFENDERS GROWING FAINTER

Sexual assault allegations against the comedian have left many — especially in the black community — feeling betrayed.

4. WHERE HISTORIC RAINS ARE SWELLING RIVERS, STREAMS

The three-day rainfall totals of 9 to 11 inches in parts of Missouri represent a deluge occurring only every 100 to 300 years, NOAA says.

5. RARE LOOK AT LIFE BEHIND BARS

The AP is granted access to — and given permission to photograph inside — a Georgia state prison, including its death row.

6. CHINA BUILDING SECOND AIRCRAFT CARRIER

The project is part of the country's rapid naval modernization, seen as aimed at asserting Beijing's maritime claims and extending its power far from its shores.

7. WHICH ICONIC STORE IS CLOSING

The massive Toys R Us superstore in Times Square, which wowed shoppers with a 60-foot indoor Ferris wheel among other treasures, is shutting down.

8. 'SO' SCHOOL LISTS TERMS IT WANTS TO BAN

The annual compilation by a Michigan university includes starting a sentence with the word "So," "presser" instead of press conference, "problematic," "walk it back" and "break the Internet."

9. WHO'S HELPING EMPOWER MUSLIM WOMEN

A woman who was accosted as a girl by a man who tried to tear off her head scarf has turned her anger into a program based in New York City that teaches self-defense to young Muslim women.

10. DOWN TO FINAL FOUR IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Top-ranked Clemson takes on Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl, while Alabama faces Michigan State in the Cotton Bowl.

2 sentenced to death in Bangladesh for killing blogger

NEW DELHI (AP) — A court in Bangladesh on Thursday sentenced two people to death and six others to prison for killing an atheist blogger in 2013, the first verdicts since suspected Islamist militants began targeting secular activists.

Seven university students and the leader of a banned Islamist group were charged with murder in the death of Ahmed Rajib Haider, a blogger who campaigned for banning the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party, which opposed Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971.

According to prosecutors, the students said that Mufti Jasimuddin Rahmani, leader of the banned Islamist group Ansarullah Bangla Team, incited them to kill Haider in sermons in which he said all atheist bloggers should be killed to protect Islam.

The two North South University students who received the death sentences included Faisal bin Nayeem, who the court said hacked Haider with meat cleavers in front of his house in Dhaka. Another was tried in

absentia. The others received prison sentences ranging from three years to life. Rahmani was sentenced to five years, according to Judge Sayeed Ahmed, who read the verdicts in a packed Dhaka courtroom in the presence of seven defendants.

Haider's father rejected the verdicts, saying all the defendants deserved the death sentence. He said he would consult with his lawyer to decide whether to appeal.

Four secular bloggers and online activists, including a Bangladeshi-American, have been killed this year by suspected militants who denounced their writings criticizing radical Islam. Many bloggers have gone into hiding, and some have left the country, as concerns have grown about an increasingly bloody divide between secular activists and conservative Islamist groups.

Police said that the student who was sentenced to death in absentia and was accused of planning the attack is a member of Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, but the party denied involvement in the killing.

As Taiwan polls loom, China warns of new challenges ahead

CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Thursday warned of a serious disruption of ties with Taiwan as the island's voters appear set to elect a new president with a far more skeptical view of dealings with Beijing.

The year ahead is bringing "complex changes" and the sides face "new challenges," the director of the Cabinet's Taiwan Affairs Office, Zhang Zhijun, said in a New Year's greeting to Taiwan's 23 million people.

Recalling the progress in relations made over the past seven-plus years under Taiwan's China-friendly President Ma Ying-jeou, Zhang said he hoped Taiwanese realize those gains could evaporate if the island defies China's insistence that it remains a part of the Chinese nation.

"We don't want to wait until the street light goes out to appreciate the illumination it has brought, or to wait until the fruits of peaceful development are lost to appreciate their value," Zhang said.

Democratic Progressive Party candidate Tsai Ing-wen is leading by a broad margin in polls to win the self-governing island's Jan. 16 presidential election. That would hand defeat to the pro-China Nationalists, who have held the office since 2008, although control of the island's legislature remains up for grabs.

While it has yet to comment directly on the election, Beijing, which considers Taiwan a breakaway province, is watching developments closely.

Bitter hostility between the sides has eased considerably over the past two decades, with direct trade and travel links fully established and their economies growing increasingly intertwined.

Though largely symbolic, a historic November summit in Singapore between Ma and Chinese President Xi Jinping was the first meeting between leaders since they split amid civil war in 1949.

Still, China and Taiwan are now moving into a period of uncertainty and it remains unclear exactly how China will respond to a Tsai presidency.

While Beijing has abandoned the direct threats against Taiwanese voters of the past that ultimately backfired, Zhang's warning appeared directed as much at Tsai herself as at the island's populace at large.

While Tsai's DPP backs Taiwan's formal independence — something Beijing says it will respond to with force — she has repeatedly stated her commitment to maintaining the status quo.

However, she has also refused to endorse Beijing's demand that she recognize the island and mainland as part of a single Chinese nation, a fuzzy doctrine known as the "92 Consensus" that formed the basis for ice-breaking talks between the sides more than two decades ago.

She has also sought to address concerns among many on the island who remain highly dubious of Ma's moves toward closer economic integration with China.

"We cannot simply be bound to China," Tsai said. "That's what worries us most about the past eight years — the sense that that's the only choice we have. That's not good for our economy or our security," Tsai said in a debate with her Nationalist Party opponent, Eric Chu, on Sunday.

While the overwhelming majority of Taiwanese voters are moderate in their views, both the hardcore pro-independence and the smaller pro-unification factions occasionally take to the streets or launch other

direct actions to press their agendas.

Earlier this week, vandals defaced a pair of replica Chinese Dynasty relics donated to a Taiwanese museum by Hong Kong martial arts actor Jackie Chan, who is disliked by many on the island for his close ties to the Chinese Communist Party and statements denigrating Taiwanese democracy.

Two people were detained on Wednesday over the act, in which the statues were spray-painted with slogans criticizing China's efforts to portray Taiwanese culture as identical to China's own.

Mom of 'affluenza' teen back in US after Mexico deportation

MARK J. TERRILL, Associated Press

ANDREW DALTON, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The mother of fugitive Texas teen Ethan Couch, known for using an "affluenza" defense in a fatal drunken-driving accident, has been returned to the U.S. from Mexico minus her son, whose own deportation was delayed by a Mexican judge.

Tonya Couch arrived at Los Angeles International Airport on a flight from Mexico in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service and was taken in handcuffs through the terminal to an unmarked Dodge Charger early Thursday morning. She was wearing blue street clothes and looked away from cameras as she walked, flanked by two marshals.

It was unclear why she was brought to Los Angeles instead of Texas, where she and her son live and where he was on probation for the 2013 drunken-driving crash. U.S. Marshals Service spokesman Eugene Hwang said he could not reveal any details about her trip through California or say how long she might remain here, citing security concerns in transporting someone in custody.

Richard Hunter, chief deputy for the U.S. Marshals Service in South Texas, said during a news conference in Houston on Wednesday that a three-day court injunction granted in Mexico to Ethan Couch will likely take at least two weeks to resolve.

But the injunction did not apply to Tonya Couch, who was deported immediately and put on a plane, an official with Mexico's National Immigration Institute told The Associated Press.

Ethan Couch was transported late Wednesday from a detention facility in Guadalajara to one in Mexico City, the official said. The decision to move Couch was made because the Mexico City facility for detaining migrants is larger and better equipped to hold someone for days or weeks.

Authorities believe the 18-year-old Ethan Couch, who was sentenced only to probation for the 2013 wreck in Texas, fled to Mexico with his mother in November as prosecutors investigated whether he had violated his probation. Both were taken into custody Monday after authorities said a phone call for pizza led to their capture in the resort city of Puerto Vallarta.

The ruling earlier Wednesday by the Mexican court gives a judge three days to decide whether the younger Couch has grounds to challenge his deportation based on arguments that kicking him out of the country would violate his rights.

Hunter said the legal maneuver basically takes the decision out of an immigration agent's hands and asks a higher authority to make the deportation decision. He said such cases can often take anywhere from two weeks to several months, depending on the priorities of the local courts.

"It also depends on the fact the Couches have legal counsel. And it seems to me, if they wanted to, they could pay them as much money as they want to drag this thing out," Hunter said. "We're hopeful that's not the case."

During the sentencing phase of Ethan Couch's trial, a defense expert argued that his wealthy parents coddled him into a sense of irresponsibility — a condition the expert termed "affluenza." The condition is not recognized as a medical diagnosis by the American Psychiatric Association, and its invocation during the legal proceedings drew ridicule.

"Couch continues to make a mockery of the system," said Fort Worth attorney Bill Berenson, who represented Sergio Molina, who was paralyzed and suffered severe brain damage in the crash.

Ethan Couch's attorneys in the U.S. issued a statement Wednesday saying they couldn't comment on the case because they weren't licensed to practice law in Mexico. It wasn't immediately clear which at-

torneys were handling the case in Mexico.

Mexican police say Couch and his mother spent three days in a rented condo at a resort development in Puerto Vallarta before finding an apartment. One of the Couches' telephones had been used to order delivery from Domino's Pizza to the condominium complex in Puerto Vallarta's old town, according to a police report issued by the Jalisco state prosecutors' office.

Agents from the prosecutors' office went to the complex, where a tourism operator told them that the people who had occupied the condo were asked to vacate because the owners were coming to stay over Christmas, the report said. The Couches then moved to an apartment, and the agents set up a surveillance operation in the surrounding streets.

On Monday evening, two people matching the Couches' description were spotted and intercepted. The police report said they behaved evasively, claimed to be carrying no IDs, gave inconsistent stories about their names and failed to provide proof of their legal migratory status in Mexico.

They were taken into custody and handed over to immigration officials.

Authorities in Texas said an arrest warrant was being issued for Tonya Couch on charges of hindering an apprehension, a third-degree felony that carries a sentence of two to 10 years in prison.

Ethan Couch was driving drunk and speeding near Fort Worth in June 2013 when he crashed into a disabled SUV, killing four people and injuring several others, including passengers in his pickup truck.

He pleaded guilty to four counts of intoxication manslaughter and two counts of intoxication assault causing serious bodily injury. A judge sentenced him in juvenile court to 10 years' probation and a stint in a rehabilitation center.

Q&As on Hillary Clinton's latest State email release

KEN THOMAS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department will be delivering a New Year's Eve batch of more emails from Hillary Clinton's time as secretary of state, bringing 2015 to a close for the Democratic presidential front-runner.

Clinton has faced questions about whether her use of a private email server was sufficient to ensure the security of government information and retention of records. The State Department has released installments of her emails every month since May.

Thursday's emails will be the second-to-last set of messages released to the public with the final segment expected just before the Iowa caucuses on Feb. 1.

Here's some questions and answers about Clinton's email:

Q: What emails are these?

A: These are the work-related emails that Clinton sent and received on the private, unsecured server in her home in New York while she was President Barack Obama's secretary of state from 2009 through January 2013. She turned over 55,000 pages of emails to the State Department for the historical record and to be released to the public. Clinton contends that she never sent or received emails that were marked classified at the time but some emails on her server were later deemed top secret or included confidential or sensitive information.

Q: What have we learned so far?

A: The messages have shown how Obama's secretary of state dealt with a series of foreign policy hurdles, from the Arab Spring in the Middle East to the deadly 2012 attacks in Benghazi, Libya, and efforts to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions. It has also offered a more private window into Clinton's daily life, showing her asking an aide to help her find Showtime's CIA-focused drama "Homeland," getting political intelligence from longtime allies and managing a busy schedule and flights around the globe.

Q: Why on New Year's Eve?

A: By court order, the State Department is required to release as many of her emails as they can in a single installment on the last weekday of every month. The emails have been disseminated in increments

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that allow the department to review the emails and redact sensitive information. The blacked out material has ranged from actual secrets to the personal addresses and emails of people with whom Clinton has corresponded.

Q: How many emails are there?

A: It has varied from month to month, but the State Department estimates that this batch will include thousands of pages. While the documents tend to be voluminous, many have included terse replies from Clinton, such as, "Pls print," or "Ok. Thx."

Q: When and where will the emails be posted?

A: The State Department is expected to post them on its website Thursday. Past emails have been released here: <https://www.foia.state.gov/Learn/New.aspx>.

Cases for and problems with Alabama and Michigan State

RALPH D. RUSSO, AP College Football Writer

Alabama and coach Nick Saban return to the College Football Playoff as big favorites against the Big Ten champions.

That didn't work out for the Crimson Tide last year and the players say they are determined to wipe away the memories of that loss to Ohio State.

Michigan State used upsets and fantastic finishes to reach the playoff. The Spartans are the underdogs again, just the way they like it.

The cases for and the problems with the Crimson Tide (12-1) and Spartans (12-1) heading into the Cotton Bowl on Thursday night in Arlington, Texas.

The case for Michigan State

Coach Mark Dantonio's Spartans are a resilient bunch and they love to prove doubters wrong. So this matchup against mighty Alabama feeds right into Michigan State's state of mind. The Spartans will not be intimidated and if it's close in the fourth quarter they will be confident.

Michigan State has a couple of things going for it: Connor Cook is the most talented quarterback Alabama has faced, and a veteran who can get the ball out of his hands fast against a Crimson Tide pass rush that has produced 46 sacks.

On the other side of the ball, few defenses sellout to stop the run like Michigan State's, with an excellent defensive line led by NT Malik McDowell and DE Shilique Calhoun. To beat Alabama, you need to slow down Heisman Trophy winner Derrick Henry and force QB Jake Coker to make plays down field. Michigan State crowds the box and dares opponents to take shots.

The problem with Michigan State

Alabama's big, strong and deep defensive front seven is built to stop teams like Michigan State, which plays a similar brand of power football to Alabama. Cook doesn't have the mobility to be a threat in the running game, and simply handing the ball to the tailback and running power have not been an effective way to attack the Tide, which allows 2.38 yards per rush.

It's pretty simple: The Spartans will need about 21 points to have a chance and getting there will be tough.

The case for Alabama

The Crimson Tide uses an 11-man rotation of defensive linemen that is the envy of all college football. Just about all of them are NFL prospects, and there is little if any drop off when the No. 2s and 3s are in the game. The depth also allows them to stay fresh.

The Tide also has plenty of extra talented players at linebacker and in the secondary. The defense comes at teams in waves. No opponent has figured out yet how to effectively and consistently attack the Tide.

On offense, Henry is a force who never seems to wear down. He carried 90 times total in Alabama's

last two games. And his speedy backup, Kenyan Drake, is healthy again. Alabama also has receivers like Calvin Ridley, ArDarius Stewart and O.J. Howard who are matchup problems.

The problem with Alabama

When you recruit the way the Crimson Tide does, problems are hard to find. Coker is not a bad player but he was 41st in the country in passer rating (139.41) and 52nd in yards per attempt (7.4). He has thrown eight interceptions in 338 attempts.

If Michigan State can keep Henry from breaking off chunks of yards and Coker has to convert first downs with throws and make plays down field to loosen up the Spartans, it's uncertain if he can deliver.

While Michigan State has thrived in close games, Alabama has played few. What will the Tide do if it is tested in the fourth quarter? Especially since the pressure is on the Tide to avoid another semifinal upset.

Consent amid wine, pills to be a key question in Cosby case

MARYCLAIRE DALE, Associated Press

ELKINS PARK, Pa. (AP) — Entertainer Bill Cosby has long maintained that his extramarital conquests over the years were all consensual.

A jury may ultimately decide if that's true after the 78-year-old actor was arrested Wednesday on felony assault charges in suburban Philadelphia stemming from a 2004 encounter with a former Temple University employee less than half his age.

The case marks the first time Cosby has been charged with sexual misconduct despite years of lurid allegations, and it sets the stage for perhaps the biggest Hollywood celebrity trial of the mobile-news era.

Prosecutors armed with new evidence this year believe his accuser, Andrea Constand, was too impaired by the pills and wine Cosby gave her to consent to the sexual activity that followed at his home.

Cosby gave a deposition after the woman sued him in 2005. He said she never told him to stop. But police now say that's because she was "frozen," "paralyzed," and "in and out of consciousness."

"On the evening in question, Mr. Cosby urged her to take pills that he provided, and to drink wine, the effect of which rendered her unable to move or to respond to his advances," incoming Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele said at a news conference Wednesday morning.

Hours later, Cosby arrived at a small courthouse to be arraigned.

Holding a cane, Cosby walked slowly and unsteadily into court on the arms of his lawyers to answer the charges against him. He had no comment as he was released on \$1 million bail.

"Make no mistake: We intend to mount a vigorous defense against this unjustified charge, and we expect that Mr. Cosby will be exonerated by a court of law," his attorney Monique Pressley said in a statement.

The decision to prosecute came just days before Pennsylvania's 12-year statute of limitations for bringing charges was set to run out. It represents an about-face by the district attorney's office, which under a previous DA declined to charge Cosby in 2005 when Constand first told police that the comic put his hands down her pants.

Prosecutors said Cosby gave Constand pills and wine, then penetrated her with his fingers without her consent while she was impaired, unable to resist or cry out.

In court papers, they said Constand was given the cold medicine Benadryl or some other, unidentified substance. Steele noted that Cosby has admitted giving quaaludes to women he wanted to have sex with.

The former "Cosby Show" star and breaker of racial barriers was charged with aggravated indecent assault, punishable by five to 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine. He did not have to enter a plea.

Wearing a black-and-white hooded sweater, Cosby tripped on a curb as he made his way into court. Inside, he seemed to have trouble seeing the paperwork and finding the place to sign, and his lawyers helped him hold the pen. But he seemed at ease, laughing and chatting with his attorneys.

When the judge said, "Good luck to you, sir," he shouted: "Thank you!"

Prosecutors reopened the case over the summer as damaging testimony was unsealed in Constand's related civil lawsuit against Cosby and as dozens of other women came forward with similar accusations.

"Reopening this case was not a question. Rather, reopening this case was our duty as law enforcement

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officers," said Steele, who is the top deputy in the DA's office and will take over next week.

In court documents, prosecutors said there are probably other women who were similarly drugged and violated by Cosby. Steele urged them to come forward.

Constand, now 42, lives in Toronto and works as a massage therapist. Her attorney, Dolores Troiani, welcomed the charges.

"She feels that they believe her, and to any victim, that is foremost in your mind: Are people going to believe me?" Troiani said. The attorney added: "Naturally it is troubling that it took until the eleventh hour for this day to arrive. She is hopeful that her patience has encouraged other victims to come forward."

Cosby also faces a raft of defamation and sexual-abuse lawsuits filed in Massachusetts, Los Angeles and Pennsylvania. But in nearly every case, it is too late to file criminal charges. One exception: a 2008 case involving a model at the Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles. It is still under investigation by police.

A key question if the Pennsylvania case goes to trial is whether the judge will allow testimony from some of those other accusers to show a pattern of "bad acts." The judge could decide such testimony would be unfair to Cosby.

In Los Angeles, celebrity attorney Gloria Allred, who represents more than two dozen Cosby accusers, pronounced the arrest "the best Christmas present they have ever received." She said her clients are willing to testify if called.

Cosby in 1965 became the first black actor to land a leading role in a network drama, "I Spy," and he went on to earn three straight Emmys. Over the next three decades, the Philadelphia-born comic created TV's animated "Fat Albert" and the top-rated "Cosby Show," the 1980s sitcom celebrated as groundbreaking television for its depiction of a warm and loving black family headed by two professionals, one a lawyer, the other a doctor.

He was a fatherly figure off camera as well, serving as a public moralist and public scold, urging young men to pull up their saggy pants and start acting responsibly.

Constand, who worked for the women's basketball team at Temple, where Cosby was a trustee and proud alumnus, said she was assaulted after going to his home in suburban Cheltenham in January 2004 for some career advice.

Then-District Attorney Bruce Castor declined to charge Cosby, saying at the time that the comedian and his accuser could be portrayed in "a less than flattering light." Constand eventually settled a lawsuit against Cosby in 2006 on confidential terms.

Cosby's lawyer noted pointedly Wednesday that the charges come "on the heels of a hotly contested election" for DA in which the handling of the Cosby case became a major issue. Castor was seeking to reclaim his job as DA but lost to Steele.

Constand's allegations and similar ones from other women in the years that followed did not receive wide attention at the time but exploded into view in late 2014, first online, then in the wider media, after comedian Hannibal Buress mocked the moralizing Cosby as a hypocrite and called him a rapist during a standup routine.

That opened the floodgates to even more allegations.

The women were mostly from the world of modeling, acting or other entertainment fields, and Cosby or his representatives denied any wrongdoing, accusing some of them of trying to extract money from him or get ahead in show business.

Earlier this year, The Associated Press persuaded a judge to unseal documents from the Constand lawsuit, and they showed the long-married Cosby acknowledging a string of affairs and sexual encounters.

Cosby, who makes his home mostly in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, testified that he obtained quaaludes in the 1970s to give to women "the same as a person would say, 'Have a drink.'" He denied giving women drugs without their knowledge.

In his deposition, Cosby said he gave Constand three half-pills of Benadryl for stress without telling her what they were. He said he groped Constand, taking her silence as a green light.

"I don't hear her say anything. And I don't feel her say anything. And so I continue and I go into the

area that is somewhere between permission and rejection. I am not stopped," Cosby testified. He said Constand was not upset when she left.

The AP generally does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they agree to have their names published, as Constand has done.

US says Iran launched 'provocative' rocket test near ships

JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S. on Wednesday accused Iran of launching a "highly provocative" rocket test last week near its warships and commercial traffic passing through the Strait of Hormuz, exposing how tensions between the two countries could escalate even after a landmark nuclear deal.

The strategic Persian Gulf waterway, which sees nearly a third of all oil traded by sea pass through it, has been the scene of past confrontations between America and Iran, including a one-day naval battle in 1988.

But Saturday's incident brought no immediate response from Iranian officials or media, while French authorities downplayed its danger.

Military vessels taking part in the war against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria also pass through the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman. On Saturday, the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier, the USS Bulkeley destroyer and a French frigate, the FS Provence, were passing through it, said Cmdr. Kyle Raines, a U.S. Central Command spokesman.

As they passed, Iranian Revolutionary Guard vessels, hailing other ships in the strait over maritime radio, announced they'd be carrying out a live fire exercise, Raines said in a statement. After 23 minutes, the Iranian boats fired "several unguided rockets" about 1,370 meters (1,500 yards) from the warships and commercial traffic, he said.

While the rockets weren't fired in the direction of any ships, Raines said Iran's "actions were highly provocative."

"Firing weapons so close to passing coalition ships and commercial traffic within an internationally recognized maritime traffic lane is unsafe, unprofessional and inconsistent with international maritime law," he said.

A French military official, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to be publicly named, confirmed the rocket fire took place Saturday. However, the official said the French military did not consider it to be a threatening event as the rocket fire clearly wasn't directed toward the Western fleet.

The French frigate is now escorting the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, which is launching airstrikes against the Islamic State group, the official said.

NBC News first reported news of the Iranian rocket fire.

U.S. Sen. John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, responded to Saturday's incident with renewed criticism of the nuclear deal with Iran.

"A rush to sanctions relief threatens to embolden an increasingly aggressive Iranian regime that has no intention of normalizing relations with the West or of retreating from a malign policy intended to destabilize the Middle East," McCain said in a statement released Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a senior U.S. official told the AP that America is considering designating a number of additional targets for sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile program. Congress is being informed about those deliberations, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to publicly disclose the information.

The Wall Street Journal first reported that the Treasury Department was preparing sanctions against several individuals and companies in Iran, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates.

The Strait of Hormuz is only about 33 kilometers (21 miles) wide at its narrowest point. Ships traversing the chokepoint have even less room to maneuver. The shipping lane in either direction is only 2 miles (3.22 kilometers) wide, with a 2-mile (3.22-kilometer) buffer zone between them.

The U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet is based in nearby Bahrain, on the southern coast of the Gulf. It conducts anti-piracy patrols in the greater Gulf and serves as a regional counterbalance to Iran.

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U.S. and Iranian forces clashed in the Strait of Hormuz in the 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq war. On April 18, 1988, the U.S. attacked two Iranian oil rigs and sank or damaged six Iranian vessels, including two naval frigates, in Operation Praying Mantis. That came after the near-sinking of the missile frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts by an Iranian mine.

A few months later, in July 1988, the USS Vincennes in the strait mistook an Iran Air flight heading to Dubai for an attacking fighter jet, shooting down the plane and killing all 290 passengers and crew onboard. The shoot-down of the jet came shortly after the U.S. vessel reported coming under fire from Iranian speedboats.

Tensions have persisted in the strait even into this year. Iran sank a replica of a U.S. aircraft carrier in February near the strait and it earlier tested out so-called "suicide drones" it said could crash into naval vessels.

Iran seized a Marshall Islands-flagged cargo ship and later released it in May after its forces had earlier surrounded a U.S.-flagged cargo ship transiting the strait. That caused the 5th Fleet to escort commercial ships traveling in the Gulf for a short time.

Iran and world powers led by the U.S. agreed to a landmark nuclear deal earlier this year to limit Tehran's enrichment of uranium in exchange for lifting economic sanctions. Iran has always denied seeking nuclear arms.

The deal reached with moderate President Hassan Rouhani's administration has been panned by Iranian hard-liners, and in the months since, Iran has conducted missile tests criticized by the U.S., as well as aired footage on state television of an underground missile base.

Saturday's rocket fire should be seen as part of a pattern by Iran since its naval loss in 1988, said Eugene Gholz, an associate professor at the University of Texas who is an expert on the use of military power in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran wants to portray itself as the region's major power, but doesn't want to directly battle U.S. naval forces again, he said.

"Theater is a good word for it," Gholz said. "You build a set, you carry out activity on the set, you send actors — in this case (Iranian Revolutionary Guard) special forces — and you hope people are watching and really paying the price of admission."

Asia stocks mixed after Wall Street falls on lower oil price

JOE McDONALD, AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets were mixed in thin trading Thursday after the latest decline in oil prices pulled Wall Street lower. Markets in Japan and South Korea were closed for the New Year holiday.

KEEPING SCORE: The Shanghai Composite Index lost 0.4 percent to 3,560.34. Sydney's S&P/ASX 200 shed 0.2 percent to 5,308.70 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.1 percent to 21,870.01. Singapore and Taiwan also fell. Benchmarks in New Zealand, Thailand and Indonesia gained.

WALL STREET: The Dow Jones industrial average fell 117.11 points, or 0.7 percent, to 17,603.87. The Dow is on track to end 2015 down 1.2 percent. Standard and Poor's 500 index dropped 15 points, or 0.7 percent, to 2,063.36. The index is up only 0.2 percent for the year. The Nasdaq composite lost 42.09 points, or 0.8 percent, to 5,065.85. The Nasdaq is up about 7 percent for year.

OIL DOLDRUMS: Benchmark U.S. crude for February delivery shed 3.4 percent on Wednesday, extending its losses for the year to 40 percent. Energy companies fell the most among the 10 sectors in the S&P 500, 1.5 percent. The sector is down 23.8 percent for the year. Southwestern Energy fell 6.8 percent, while Consol Energy sank 5.6 percent.

ANALYST'S TAKE: "On the eve of the new year, the fact is that lingering and familiar risks are not purged at the stroke of midnight," said Mizuho Bank. It cited fluctuating oil prices and uncertainty about the impact of monetary policy changes in the United States, Europe and Japan. "Instead the risk landscape is a continuum that warrants caution."

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude gained 22 cents to \$36.82 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract plunged \$1.27 on Wednesday to close at \$36.60. Brent crude, used to price international oils, added 16 cents to \$36.62 in London. It slid \$1.33 in the previous session

to \$36.46.

CURRENCY: The dollar declined to 120.42 yen from Wednesday's 120.49. The euro also fell, to \$1.0926 from \$1.0936.

Family of 2-year-old amputee adopts kitten that lost a limb

SAN JACINTO, Calif. (AP) — A 2-year-old cancer survivor with an amputated arm is getting a special gift: A kitten that also suffered an amputation.

Matt and Simone Tipton, of Orange County, had been searching for a kitten for their daughter Scarlett, who was born with a rare form of cancer. Scarlett's left arm had to be amputated when she was 10 months old.

Doctors say she's now cancer free.

Scarlett's parents wanted to find a kitten that had undergone an amputation surgery to help in their daughter's ongoing recovery. That's when they heard about Holly, a kitten two women found bleeding from a traumatic injury in December.

The kitten's left front leg was amputated.

The family drove to the San Jacinto animal shelter to adopt the cat named Holly on Christmas Eve.