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2015 Precipitation Near Normal

2015 started out below normal for precipitation, but then the clouds opened up and the year ended up less than an inch below normal for the year. Normal precipitation is 21.72 inches and Groton received 20.80 inches for the year. December was above normal with .98 of precipitation, compared to the average of .52.

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

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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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

11:00am: United Methodist Church Worship

3:00pm: JK-8th Grade Open Gym

5:00pm: 6th-12th Open Gym

Monday, January 4, 2016

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

School Lunch: Pizza cruncher, mixed veggies, carrots and dip, fruit.

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, broccoli, garlic toast, sherbet.

Anniv: Jay and Jean Peterson

Birthdays: Hannah Swanson, Heath Giedt, Val Flihs.

6:30am: Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study

10:00am: Emmanuel Lutheran WELCA study leaders meet with pastor

6:30pm: GBB host Langford Area

"From minor scratches to a complete rebuild... we can do it all!"

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**225 Brown County Hwy 19 South
Aberdeen: 605/725-4900**

Top Pump Price News Stories of 2015

South Dakotans will ring in 2016 with close to the lowest pump prices of the year.

Today's South Dakota gas price average of \$1.950 is only two-tenths of a cent above the all-time low price for 2015 of \$1.948 recorded last January 26. Today's state average is three cents below the price one week ago, fifteen cents less than the average one month ago and 23 cents under the price on Dec. 31, 2014.

Drivers paid the second-cheapest gas prices in a decade in 2015. Only 2009 was cheaper during that time. The annual average price of gas in 2015 was \$2.40 per gallon, which was about 94 cents less than 2014.

AAA estimates that Americans saved more than \$115 billion on gasoline this year compared to 2014, which was an average of more than \$550 per licensed driver.

Today's national average price of gas is \$2 per gallon, which is the lowest average for New Year's Eve since 2008.

The national average price of gas for December was \$2.01 per gallon, which was the lowest monthly average since March 2009.

About 71 percent of U.S. stations are selling gas for less than \$2 per gallon, and drivers can find at least one station selling gas for less than \$2 in 47 states. More than 16,000 stations across the country are selling gas for less than \$1.75 per gallon.

California had the most expensive annual average of any state in 2015 for the first time on record. South Carolina had the cheapest annual average of any state for the fourth year in a row.

Drivers may pay even less for gasoline in 2016. AAA estimates the annual average price of gas in 2016 is likely to end up between \$2.25 and \$2.45 per gallon, which would be cheaper or at least comparable to this year's average of \$2.40 per gallon.

All average retail prices in this release are for a gallon of regular gasoline. E-10 fuel and pure 100% gasoline prices are averaged together.

As an advocacy organization representing the motoring public, AAA offers a variety of free resources to help motorists keep fuel budgets in check, including:

Fuel price averages updated daily at www.FuelGaugeReport.AAA.com. Every day, up to 120,000 stations are surveyed based on credit card swipes and direct feeds in cooperation with the Oil Price Information Service (OPIS) and Wright Express for unmatched statistical reliability.

Fuel Price Finder (AAA.com/fuelfinder) locates the lowest fuel price in your area.

AAA Mobile (AAA.com/mobile) provides directions and plots fuel prices along your travel route.

AAA's Member Rewards Visa® Credit Card (www.AAA.com/visacard) accumulates double points on fuel purchases.

Warm & Snowy December 2015

December 2015 featured above average temperatures, which has become a monthly theme for the year. Though not in record territory, locations ranged from 4-8 degrees above normal for the month. The first half of December was particularly warm, but temperatures became increasingly seasonable as the month wrapped up. It took until mid to late December for low temperatures to first reach at least 0 degrees for many. On the 27th Pierre's streak was broken, but not before coming within 5 days of reaching their record latest first 0 degrees or colder temperature.

These warm temperatures prevailed despite an active pattern which brought several rounds of moderate to heavy snow across the area, which typically entrenches cold air across the region this time of year. Snowstorms took place on Nov 30-Dec 1st, Dec 15-16th, and then again from Dec 25-26th. Although these events weren't particularly extreme in terms of cold, wind, or ice, they combined to reach impressive monthly snowfall totals across parts of central South Dakota. Murdo observed their snowiest December on record, while Pierre was 4th and Kennebec tied for 5th. These numbers are unusual considering a strong El Nino is in progress, though El Nino is but one climatic factor that influences our winters.

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Nominating South Dakota Students to Our Nation's Service Academies **By Senator Mike Rounds**

This year, I had the opportunity to nominate 24 exceptional South Dakota students to our nation's military service academies for the fall 2016 semester. Each year, I can nominate a certain number of students to the four service academies that require a nomination. They include the Military Academy at West Point, New York; the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland; the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado; and the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York. All academies offer a great opportunity for young people to become leaders in our nation's military.

It is truly an honor for me to nominate young South Dakota students to become the next generation of military leaders. The United States service academies are looking for the best and brightest to join their ranks. Each of the students nominated this year exemplify the leadership qualities and academic excellence that our country's service academies are looking for in their recruits.

Being admitted to the service academies isn't easy. Only a small number of students are selected each year, and those who do get accepted are the best of the best. They must meet difficult eligibility requirements in leadership, physical fitness, character and scholarship. That being said, those who graduate from the academies can go on to do great things. They are among the highest caliber our country has to offer, and that is a direct result of the training and education they received at whichever academy they attended.

The multi-part process of applying to the service academies can be difficult and oftentimes confusing. I have staff members in my South Dakota offices who are experienced in the process. They can assist with the application and answer any questions students or their parents may have. Additionally, I have implemented "Military Academy Day" events throughout the state. We held a series of these events in 2015 and will do so again in 2016. At these seminars, my staff is joined by representatives from the academies to give presentations and answer any questions from interested students and parents. They are a good way for students who are thinking of attending a military service academy to learn more about the application process and see what life is like at an academy. Dates and locations for 2016 Military Academy Day events will be released in the coming months.

To learn more about academy nominations, visit my website at www.rounds.senate.gov or call any of my state offices. You can also email academy_nominations@rounds.senate.gov. By attending an academy, not only will students have the opportunity to serve our nation and help lead the best military in the world, but they will receive an excellent education at a top-notch institution. It is an honor for me to be able to nominate South Dakota students to the U.S. military service academies.

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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
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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

January 2, 1999: Heavy snow of 6 to 8 inches fell across part of northeast South Dakota from the late afternoon hours of the 1st to the early morning hours of the 2nd. Strong north winds of 15 to 30 mph combined with temperatures in the single digits generated wind chills from 25 to 40 below and visibilities below 1/4 of a mile at times. Holiday travel along Interstate-29 and Highway 12 was most affected by this winter storm. There were some travel delays and some stranded motorists as a result. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Kidder, Victor, Sisseton, Webster, Waubay, Wilmot, and 8 inches at Britton and near Peever.

1870: One unofficial source reported the heaviest snowfall ever known in Louisville, Kentucky, piled up to about four feet. That would be more than twice as much as the accepted official record of 22.4 inches set February 4 through 6.

1897: Tornadoes in January? Two tornadoes touched down on this day. The first tornado touched down in the town of Mooringsport, Louisiana, killing five people and injuring 21 others. The second tornado occurred at Benton, Arkansas. Although this tornado was more destructive regards to property damage, it caused one death.

1910 - A great flood in Utah and Nevada washed out 100 miles of railroad between Salt Lake City UT and Los Angeles CA causing seven million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1955: Hurricane Alice passed through the Islands of Saint Martin and Saba in the Caribbean Sea on this day. Alice, which developed on December 30, 1954, is the only known Atlantic hurricane to span two calendar years.

1961 - The coldest temperature of record for the state of Hawaii was established with a reading of 14 degrees atop Haleakela Summit. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A winter storm moving up the Atlantic coast brought heavy snow and high winds to the northeastern U.S. Wind gusts reached 82 mph at Trenton NJ and Southwest Harbor in Maine. Snowfall totals ranged up to two feet at Salem NH and Waterboro ME. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - "Old Man Winter" took a siesta, with snow a scarcity across the nation. For the second day in a row Alamosa CO reported a record low of 31 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - Strong and gusty winds prevailed along the eastern slopes of the northern and central Rockies. Winds gusted to 71 mph at Colorado Springs CO and Livingston MT. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)








1990 - The first winter storm of the new year and decade developed in the southwestern U.S., and blanketed the northern mountains of Utah with 12 to 23 inches of snow. Up to 22 inches of snow was reported in the Alta-Snowbird area. The storm brought Las Vegas NV their first measurable precipitation in four and a half months, since the 17th of August. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

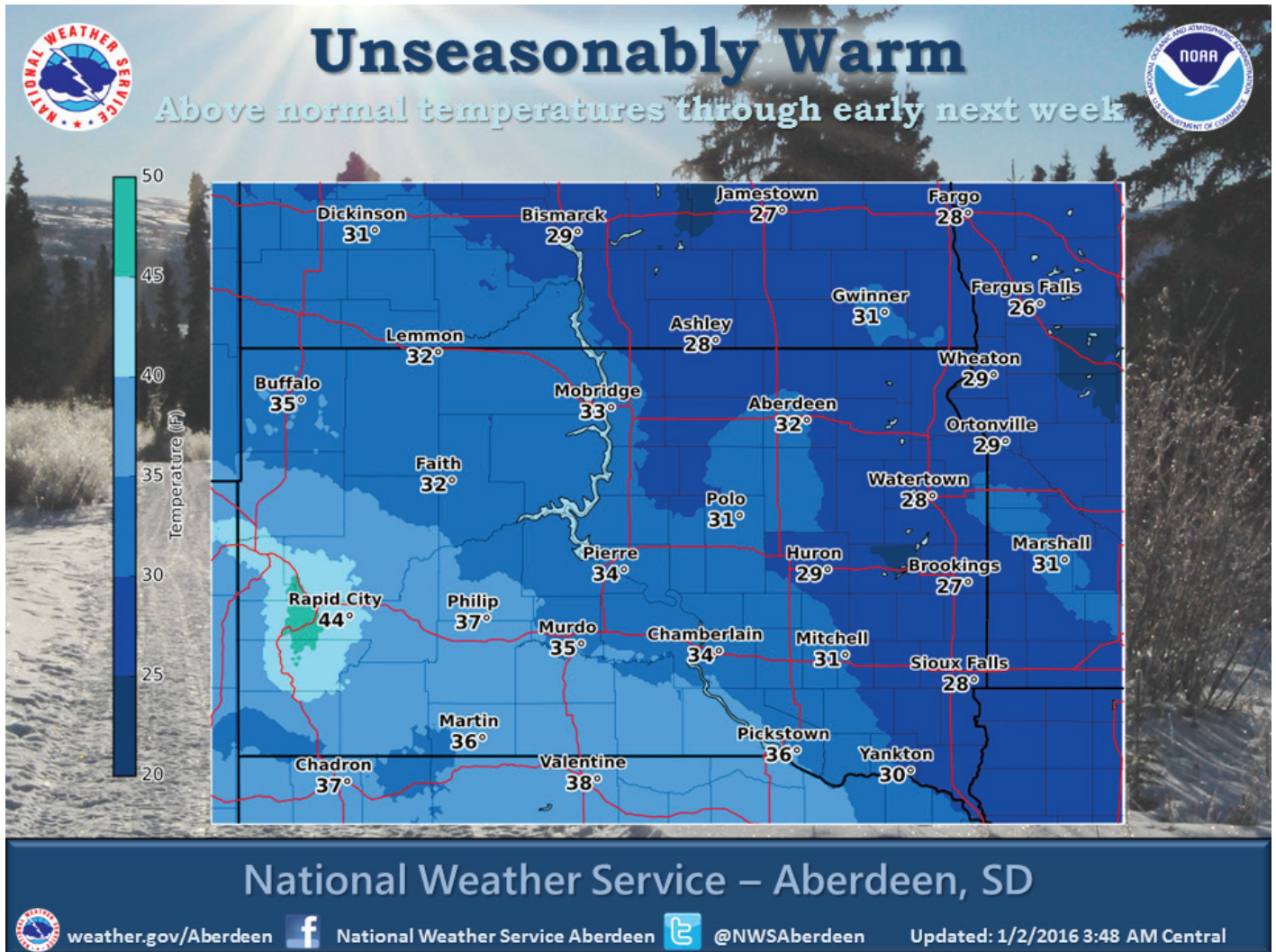
1994 - High winds buffeted the Northern Front Range of Colorado during the morning hours. Peak wind gusts included 105 mph atop Squaw Mountain near Idaho Springs and 89 mph at Fort Collins. A fast moving "Alberta Clipper" brought up to six inches of snow to Iowa. Up to a foot of snow blanketed the Snowy Range Mountains in southeastern Wyoming. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2008 - The second day of 2008 brought snow to areas of Indiana, Ohio and the Appalachians through the Northeastern United States. Parts of New England received the heaviest amounts, with some areas receiving storm totals of over 15 inches (38 cm) in several areas of central and eastern Maine. (NCDC)

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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy and Breezy	Mostly Sunny and Breezy
High: 31 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 24 °F	Low: 1 °F	High: 21 °F	Low: 12 °F	High: 26 °F



Sunny skies and unseasonably warm temperatures are expected across the region today, as are breezy northwest winds. Mild and dry weather conditions are expected to persist into next week.

Published on: 01/02/2016 at 4:00AM

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Yesterday's Weather

High: 27.8 at 1:13 PM

Low: 8.8 at 11:44 PM

High Gust: 24 at 12:37 PM

Precip: 0.0

Today's Info

Record High: 50° in 1963

Record Low: -30° in 2010

Average High: 22°F

Average Low: 2°F

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.04

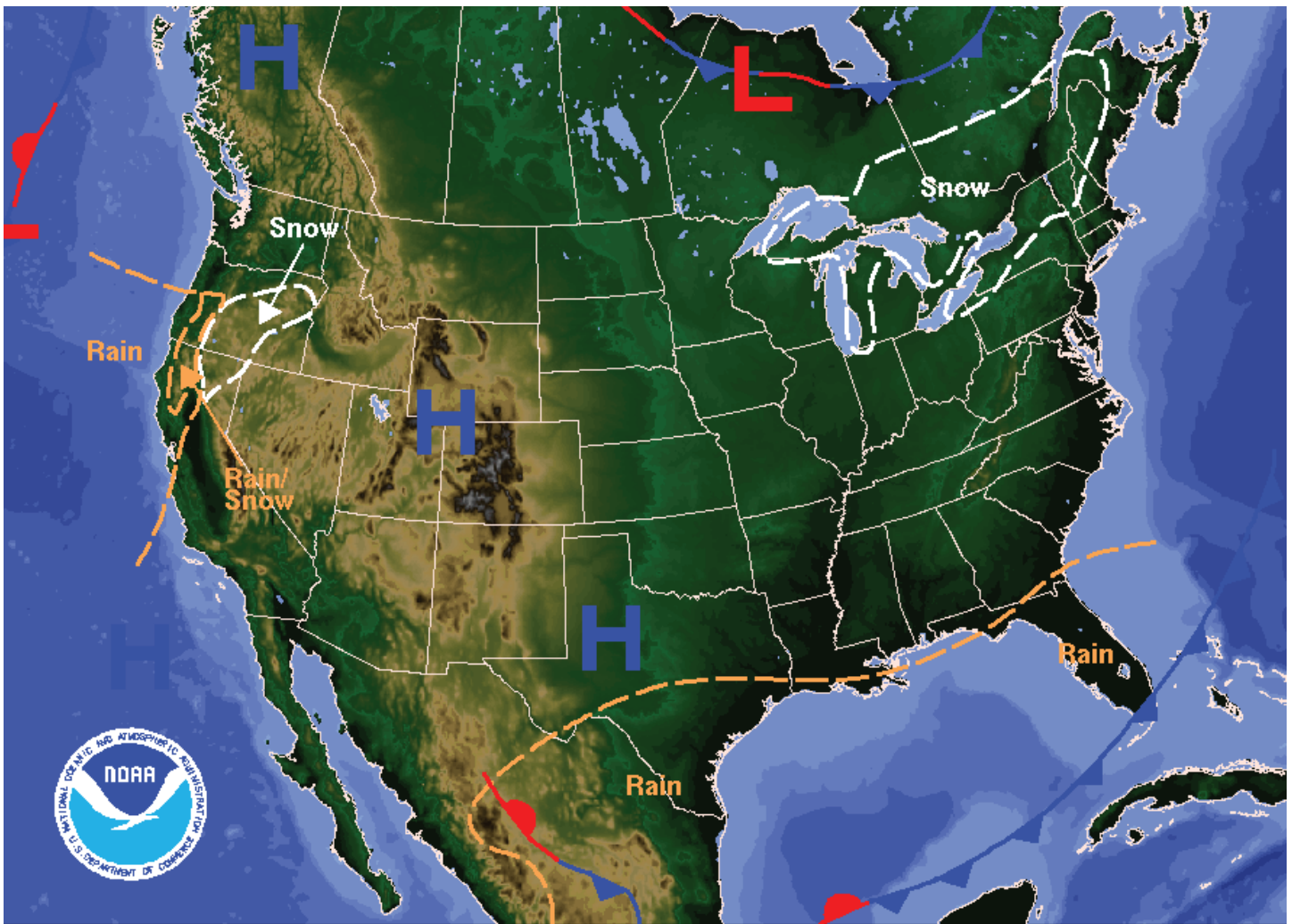
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.04

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:01 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:13 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Sat, Jan 02, 2016, issued 3:36 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Santorelli based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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A CALL FOR HELP!

A small boy got into a fight with the school's well-known bully. He was getting the best of the bully and was sitting on top of him when, suddenly, he began to call for help.

"Why should we help?" came the response from a friend standing nearby.

"I can feel him starting to get up and he might win the fight!" was the quick answer.

So it is in the fight against temptation and sin. We are in a constant battle to overcome the strength and power of Satan. He is always there waiting to attack us and wanting to get us involved in a contest where he has the upper hand.

As Christians, we must always be aware of the fact that we cannot avoid being confronted by Satan and challenged to sin. We should always be vigilant to be victorious. We know the "schoolyard bully" by the way he looks and how he acts. But most often, the temptations we face are not obvious until after the fight begins.

We live in a sinful world. Our minds and hearts have been numbed by the things we see, the words we read, and the stories we hear. We must be careful to be on guard at all times by avoiding tempting situations. We must be aware of our playgrounds, playthings and playmates.

Prayer: Father, may we recognize that through You we can overcome sin by following and obeying Your Word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Scripture for Today: 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

News from the Associated Press

Motorcycle driver dies in collision with SUV at intersection

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A 45-year-old man was killed when the motorcycle he was driving collided with a sports utility vehicle at a Rapid City intersection.

The accident happened just before 3 p.m. Friday. The Highway Patrol says the SUV driver was southbound on state Highway 44. He had stopped at a stop sign before colliding with the eastbound motorcycle. The motorcycle driver was pronounced dead at the scene. He was not wearing a helmet. The name of the victim has not been released.

Blue Angels jet to help promote upcoming Sioux Falls Airshow

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Blue Angels F-18 jet is scheduled to visit Sioux Falls on Tuesday morning to help promote an airshow planned for this summer.

The U.S. Navy Blue Angels aerial demonstration team will be the headline act for the upcoming Sioux Falls Airshow at Joe Foss Field on July 23-24.

The air shows are typically planned for every three years, but the organizing committee postponed 2015's show to 2016 because it had difficulty lining up a featured act.

The South Dakota Air National Guard will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of its Fighting Lobos flight wing unit during the show.

3 mountain lions killed so far in Black Hills season

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Wildlife officials in South Dakota report that three mountain lions have been killed so far during the hunting season in the Black Hills Fire Protection District.

A report from the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks shows two of the three lions killed were males. One was killed in Pennington County and the other one in Custer County. The female lion was killed in Pennington County.

The season began Dec. 26 and will conclude March 31, unless the harvest limit of 60 total mountain lions or 40 female lions is reached prior to that date. The mountain lion season outside of the Black Hills district runs year-round.

The state has had a residents-only mountain lion season since 2005.

Former Pioneer Press sports columnist Don Riley dies at 92

JON KRAWCZYNSKI, AP Sports Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Don Riley, the former St. Paul sports writer who spent more than four decades penning a widely read column in the city's newspapers, has died. He was 92.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press said Friday that Riley died Thursday from a heart ailment. He wrote "The Eye Opener" column and covered boxing in a newspaper career that spanned 44 years from 1943 to 1987.

"He pretty much carried the St. Paul newspaper, in my opinion, for four decades," said Charley Walters, the longtime Pioneer Press sports columnist. "His column was so entertaining."

Riley became known for weaving passing references to Hollywood starlets and characters such as Dracula and Frankenstein into his column and then running photos of them to draw more readers to his words. He also delighted in taking shots at fans of the Green Bay Packers, the chief rivals for the Minnesota Vikings.

The two teams square off Sunday night in Green Bay — Riley would call it "Green Bush" — with the winner being crowned champion of the NFC North. Riley's pot shots would often reach the Packers faithful because the Pioneer Press had a significant subscription base in Western Wisconsin. The timing of Riley's death resonated with Star Tribune columnist Patrick Reusse, who worked with Riley in St. Paul.

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"I went to cover a game there and the Packers wouldn't put me in the press box," Riley told Reusse in a 1998 column. "They put me in a snowdrift in the 55th row. They were mad, I guess, because that week I wrote, 'Did you hear about the beauty contest in Green Bush? Nobody won.'"

As angry as the Packers fans would get, the affable and hilarious Riley would always win them over on his many trips to Minnesota's neighboring state.

"He was a mad genius," Reusse said. "Every high school letterman's banquet in every little hamlet in Wisconsin had Riley as their guest speaker in April or May for years. They'd all boo him and hiss at him and then he'd make them laugh and they'd have him back."

Convention was never Riley's thing. He rarely attended the sporting events he chronicled in the local paper and would experiment wildly all in an effort to entertain. Some recall a Christmas-time column that started on Page 1 with a picture of Minneapolis Lakers great George Mikan. When the column jumped inside for the second half, Riley also had the editors jump the lower half of the Mikan photo inside as well, showing just his legs.

"A classic old-time newspaper character," said AP sports writer John Nicholson, who worked with Riley in St. Paul at the end of the columnist's career. "One of the greatest story-tellers I've ever met."

Riley was a heavy drinker in his earlier days before sobering up in 1979 and he wrote a book titled "Gallivan's Gang" about his alcohol-fueled nights at a local watering hole. One such night included a confrontation with former Pioneer Press sports editor Arno Goethel after Riley stole some material from Goethel's Sunday column and put it in his own.

An angry Goethel physically confronted him in the bar and asked Riley how he could do such a thing.

"It was a pretty good item," Walters recalled Riley telling Goethel. "I thought it deserved better readership."

Those speaking gigs were just one of many schemes Riley came up with to supplement his newspaper salary. Reusse recalled how one year he concocted a "Chow Cone," an ice cream cone filled with chow mein, to be sold at the Minnesota State Fair.

"Legend has it that the stand opened at 10 a.m.," Reusse said. "At 10:10, first family bought it and it came through the bottom of the cone and got all over them and the Chow Cone stand was out of business by 10:30."

One of Riley's notable quirks was a difficulty with recalling the names of his many co-workers and acquaintances, instead calling them "Tiger" or "Ace." Both Nicholson and Walters told a story about Riley getting on an elevator one day with two men who knew Riley, but didn't know each other.

"Riley says, 'Tiger, meet Ace. Ace, meet Tiger,'" Walters said with a laugh.

And just like all those Packers fans, the men in the elevator couldn't be mad at him, either.

"He was an all-time character," Walters said. "A really lovable guy. You couldn't help but love the guy."

South Dakota State beats Denver 68-59

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Reed Tellinghuisen, Ian Theisen and George Marshall each scored 11 and South Dakota State beat Denver 68-59 in the Summit League opener for both teams on Friday night.

Deondre Parks and Mike Daum added 10 points apiece for the Jackrabbits (12-3), who pulled away with a 10-0 run to lead 58-46 with 4:06 to play. They led by at least eight the rest of the way.

Marcus Byrd led the Pioneers (8-6) with 16 points. Joe Rosga scored 12 and Nate Engesser added 11. Denver went on a 15-2 run early in the second half to get within 39-38 and stayed as close as 48-46 before the Jacks pulled away.

Denver shot 55.6 percent from the field but managed only 36 field-goal attempts and two offensive rebounds.

It was South Dakota State's 22nd consecutive home win at Frost Arena.

Authorities ID woman killed when pickup crashes near Sturgis

STURGIS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have released the name of a 25-year-old woman who was killed when she lost control of the pickup truck she was driving on a snow-covered and icy highway two miles west of Sturgis.

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The victim is identified as Melissa Carter of Black Hawk.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol says Carter was heading east on Interstate 90 just after 9 a.m. Thursday when the pickup entered the median and overturned. The patrol says Carter, who was not wearing a seat belt, was thrown from the truck and died.

Weather conditions at the time included blowing snow.

The crash remains under investigation.

Combs, Hall lead IUPUI to 77-66 win over South Dakota

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Darell Combs scored 19, including four 3-pointers, and Evan Hall added 14 points and eight rebounds to help IUPUI beat South Dakota 77-66 Friday in the Summit League opener for both teams.

Matt O'Leary scored 15 for IUPUI (5-11). The Jaguars, who came in shooting 39.3 percent from the field, made 27 of 54 shots.

IUPUI led by as many as 13 in the first half, but South Dakota (8-7) opened the second with an 8-2 run that gave the Coyotes a 41-40 lead, their first since the opening minute of the game.

O'Leary answered with a 3-pointer that sparked an 8-2 spurt by IUPUI and the Jaguars led rest of the way.

Eric Robertson's jumper pulled South Dakota within six with 2:15 left, but IUPUI made 7 of 8 free throws thereon to seal it.

Tre Burnette scored 19 to lead the Coyotes, who made a season-low two 3-pointers.

The Vikings-Packers rivalry: a look back

DAVE CAMPBELL, AP Pro Football Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minnesota at Green Bay, for the NFC North championship, in the final game of the regular season. This is precisely why the NFL has moved to preserve the last week on the schedule for intra-division games.

The Vikings and Packers will play Sunday night, the league's most-watched television time slot, at hallowed Lambeau Field in the January cold. The winner gets the No. 3 seed for the NFC playoffs, plus a sense of satisfaction that will last in some form at least until next fall.

The loser must go on the road to start the postseason as a wild-card team, with some inevitable bitterness about the rival team taking the division title.

"We could play on a basketball court, and I'll be ready to play for this one," Vikings running back Adrian Peterson said.

Over 55 years and 110 matchups, plenty of memorable games have been played between these border-state teams. But at the mercy of the NFL's schedule makers, these late-season meetings have been more of a rarity than a routine. The Vikings and Packers have squared off in the final game of the season in 1984, 1991, 1992, 1996 and 2012, but that's it. They've played a mere 20 times over the last three weeks on the schedule.

The times they have met with the playoffs on the line, then, have naturally stood out in the series.

Here are some memorable meaningful games in the past between the Vikings and Packers:

FAVRE'S FIRST YEAR: The Vikings clinched the NFC Central in the second-to-last week of Dennis Green's first season as coach in 1992, going 11-5. The final game of the regular season was against the Packers, who had a first-year coach in Mike Holmgren as well as a new quarterback named Brett Favre.

The Packers were still in the running for a spot in the playoffs entering that game at the Metrodome, but they were outgained 447-211 in total yardage in a 27-7 loss. Favre threw three interceptions and Green Bay finished 9-7.

CHRISTMAS COMES EARLY IN 2004: The teams were matched up on Christmas Eve at the Metrodome in the second-to-last game on the schedule, with both teams entering the afternoon at 8-6 and the winner set up to clinch the division title.

Back and forth they went, with neither team leading by more than seven points, until Ryan Longwell's

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29-yard field goal on the final play of the game gave the Packers a 34-31 victory. Favre, who like Longwell eventually went on to play for the Vikings, passed for 365 yards and three touchdowns.

The Vikings still made the playoffs as an 8-8 wild-card team and went on to face (guess who?) the Packers in the first round.

MOONED BY MOSS: With four touchdown passes by Daunte Culpepper, the Vikings got their revenge two weeks later with a 31-17 playoff victory at Lambeau Field. The game was remembered best for a catch in the end zone by Randy Moss, who celebrated by pretending to pull down his pants at the Packers fans behind him.

FAVRE'S RETURN: The game on Nov. 1, 2009, was merely at the midpoint of the season, but there's hardly a more significant moment in this rivalry than the day Favre took the Vikings into Lambeau Field with boos raining down on him. He left with a 38-26 victory. That was essentially the division title game, too, because the Vikings wound up winning the NFC North at 12-4, while the Packers finished 11-5.

PETERSON'S RUN FOR THE RECORD: Peterson rushed for 199 yards on Dec. 30, 2012, leading the Vikings to a 37-34 victory over the Packers at the Metrodome and into the playoffs. That left him 9 yards short of becoming the NFL's all-time single-season rushing leader. The Packers had already clinched the NFC North, but they still had a first-round bye in their sights. Then, like in 2004, the teams met again in the first round of the playoffs. This time, Aaron Rodgers and the Packers took care of their home field and took down the Vikings 24-10.

Vikings list DT Linval Joseph as doubtful to play Packers

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota Vikings nose tackle Linval Joseph has been listed as doubtful to play at Green Bay due to a foot injury that has hampered him over the last month.

Joseph did not practice at all this week, with the Vikings preparing for what has become the NFC North championship game against the Packers on Sunday night. Joseph returned from a three-game absence to face his former team, the New York Giants, last week, but he aggravated the injury and could leave the Vikings again without a key cog in their scheme.

If Joseph doesn't play, Sharrif Floyd would switch tackle spots and Tom Johnson would move into the lineup. Floyd didn't practice Friday, either, because of a knee injury, but he was listed as probable to play the Packers.

Couple in Fedora specialize in Scottish Highland cattle

FEDORA, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota couple who run a farm east of the town of Fedora specialize in Scottish Highland cattle, a shaggy, long-horned breed, and their herd has become a roadside attraction.

Lynette Forth and Gary Moschell of Moschell Farms tend to about 100 Highland cattle, the Tri-State Neighbor reported (<http://bit.ly/1kudhik>). People often stop to take pictures of the animals and talk to the bull nicknamed "Loveboy."

Some of the Highlands are sold as pets, but the animals built for cold conditions also are sought for their heartiness, longevity and quality meat.

The couple obtained their first Highlands in 2007. They went to a sale thinking they would buy a baby calf as a pet. All the calves were sold, but they came home with 19 cows and a bull.

Moschell grew up around cattle, but it had been a long time since the couple had livestock on their property, which sits on Highway 34 between Howard and Fedora.

Forth is from Illinois. She said she always has had a way with animals, and her interest in the Scottish-heritage breed came from her days of studying British history and dressing up in 1700s period clothing.

Each Christmas, Forth shares her cattle with her family back in Illinois by creating a calendar. It stars her Highlands in South Dakota scenes each month.

"I'm really crazy about the breed," Forth said.

Moschell Farms calves in March. Highlands are known for easy calving, which makes them a good option for cross-breeding. They're a shorter, stocky breed. Cross steers finish at 17 to 18 months at an average

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weight of 1,100 to 1,200 pounds.

Highland cattle can be hard-headed, and a person has to be patient in working with them, Forth said. "They treat you like you treat them," she said.

SD to tackle livestock operation permits, power plan in 2016

DIRK LAMMERS, Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Revisions to the state's permit for large livestock operations, extensive new federal standards to protect groundwater from uranium mining and the state's response to a new federal Clean Power Plan are poised to be among the top environmental issues facing South Dakota in 2016.

South Dakota appears to be in good shape to avoid drought conditions in 2016, and the state's Public Utilities Commission may consider whether to re-approve the state's segment of Keystone XL despite President Barack Obama's rejection of the embattled pipeline project.

Here are some of the issues to be addressed in the coming year:

FEEDLOT PERMITS

The state Department of Environment and Natural Resources will schedule a hearing early in 2016 on its draft revisions to the state's permit for large livestock operations. In September, environmental and livestock groups gave largely favorable marks to the plan to update standards for protecting South Dakota's water supply from manure and waste produced by large-scale animal feeding operations.

Updates range from requiring more information about the ownership of an operation — people with at least a 10 percent stake would be disclosed — to requiring feedlots to meet new standards for conservation plans used by livestock operations. There are about 420 permitted concentrated animal feeding operations in South Dakota, nearly all in the eastern part of the state.

CLEAN POWER PLAN

The state Department of Environment and Natural Resources in 2016 will plan how to implement the federal Clean Power Plan in case a multistate lawsuit fails to stop the new rules. Attorney General Marty Jackley joined a lawsuit with 24 states opposing the EPA's Clean Power Plan, which seeks to reduce carbon emissions from electrical-generating plants.

DENR will seek public input in the coming months, request a two-year extension from EPA by the September deadline and then finalize a state Clean Power Plan for submittal to EPA by September 2018.

URANIUM MINING

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to move forward in 2016 with extensive new standards to protect groundwater from uranium mining.

The EPA proposed the standards in 2015 to account for how nearly all uranium produced in the U.S. nowadays comes from in-situ mining rather than conventional mining. In-situ mining involves pumping into the ground a solution to dissolve minerals, then pumping out of the ground a solution containing uranium. The EPA maintains it has authority under federal laws to update contamination standards for implementation by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Opponents say the EPA is overstepping its authority and endangering an industry.

In 2014, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued a permit to Powertech Uranium Corp. for a proposed uranium mine in western South Dakota's Black Hills.

NO DROUGHT?

After dealing with severe drought conditions through much of 2013, South Dakota appears to be in good shape for moisture heading into 2016. The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center shows no areas of concern in the state through March 31.

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor shows just a handful areas of South Dakota listed under the lowest "abnormally dry" conditions: Corson, McPherson, Edmunds and Marshall counties, the northern half of Roberts County, the northern tip of Perkins County and the far western parts of Pennington and Custer counties.

PIPELINE PROJECT

South Dakota's Public Utilities Commission could decide early in 2016 whether to re-approve the state's portion of the embattled Keystone XL pipeline project. Pipeline opponents argued in December that when

President Barack Obama rejected the project, it should have put an end to the proceedings in South Dakota. But an attorney for TransCanada Corp., the company behind the proposed pipeline, said the company remains committed to the project and it could be revived under the next president.

TransCanada's proposed pipeline would go from Canada through Montana and South Dakota to Nebraska, where it would connect with existing pipelines to carry more than 800,000 barrels of crude oil a day to refineries along the Gulf Coast. It would move about 100,000 barrels of oil daily from the western North Dakota oil patch.

Attorney general touts South Dakota sobriety program

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — West Virginia's attorney general is urging state lawmakers to adopt a substance abuse program used in South Dakota.

Patrick Morrissey says he sent a letter this week to the chairmen of the Senate and House Judiciary Committees urging them to consider the 24/7 Sobriety Program during the 2016 legislative session. The offender-funded, court-monitored initiative aims to reduce the number of repeat offenses of drunken driving.

According to Morrissey, participants are required to take two alcohol breath tests per day. The program also employs urine drug screening, ankle bracelets that monitor alcohol intake, and drug patches that test for drugs by collecting sweat samples.

Morrissey says the initiative has lowered recidivism rates in South Dakota.

India air force base attack leaves 4 gunmen, 2 troops dead

CHANNI ANAND, Associated Press

PATHANKOT, India (AP) — Suspected militants infiltrated an Indian air force base near the border with Pakistan on Saturday and exchanged fire with security forces for hours, leaving at least four gunmen and two Indian troops dead, officials and news reports said.

Although it was unclear who staged the attack, it was being seen as a possible attempt to undo recent progress made in relations between rivals India and Pakistan, coming just a week after the first visit to Pakistan in 12 years by an Indian prime minister.

The attack at the Pathankot air force base began a couple of hours before dawn, and by late morning it appeared that the violence had ended with the killing of the gunmen by Indian forces. But just two hours later, fresh gunfire erupted, with an air force helicopter firing at an area of the base. Shots could also be heard from inside Pathankot, a major air force base located about 430 kilometers (267 miles) north of New Delhi.

Air force spokeswoman Rochelle D'Silva said Saturday night that troops were conducting combing operations of the entire base in order to be able to fully secure it. She added that the full number of casualties would be clear once the base was completely secured.

By 8 p.m., no gunfire had been heard around the base for more than two hours.

The defense ministry said there had been intelligence reports about a likely terror attack on military installations in Pathankot, and that the air force had been prepared to thwart any attackers.

"Due to the effective preparation and coordinated efforts by all the security agencies a group of terrorists were detected by the aerial surveillance platforms as soon as they entered the Air Force Station at Pathankot," the ministry said in a statement.

Despite the intelligence on a possible attack, at least two air force troops were killed in the gunbattle, the Press Trust of India news agency reported. PTI, citing police, also said at least four gunmen had been killed.

The attack began at around 3 a.m., when a group of gunmen entered the section of the base where the living quarters are located, the defense ministry said. The attackers, however, were unable to penetrate the area where fighter helicopters and other military equipment are kept, it said.

Police said they suspected the gunmen were militants, and were investigating whether they had come from the Indian portion of Kashmir or from Pakistan. The Himalayan region of Kashmir is divided between

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India and Pakistan, but is claimed in its entirety by both.

Rebels routinely stage attacks in Indian-held Kashmir, where they've been fighting since 1989 for an independent Kashmir or its merger with Pakistan.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training Kashmir's insurgents, a charge Islamabad denies, and the attack was viewed by many in India as an attempt to unravel recent progress in the country's relationship with its archrival.

The violence came just a week after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an unannounced visit to Pakistan to meet with his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif. The visit was seen as a potential sign of thawing relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. The two leaders also held an unscheduled meeting at the Paris climate change talks last month.

Ahead of Modi's visit to Pakistan, the national security advisers of both countries had met in Thailand. The foreign secretaries of both nations are scheduled to meet in Islamabad later this month.

In the past, the contentious issue of Kashmir has halted talks between the rivals.

"These kinds of attacks are nothing new and have generally been the outcome of the dispute of India and Pakistan over Kashmir," said Noor Ahmed Baba, a political scientist at Central University in Indian Kashmir's capital, Srinagar.

Baba said that there were elements in both countries that would like to see the peace process fizzle out, and that all sides must "exhibit political maturity and sagacity to defeat the vested interests."

Pathankot, in Punjab state, is on the highway that connects India's insurgency-wracked Jammu and Kashmir state with the rest of the country. It's also very close to India's border with Pakistan.

Pakistan's foreign ministry condemned the attack. "Building on the goodwill created during the recent high level contacts between the two countries, Pakistan remains committed to partner with India as well as other countries in the region to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism afflicting our region," it said in a statement.

Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh told reporters that India wants peace with Pakistan, but "if there is any kind of terror attack on India, we will give it a fitting reply."

India's defense minister, national security adviser and the chiefs of the army, navy and air force met Saturday to discuss the situation.

In July, gunmen staged a similar attack at a police station and a moving bus near Gurdaspur, a border town in India's Punjab state. The three attackers then killed four policemen and three civilians before being shot dead by security forces.

The Latest: Iran politician predicts 'maelstrom' in Saudi

The Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — The latest developments following Saudi Arabia's execution of 47 people, including a prominent opposition Shiite cleric who had rallied demonstrations in the kingdom (All times local).
6 p.m.

Iran's parliament speaker says the execution of prominent Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr will prompt a "maelstrom" in Saudi Arabia.

In comments posted on Iranian state television's website, Ali Larijani said, "Nimr's martyrdom will put Saudi Arabia in a maelstrom. Saudi will not pass through this maelstrom."

3 p.m.

An Iran-backed Shiite militia in Iraq has condemned Saudi Arabia's execution of prominent opposition Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr and called on Baghdad to reconsider the re-opening of the Saudi embassy.

In a statement aired on its TV network, Asaib Ahl al-Haq called the execution, which was announced Saturday, a "new crime" carried out by the Saudi royal family.

It called on the Iraqi government to "reconsider the benefit of having a Saudi embassy in Iraq, with a suspicious ambassador and goals."

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Saudi Arabia is gearing up to re-open its embassy in Shiite-dominated Iraq for the first time in 25 years. The kingdom closed the embassy in 1990, after Saddam Hussein ordered an invasion of Kuwait.

Al-Nimr, who led anti-government protests by the kingdom's Shiite minority before his arrest in 2012, was among 47 people whose execution was announced by Saudi authorities on Saturday.

2:45 p.m.

An international rights group which works to abolish the death penalty has condemned Saudi Arabia's execution of 47 people, saying two were teenagers when they were detained.

Reprieve says the 47 people whose execution was announced Saturday include four Shiite dissidents.

It says one of the dissidents, Ali al-Ribh, was 18 when he was arrested in 2012, and another, Mohammed al-Shuyokh, was 19.

Both were convicted on charges related to anti-government protests in eastern Saudi Arabia, where the Shiite minority is centered. Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent Shiite cleric and central figure in those protests, was also among those executed.

Reprieve said in a statement that the Saudi government "is continuing to target those who have called for domestic reform in the kingdom."

2:25 p.m.

Saudi Arabia's top cleric has defended the execution of 47 people, calling it a "mercy to the prisoners" because it would save them from committing more evil acts and prevent chaos.

Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al Sheikh said in a statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency that the executions announced Saturday were in line with Islamic law and the need to safeguard the kingdom's security.

Islamic scholars around the world hold vastly different views on the application of the death penalty in Shariah law, with Saudi judges adhering to one of the strictest interpretations.

The 47 who were executed included an al-Qaida ideologue as well as Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent opposition Shiite cleric who had rallied anti-government protests before his arrest in 2012.

2:15 p.m.

The brother of Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent opposition leader who was among 47 people executed by Saudi Arabia, says he is shocked by the move.

Mohammed al-Nimr told The Associated Press by phone Saturday that the executions came as a "big shock" because "we thought the authorities could adopt a political approach to settle matters without bloodshed."

He says the family has not yet been asked to pick up the body but that a funeral would be held as soon as possible.

The execution of al-Nimr was expected to escalate tensions in eastern Saudi Arabia, where the Shiite minority is concentrated, and Bahrain, which has seen years of simmering unrest between its Shiite majority and Saudi-allied Sunni monarchy.

Mohammed al-Nimr said "there will be reactions" but urged people to "adopt peaceful means when expressing their anger."

2 p.m.

Iran has strongly condemned Saudi Arabia's execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent opposition Shiite cleric.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari said Saturday that the execution of al-Nimr, "who had no means other than speech to pursue his political and religious objectives, only shows the depth of imprudence and irresponsibility." His statement was carried by state-run Press TV.

Saudi Arabia announced the execution of 47 prisoners on Saturday, including al-Qaida militants convicted of deadly attacks and at least four Shiite dissidents.

Al-Nimr, arrested in 2012, was a central figure in demonstrations by the kingdom's Shiite minority calling for greater rights.

Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran are regional rivals, and support opposite sides in the wars in Syria and Yemen.

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Swimmers splash into 2016 in NYC Polar Bear plunge

NEW YORK (AP) — New Year's Day was a time to chill out for a throng of adventuresome swimmers who started 2016 with a dip in the Atlantic Ocean off New York City.

An estimated 2,000 people participated in the annual Coney Island Polar Bear plunge on a seasonally chilly Friday. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration measurements show air temperatures in the area were in the low 40s, while the ocean was a bit warmer.

Some people wore wetsuits, but others sported only bikinis.

Sixty-two-year-old Peter DeAngelo was garbed as the Jolly Green Giant for his 10th Polar Bear swim. He tells the Daily News of New York that it's "something you can never explain," but it gets adrenaline flowing.

The event raises money for Camp Sunshine, a camp for children with life-threatening illnesses.

4 shot dead including man, wife in suburban Los Angeles home

ROWLAND HEIGHTS, Calif. (AP) — A man shot and killed his wife and two others in his home on New Year's Eve before his son wrestled the gun away and fatally shot him in a chain of events apparently set off by a dispute over a washing machine, authorities said Friday.

The two other victims killed were the son's 48-year-old girlfriend who also lives at the house in Rowland Heights and a 27-year-old man who was visiting, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said.

The 54-year-old father was a heavy drinker with a large gun collection, and authorities had made dozens of previous trips to the home, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department said.

Investigators were talking to surviving witnesses to figure out what led to the father pulling out a semi-automatic pistol and opening fire.

"It looks like it was a dispute between the dad and the son's girlfriend, probably over using the washing machine," Sheriff's Lt. John Corina told the San Gabriel Valley Tribune. "For some reason, this set the dad off."

The son, 33-year-old Christopher Morey, eventually recovered the gun from his father and shot him, authorities said. Morey is being held on suspicion of murder on \$1 million bail, authorities said. Deputies reached by phone did not know if he has an attorney who could comment.

Morey and his girlfriend were living in the home with the 54-year-old mother, who had recently had a stroke.

"They had been taking care of her," Corina said. "She was in a hospital bed there in the middle of the living room."

Authorities have not released the name of any victims, but the mother and brother of the 27-year-old were outside the home Friday and told the Tribune his name was Ernesto Calzadilla and he has an 8-month-old daughter.

The mother, Maria Cruz, said the family was nice to his son and he liked being at the house.

But the brother, Wilfred Calzadilla, said Ernesto had generally stopped going to the house because of worries about the father, making an exception on New Year's Eve.

"Mixing alcohol and guns never ends good," Wilfred Calzadilla said.

IS suicide car bombs target Iraqi troops in Ramadi

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's military says Islamic State militants have launched suicide attacks in the western city of Ramadi days after troops drove them out of the city center.

Brig. Gen. Ahmed al-Belawi told The Associated Press on Saturday that the militants stuck security forces the day before with seven suicide car bombs in two areas on the city's outskirts.

Al-Belawi says there were casualties among the government troops, but could not provide a specific figure. He says the troops repelled the attacks and did not lose territory.

Ramadi, the provincial capital of the sprawling Anbar province, fell to IS in May, marking a major setback for U.S.-backed Iraqi forces. Iraqi troops retook the city center on Monday, but insurgents are still holed up in parts of the city.

Moderate 5.3 earthquake rocks Afghanistan, Pakistan

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A moderate 5.3-magnitude earthquake in northern Afghanistan was felt in the capital, Kabul, and across the border in Pakistan, but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties.

The U.S. Geological Survey says the epicenter of Saturday's quake was 22 miles (35 kilometers) south-east of Jarm, Afghanistan, in the sparsely populated Hindu Kush region.

A 7.5-magnitude quake in the same region in October caused extensive damage in northwestern Pakistan and killed around 400 people.

Some begin picking up pieces in Missouri after flooding

JIM SALTER, Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — The worst of the dangerous, deadly winter flood is over in the St. Louis area, leaving residents of several water-logged communities to assess damage, clean up and figure out how to bounce back — or in some cases, where to live.

Farther south, things were getting worse: Record and near-record crest predictions of the Mississippi River and levee breaks threatened homes in rural southern Missouri and Illinois. Two more levees succumbed Friday, bringing to at least 11 the number of levee failures.

The flood, fueled by more than 10 inches of rain over a three-day period that began last weekend, is blamed for 22 deaths. Searchers were still looking for five missing people — two teenagers in Illinois, two men in Missouri and a country music singer in Oklahoma.

China creates 3 new army units to modernize military

BEIJING (AP) — China has created three new military bodies as part of reforms to modernize its military — the world's largest standing force — and improve its fighting capacity.

State television on Saturday showed President Xi Jinping giving military flags to the leaders of the three new units — a general command for the People's Liberation Army, a missile force and a strategic support force. At the ceremony, which took place Thursday, Xi and PLA officers and soldiers sang the national anthem.

Xi said the three new units were created as part of a modernization reform and "to realize the Chinese dream of a strong military."

He has promulgated the idea of a "Chinese dream" involving "the great renewal of the Chinese nation" and sees a strong military as key to this.

The military reform comes as China has become more assertive in pressing its claims to territory in the East China Sea and South China Sea, increasing tensions with its neighbors.

In a bid to show China poses no expansionist threat, Xi announced in September that he would reduce China's 2.3 million-strong army by 300,000 troops. However, it will still remain the world's largest.

Described by Xi as a "core force of strategic deterrence," the PLA Rocket Force will replace the Second Artillery Force in controlling China's nuclear arsenal and conventional missiles. The new Strategic Support Force will likely focus on cyber warfare.

Other reform plans include phasing out old equipment and developing new weapons systems.

The reforms also tighten the party's leadership over the army. It used to be supervised by four headquarters, while now the army's general command is controlled directly by the Central Military Commission, whose chairman is Xi.

The military has been the focus of an anticorruption campaign spearheaded by Xi. The two highest-ranking officers to be accused of taking bribes were vice-chairmen of the Central Military Commission.

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Humpback whales slow to arrive in Hawaii

HONOLULU (AP) — December usually marks the start of humpback whale season in Hawaii, but experts say the animals have been slow to return this year.

The giant whales are an iconic part of winter on the islands and a source of income for tour operators. But officials at the Humpback Whale Marine Sanctuary said they've been getting reports that the whales have been difficult to spot so far.

"This isn't a concern, but it's of interest. One theory was that something like this happened as whales increased. It's a product of their success," said Ed Lyman, a Maui-based resource protection manager and response coordinator for the sanctuary.

"What I'm seeing out there right now I would have expected a month ago," said Lyman, who was surprised by how few of the animals he saw while responding to a call about a distressed calf on Christmas Eve. "We've just seen a handful of whales."

It will be a while before officials have hard numbers because the annual whale counts don't take place until the last Saturday of January, February and March, according to former sanctuary co-manager Jeff Walters.

"They don't necessarily show up in the same place at the same time every year," Walters said.

More than 10,000 humpback whales make the winter journey from Alaska to the warm waters off Hawaii to mate and give birth.

Lyman said the whales' absence could just mean they're spending more time feeding in northern waters, possibly because of El Nino disruptions or because their population has gone up.

"With more animals, they're competing against each other for that food resource, and it takes an energy of reserve to make that long migration over 2,000 miles," he explained.

Japan's emperor wishes for peace in New Year's appearance

YURI KAGEYAMA, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Emperor Akihito expressed his hopes for world peace as he appeared Saturday with his wife, Empress Michiko, sons and grandchildren behind bullet-proof glass before thousands of well-wishers waving flags.

The 82-year-old Akihito, who was scheduled to make five such appearances at Tokyo's Imperial Palace Saturday, also released a New Year's statement in which he expressed his sympathy for people displaced from their homes and still living in temporary housing after the March 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster in northeastern Japan.

Michiko, wearing a pinkish beige dress, waved to the crowd, estimated by public broadcaster NHK at 44,000 in the morning. That's likely to double in the afternoon.

Masako, wife of the crown prince who has made rare public appearances because of a stress-related illness, also joined this year's New Year's greeting, smiling in a deep blue dress.

Akihito is the son of Hirohito under whose name Japan waged World War II and surrendered seven decades ago. But from the start, he has stood for peace.

His role is symbolic and he holds no political power, but he is relatively popular with the people. Michiko was the first commoner to marry into the Japanese royal family, and she also has at times suffered from stress, like the Harvard-educated Masako, a former diplomat.

"From the start of this New Year, I pray for peace for our nation and for the world," Akihito told the crowd.

Natalie Cole, master of past and present styles

SANDY COHEN, Associated Press

HILLEL ITALIE, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — She began as a 1970s soul singer hyped as the next Aretha Franklin and peaked in the 1990s as an old-fashioned stylist and time-defying duet partner to her late father, Nat "King" Cole.

Natalie Cole, who died Thursday in Los Angeles at age 65, was a Grammy winning superstar honored and haunted by comparisons to others.

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"Natalie fought a fierce, courageous battle, dying how she lived ... with dignity, strength and honor. Our beloved Mother and sister will be greatly missed and remain UNFORGETTABLE in our hearts forever," read a statement from her son, Robert Yancy, and sisters Timolin and Casey Cole.

According to her family, Cole died of complications from ongoing health issues. She had battled drug problems and hepatitis that forced her to undergo a kidney transplant in May 2009. Cole's older sister, Carol "Cookie" Cole, died the day she received the transplant. Their brother, Nat Kelly Cole, died in 1995.

"I had to hold back the tears," Franklin, who had feuded with Cole early in Cole's career, said in a statement. "She fought for so long. She was one of the greatest singers of our time. She represented the Cole legend of excellence and class quite well."

A mezzo-soprano with striking range and power, Cole was destined to be a singer, the only question being what kind. She was inspired by her dad at an early age and auditioned to sing with him when she was just 11 years old. She was 15 when he died of lung cancer, in 1965, and would reunite with him decades later in a way only possible through modern technology.

All along, she was moved by and sometimes torn between past and present sounds. As a young woman, she had listened to Franklin and Janis Joplin and for years was reluctant to perform her father's material. She sang on stage with Frank Sinatra, but also covered Bruce Springsteen's "Pink Cadillac."

"I was determined to create my own identity," she wrote in her 2010 memoir "Love Brought Me Back." The public loved her either way.

She made her recording debut in 1975 with "Inseparable," and the music industry welcomed her with two Grammy Awards — one for best new artist and one for best female R&B vocal performance for her buoyant hit "This Will Be (An Everlasting Love)." Her quick success and the similarities to Franklin, another mezzo-soprano, did not please the "Queen of Soul," who at the time called Cole "just a beginner."

"The first time I saw Aretha was at an industry banquet," Cole later told Franklin biographer David Ritz. "She gave me an icy stare and turned her back on me. It took me weeks to recover."

Backed by the writing-producing team of Chuck Jackson and Marvin Yancy, she followed with such hits as "Our Love" and "I've Got Love on My Mind," and by 1979 had a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. But her career faded in the early 1980s and she battled heroin, crack cocaine and alcohol addiction for many years. She spent six months in rehab in 1983.

Her recovery began later in the decade with the album "Everlasting" and reached multiplatinum heights with her 1991 album, "Unforgettable ... With Love." No longer trying to keep up with current sounds, Cole paid tribute to her father with reworked versions of some of his best-known songs, including "That Sunday That Summer," "Too Young" and "Mona Lisa."

Her voice was overlaid with her dad's in the title cut, offering a delicate duet a quarter-century after his death.

Although criticized by some as morbid, the album sold some 14 million copies and won six Grammys, including album of the year as well record and song of the year for the title track duet.

While making the album, Cole told The Associated Press in 1991, she had to "throw out every R&B lick that I had ever learned and every pop trick I had ever learned. With him, the music was in the background and the voice was in the front."

"I didn't shed really any real tears until the album was over," Cole said. "Then I cried a whole lot. When we started the project it was a way of reconnecting with my dad. Then when we did the last song, I had to say goodbye again."

She was nominated for an Emmy award in 1992 for a televised performance of her father's songs.

"That was really my thank you," she told People magazine in 2006. "I owed that to him."

Another father-daughter duet, "When I Fall in Love," won a 1996 Grammy for best pop collaboration with vocals, and a follow-up album, "Still Unforgettable," won for best traditional pop vocal album of 2008.

She also worked as an actress, with appearances on TV's "Touched by an Angel" and "Grey's Anatomy."

But she was happiest touring and performing live.

"I still love recording and still love the stage," she said on her website in 2008, "but like my dad, I have the most fun when I am in front of that glorious orchestra or that kick-butt big band."

Cole was born in 1950 to Nat "King" Cole and his wife, Maria Ellington Cole, a onetime vocalist with Duke

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Ellington who was no relation to the great bandleader.

Her father's graceful easygoing style was admired by Sinatra, Ray Charles and many others and, in 1956, he became the first black entertainer to host a national TV variety show. Natalie Cole grew up in Los Angeles' posh Hancock Park neighborhood, where her parents had settled in 1948, despite animosity from some white residents about having the black singer as a neighbor. When told by residents they didn't want "undesirable people" in the area, the singer said, "Neither do I, and if I see (any), I'll be the first to complain."

The family eventually included five children. Cole herself married three times, her husbands including Marvin Yancy and "Unforgettable" co-producer Andre Fischer. Robert Yancy was her only child.

When she announced in 2008 that she had been diagnosed with hepatitis C, a liver disease spread through contact with infected blood, she blamed her past intravenous drug use.

She criticized the Recording Academy for giving five Grammys to drug user Amy Winehouse in 2008.

"I'm an ex-drug addict and I don't take that kind of stuff lightly," Cole explained at the 2009 Grammy Awards. Hepatitis C "stayed in my body for 25 years and it could still happen to this young woman or other addicts who are fooling around with drugs, especially needles."

Cole received chemotherapy to treat the hepatitis and "within four months, I had kidney failure," she told CNN's Larry King in 2009. She needed dialysis three times a week until she received a donor kidney on May 18, 2009.

Cole toured through much of her illness, often receiving dialysis at hospitals around the globe.

"I think that I am a walking testimony to you can have scars," she told People magazine. "You can go through turbulent times and still have victory in your life."

San Francisco's black rhino, oldest in North America, is 45

JANIE HAR, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The San Francisco Zoo celebrated the 45th birthday of the oldest black rhinoceros in North America with a special cake of rolled oats and molasses.

The exact date of Elly's birth isn't known, as she was born in the wild. But she has lived at the zoo since April 1974.

Zookeepers on Friday prepared a "sweet feed" of oats and molasses that read "45," said zoo spokeswoman Nancy Hayden Crowley.

Elly has given birth to 14 calves, helping preserve a critically endangered species that numbered 200,000 before 1960 throughout parts of Africa. The number has dwindled to 3,000 to 5,000, due to poaching for their horns, said zoo curator Jim Nappi.

The horns are prized in some cultures for folk medicine cures and use as decorative dagger handles.

The second-oldest black rhino in North America, if still alive, is about 38 years old and lives in Miami. There are about 60 black rhinos in North America zoos.

In the wild, black rhinos eat bushes and shrubs. At the zoo, they are fed alfalfa and hay, fruit and acacia.

Elly especially loves beets, corn and bananas. She weighs about 2,000 pounds and sleeps on an entire bale of straw to soothe her elderly bones. She shares a habitat with grandson Boone.

"She's our little old lady that everyone pampers," Nappi said. "She likes to interact with food. She's got a kind of independence to her, which is unique."

Black rhinos are extremely nearsighted but have excellent hearing and sense of smell. Their life span in the wild is about 16 to 20 years.

Munich terror threat remains in place, stations open again

KIRSTEN GRIESHABER, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A terror warning in Munich on New Year's Eve that led to the evacuation of two train stations was not a false alert, security officials said Friday, although there have been no arrests.

The evacuation of Munich's main train station and the Pasing neighborhood station shortly before mid-

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night reportedly followed a warning from a "friendly" foreign intelligence service that five to seven Islamic State militants from Syria and Iraq were planning coordinated attacks on different locations in Munich including the two train stations.

Although it wasn't even yet clear if any would-be attackers actually existed, Munich police president Hubertus Andrae told reporters that the terror warning and consequent evacuation of the train stations had not been "a false alert."

Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann told reporters that as of Friday morning the train stations were open again and "we no longer have concrete indications for a terror threat today or tomorrow at a specific location."

However, Herrmann warned that the overall threat across Europe remained high after the attacks in Paris in November that killed 130 people.

Later in November, a warning of a possible imminent attack plunged Brussels into a lockdown for a time. Ten people suspected of involvement in the Paris attacks have been arrested in Belgium.

Shortly before Munich rang in the new year, police evacuated the main train station and the Pasing station. Partygoers were asked to avoid crowds.

Despite those warnings, thousands of people were on the streets of Munich at midnight to welcome the new year with fireworks.

Authorities were investigating intensively on Friday, Herrmann said, but so far had not found any solid evidence for a planned attack. He said they had received personal data for some of the alleged attackers and were in the process of investigating and verifying the information.

He would not give any further details.

Herrmann called on Munich residents to be cautious, but at the same time not to let threats interfere with their normal lives.

More than 500 police and special unit officers from all over the southern Bavaria region were called to Munich Thursday night to help evacuate and secure the stations. By Friday noon, some 100 extra officers were still present in the city.

German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere commended all the authorities involved for their "thoughtful, considerate and decisive" action in Munich.

"The situation in Europe and Germany continues to be serious in the new year," de Maiziere said in a written statement. "Indeed we did get indications (for a planned attack) yesterday, which were evaluated by the Bavarian intelligence authorities and federal police."

Cities across Europe have been on edge since an attack in Paris in November that killed 130 people.

A few days after the Paris attack, a soccer stadium in Hannover in central Germany was evacuated after a threat against a friendly match between Germany and the Netherlands. The authorities never reported any findings of explosives or concrete attack plans.

New laws in 2016 show states are diverging on guns, voting

GEOFF MULVIHILL, Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — Laws taking effect at the start of the new year show states diverging on some hot-button issues.

Restrictions on carrying guns eased in Texas, for example, but got tighter in California. It is easier to register to vote in Oregon, but there is another step to take at the polls in North Carolina.

The opposing directions in the states reflect a nation with increasingly polarized politics.

In the debate over gun control, both sides say their arguments are strengthened by a string of mass shootings this year. That includes the December attack at a county health department gathering in San Bernardino, California, when a couple who investigators say pledged allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State group killed 14 people.

Everytown for Gun Safety, a group backed by billionaire former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, is seeking to be a counterweight to the National Rifle Association's lobbying of state lawmakers. Both

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groups are expected to be active in legislatures in the coming year.

Whether to raise the minimum wage has become another hot topic in states and cities, with the issue getting no traction in the Republican-led Congress.

New voting laws, meanwhile, could help shape the outcomes in state and federal elections in the coming year. Democrats and others who want to boost voter participation have been pushing to expand access to the polls, while conservatives have pushed for measures aimed at preventing election fraud. Each side says the other is using legislation to help their favored party in elections.

A look at some of the more notable laws taking effect in January:

GUNS

Texas, the second-most populous state, joins 44 other states in allowing at least some firearm owners to carry handguns openly in public places. Under the Texas law, guns can be carried by those with licenses and only in holsters.

Meanwhile, California, the most populous state, has multiple new laws on gun control. One tightens a ban on firearms in and around schools. Under the new law, the prohibition applies even to most people who are allowed to carry concealed weapons generally. Another allows people to request that a judge order weapons be taken away from relatives who are believed to pose a threat.

VOTING

California and Oregon become the first states that automatically register eligible voters when they obtain or renew their driver's licenses. Critics of the measures — mostly Republicans — say that could lead to voter fraud and is part of a plan to register more voters who are likely to be Democrats. They say voters should register voluntarily. In both states, people are able to opt out of being registered.

Similar measures have been proposed in other states but never adopted. This year, Republican Gov. Chris Christie vetoed the concept in New Jersey.

In North Carolina, a voter identification law passed in 2013 that requires people to show a photo ID takes effect.

An amendment adopted this year allows voters who have trouble obtaining the required ID to vote anyway. That provision keeps North Carolina from joining eight states in which a photo ID is strictly required. There are still legal challenges over the law, and opponents want a judge to delay implementation.

In most states, voters are asked to show some kind of identification.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Hawaii becomes the first state to raise its minimum age, from 18 to 21, to buy or use cigarettes or e-cigarettes. It's a move some local governments have made before, but never a state.

California joins West Virginia and Mississippi as the only states without a personal-belief exemption for parents who do not want to vaccinate their children. Children whose parents refuse to have them immunized against several diseases are not allowed to enroll in public or private school and instead have to be homeschooled. There is an exemption for children with serious health problems.

EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

In California, a new law lets female employees allege pay discrimination based on the wages a company pays other employees who do substantially similar work. Under the law, it is up to employers to prove a man's higher pay is based on factors other than gender.

Oregon becomes the fifth state with a paid sick leave mandate for many employers.

Some cities in traffic-congested urban areas are trying to ease the burdens of commuting. Employers with at least 20 workers in Washington, D.C., and New York City are required to offer commuter benefits such as tax-free mass transit subsidies to their workers. San Francisco already has a similar ordinance.

In Missouri, a new law links the duration of jobless benefits to the state's unemployment rate. When fewer people are out of work, those claiming the benefits will be cut off sooner. The maximum length of

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the benefits will be reduced from the current 20 weeks — already among the shorter periods in the nation — to 13. Only North Carolina, which has a similar sliding scale, has a shorter period: 12 weeks.

MINIMUM WAGE

The minimum wage rises in many cities and states with the new year. Some of the wage increases are coming under laws passed years ago that phased in the increases over a period of years. Some are automatic increases tied to the cost of living.

Fast-food workers in New York state receive their first pay bump under a new law that eventually will push their minimum wage to \$15. The full amount will kick in at the end of 2018 in New York City and 2021 in the rest of the state.

The federal government has not touched the minimum wage since it was increased to \$7.25 effective in 2009. Labor groups and workers keep pushing for higher raises while many business groups say raises could come at the expense of jobs. But with the federal rate unchanging, more state and local governments — particularly in the West and Northeast — are taking action.

The wages rise in California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Rhode Island, Vermont and West Virginia on Friday. States with automatic annual increases effective Jan. 1 are Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio and South Dakota.

Some cities, including New Orleans, also have new rates starting Jan. 1. Minimum-wage fast-food workers in Seattle get a bump as part of that city's phased-in increase to \$15 an hour.

TAXES

Taxes have gone up in some places and dropping in others.

Income tax rates dropped slightly in Oklahoma, where state revenues have fallen sharply, and Massachusetts.

In North Carolina, the tax on gasoline dropped by a penny a gallon to 35 cents. The sales tax on boats will drop in New Jersey as of Feb. 1.

Taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products rose in Minnesota, as will hotel taxes in Hawaii.

ABORTION

Physicians in North Carolina are required to provide the state with ultrasound images of fetuses and other data related to abortions performed after the 16th week of pregnancy.

For pregnancies terminated after the 20th week, doctors must explain to the state Department of Health and Human Services how continuing the pregnancy would have threatened the life and health of the mother. Some lawmakers who favor abortion rights say the state should not have this medical data.

IMMIGRANT DRIVER'S LICENSES

Two more states allow people who are in the United States illegally to be licensed to drive. Delaware's law took effect Sunday and Hawaii's is in effect in the new year.

Ten states and the District of Columbia already have similar provisions.

PETS

Illinois made it a misdemeanor to leave pets outside during extreme weather. Missouri, in a crackdown on the state's commercial "puppy mills," required dog breeders to provide more space for their animals and barred them from using wire-strand flooring in dog kennels.

Tennessee gave approval this year to the first statewide animal abuse registry. The law, which takes effect Jan. 1, requires the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to post to its website a list of persons convicted on or after that date of aggravated animal cruelty, felony animal fighting, or bestiality and related offenses.

The list is to include the animal abuser's full legal name and photograph. Upon first offense, the person's name will remain on the list for two years. Upon subsequent offenses, it will remain on the list for five years.

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White House South Lawn becomes first lady's grassy stage

DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Michelle Obama's affection for the White House South Lawn has grown just like the sweet potatoes and carrots she plants there.

During seven years as first lady, Mrs. Obama has often used her family's temporary backyard as a grassy stage from which to promote a lifestyle built around plenty of fresh, nutritious food and lots of exercise.

But to Mrs. Obama, the 6-plus acres of manicured grass and gardens are more than a place to talk about diet and health. It's a symbolic venue for a mother of two from the South Side of Chicago who stepped into the role of presidential spouse with the goal of welcoming more visitors, especially children, to the seat of world power.

"While our family might live upstairs, the president and I know that the White House is truly the 'People's House,'" the first lady said. "It belongs to all of us."

Military families and students are among those given priority at White House events such as the annual Fourth of July picnic. Mrs. Obama is also more consistent than her recent predecessors in using the South Lawn. Most first ladies used the outside grounds for the occasional state dinner, annual Easter Egg Roll or ceremony for a visiting head of state.

Girl Scouts hunkered down in tents for a campout last summer until rain and claps of thunder sent them and their chaperones scampering into a nearby office building. Mrs. Obama said it was the first campout ever held on the lawn.

In 2011, scores of children surrounded Mrs. Obama on the lawn to break the Guinness World Record for the most people around the world doing jumping jacks in a 24-hour period. (More than 300,000 people participated.) The lawn is also where she showed off her hula-hooping prowess, performing 142 turns of her hips during a "healthy kids" fair that same year. Children joined her in 2014 when blue sport bottles were laid out on the lawn in the shape of a water drop, part of her campaign to encourage people to drink more plain water.

Observers say these events wouldn't pack the same punch if Mrs. Obama held them anywhere else.

"Even if those kids are sweating in the sun doing jumping jacks, they only need to look back over their shoulder to see the most powerful house in the world," said Carl Anthony, historian at the National First Ladies' Library in Canton, Ohio.

Then there's Mrs. Obama's world-famous garden. It's the first one on the South Lawn since World War II, when first lady Eleanor Roosevelt started a garden there as Americans were being encouraged to plant "victory gardens" to supplement the U.S. food supply.

Students from local schools helped plant Mrs. Obama's inaugural plot in 2009. She used the garden to nudge the public to think about eating healthier and to prepare for "Let's Move," her nearly 6-year-old initiative to reduce childhood obesity. Students from these and other schools visit the White House each spring and fall to help replant the garden and harvest the vegetables.

The South Lawn is also the largest event space at the White House.

"In some ways, it's even more inspiring than being inside the house," said Anita McBride, who was Laura Bush's chief of staff and now directs American University's first ladies' program.

As parents, both President Barack Obama and his wife enjoy the sound of kids on the lawn, aides say. They installed a swing set for daughters Malia and Sasha after the family moved in. The president also presides over his own lawn events, with championship sports teams, wounded service members and more.

Another advantage to the lawn? Security. It's behind iron fencing and far removed from surrounding streets and passers-by, though it wasn't always closed off.

Members of the public were allowed on the South Lawn during regular visiting hours that continued into the late 19th century, said William Bushong, chief historian at the White House Historical Association. The nurse maid for President Grover Cleveland's wife, Frances, often took the first family's two young daughters to the lawn during the public hours.

But the situation got a "little bit dicey," Bushong said, when, due to public fascination with the children of presidents, a woman picked up Cleveland's youngest child and "started passing her around." Mrs. Cleveland

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was "freaked out" and "at that point, they closed the gates," Bushong said.

Subsequent presidents reopened the White House grounds, except during war. Open access to the grounds ended with World War II, Bushong said.

Obama explores unilateral steps on guns

KEVIN FREKING, Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — President Barack Obama is looking for ways to keep guns out of the hands of "a dangerous few" without depending on Congress to pass a law on the fraught subject of gun control.

He's says he'll meet his attorney general, Loretta Lynch, on Monday to see what executive actions might be possible. Steps to strengthen background checks could come this week.

"The gun lobby is loud and well organized in its defense of effortlessly available guns for anyone," Obama said in his weekly radio address. "The rest of us are going to have to be just as passionate and well organized in our defense of our kids."

He said he gets so many letters from parents, teachers and children about the "epidemic of gun violence" that he can't "sit around and do nothing."

Obama recently directed staff at the White House to look into potential executive actions.

Currently, federally licensed firearms dealers are required to seek background checks on potential firearm purchasers. But advocacy groups say some of the people who sell firearms at gun shows are not federally licensed, increasing the chance of sales to customers prohibited by law from purchasing guns.

A source familiar with the administration's efforts said Obama is expected to take executive action next week that would set a "reasonable threshold" for when sellers have to seek a background check. That person didn't know whether it would be based on the number of guns sold or revenue generated through gun sales.

The source, a member of a gun control advocacy group, was not authorized to discuss details before the announcement and spoke on condition of anonymity. White House officials won't confirm the timing.

In his efforts to work around a Congress that has often been politically gridlocked, Obama has made aggressive use of executive power, particularly on immigration. It has been an increasingly effective presidential tool. And while legal scholars are divided on whether Obama has accelerated or merely continued a drift of power toward the executive branch, there's little debate that he's paved a path for his successor.

Depending on who succeeds him, many Obama backers could rue the day they cheered his "pen-and-phone" campaign to get past Republican opposition in Congress. The unilateral steps he took to raise environmental standards and ease the threat of deportation for millions of immigrants in the U.S. illegally may serve as precedent for moves they won't cheer.

The National Rifle Association opposes expanded background check systems. The organization's Institute for Legislative Action says studies have shown that people sent to state prison because of gun crimes typically get guns through theft, the black market or family and friends.

Also, many purchases by criminals are made from straw purchasers who pass background checks. "No amount of background checks can stop these criminals," says the group's website.

Obama has consistently expressed frustration after mass shootings, saying it shouldn't be so easy for somebody who wants to inflict harm to get his or her hands on a gun.

Going into his final year in office, Obama said his New Year's resolution is to move forward on unfinished business.

"That's especially true for one piece of unfinished business, that's our epidemic of gun violence," Obama said in his weekly address.

He said a bipartisan bill from three years ago requiring background checks for almost everyone had huge support, including among a majority of NRA households. But the Senate blocked it.

"Each time, we're told that common-sense reforms like background checks might not have stopped the last massacre, or the one before that, so we shouldn't do anything," he said. "We know that we can't stop every act of violence. But what if we tried to stop even one?"

New Year's Eve skyscraper fire in Dubai smolders into 2016

JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A towering inferno that engulfed a 63-story luxury hotel in Dubai on New Year's Eve still smoldered through the first day of 2016 as firefighters worked to douse its embers on Friday.

Authorities said they were still working to determine the cause of the fire that erupted before the city's fireworks extravaganza and raced through the Address Downtown, one of the most upscale hotels and residences in Dubai. It came after a series of fires striking the towers that provide this megacity its futuristic skyline.

Dubai officials said only 14 people suffered minor injuries in evacuating the building late Thursday night, but the fire raised new questions about building safety for those living in the United Arab Emirates.

The Address would have a prime spot for viewing the midnight fireworks display, centered at the nearby Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. The Address boasts a luxury hotel with nearly 200 rooms, along with more than 600 residential units. Rentals of a one-bedroom can run \$70,000 a year.

The fire started around 9:30 p.m. Thursday, racing up the sides of the building. Still authorities went ahead with the fireworks show.

More than 12 hours later on Friday morning, Dubai firefighters largely watched the fire from the ground, unable at one point to use a water hose on a ladder truck. They later regained water pressure and resumed spraying the building. Restaurants nearby opened for business, but served limited menus as civil defense officials cut natural gas to the area.

By the afternoon, the blaze had largely died down, but small fires were still visible burning through some windows, sending smoke into the air.

Dubai Civil Defense said the fire appeared to have started on the 20th floor terrace, according to a statement by the government media office. Witnesses who saw the blaze start said they believed it began on the building's ground floor.

The Civil Defense said "cooling procedures" were still underway Friday, and that the investigation was underway into the cause.

Around 1 million people had been expected to gather around the Burj Khalifa skyscraper to watch the fireworks. Dubai's economy depends heavily on tourism, and New Year's is one of the busiest seasons, drawing people from around the world to watch the fireworks that the emirate puts on at the world's tallest tower, as well as the sail-shaped Burj Al Arab and over a man-made palm-shaped island.

Dubai-based Emaar Properties, which built the Burj Khalifa, the Address Downtown and other surrounding developments, declined to immediately answer questions about the fire posed by The Associated Press. It did issue a statement praising authorities "for their immediate and professional support."

"An investigation is ongoing and details will be provided once they are ascertained," the statement said.

Lt. Gen. Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's deputy prime minister and interior minister, also praised first responders to the blaze for "the success of the rescue operation" in comments published by the state-run WAM news agency.

But challenges remain as Dubai has faced a series of recent tower fires. In February, a similar blaze spread along the external cladding of Dubai's 86-story Torch tower, one of the world's tallest residential buildings. There were no serious casualties in that fire. In October, another fire broke out in a high-rise residential tower in the Emirati city of Sharjah.

North Korean leader talks war but doesn't comment on nukes

KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said in an annual New Year's speech Friday that he was ready for war if provoked by "invasive" outsiders, but he stayed away from past threats involving the country's nuclear weapons and long-range missile ambitions.

His comments stuck to well-worn propaganda meant to lift his image for the elite residents of one of the world's poorest, most closed countries, and could be read as an attempt to keep ties with rivals Washington and Seoul from getting worse so he can try to turn around a miserable economy and further solidify his leadership.

"We will continue to work patiently to achieve peace on the Korean Peninsula and regional stability. But if invasive outsiders and provocateurs touch us even slightly, we will not be forgiving in the least and sternly answer with a merciless, holy war of justice," said Kim, who wore thick black-rimmed glasses that continued his efforts to mimic the style favored by his late grandfather, beloved national founder Kim Il Sung.

While largely repeating the daily propaganda in state-controlled media, Kim's words will be pored over by analysts for hints about the country's intentions for the coming year. There is little public information about the inner workings and policy goals of North Korea's government, which considers democratic South Korea and its ally the United States its enemies and is pursuing a long-range missile that could carry a nuclear warhead to America's mainland.

Some observers had predicted that Kim would avoid overly provocative statements because the county wants to improve relations with South Korea and also China, its most important economic and strategic ally. Ties between North Korea and China have been cool since Kim took power in 2011, but seemed to improve when a senior Chinese official attended a high-profile military parade in Pyongyang in October.

Kim said he was open to talks with anyone truly interested in "reconciliation and peace" on the Korean Peninsula, and ready to "aggressively" work to improve ties with the South. But a far larger part of his speech on North Korea's state TV was devoted to criticism of Seoul's approach to inter-Korean talks and its alliance with Washington.

He vowed to improve North Korea's struggling economy and living standards, and also called for the military to advance its technologies to develop more "diversified attack means."

Analysts say Kim likely wants a push for tangible diplomatic and economic achievements before a convention of the ruling Workers' Party in May, the party's first since 1980, when he is widely expected to announce major state policies and shake up the country's political elite to strengthen his position.

The rival Koreas have shown mixed progress in reconciliation efforts since stepping away from a military standoff in August, which started when land mine explosions that Seoul blamed on Pyongyang maimed two South Korean soldiers. The countries ended rare high-level talks last month with no breakthroughs.