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Open House Bridal Shower For

Brianna Woods

Bride-to-be of Zach Geary

Saturday, April 30th

9:30-11:30

**St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic
Church – Groton**

The couple is registered at:

Target, Herbergers & Menards

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

The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **Closed**

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Thursday, April 21

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

School Lunch: BBQ, potato chips, broccoli and dip, fruit.

Senior Menu: Swiss steak with mushroom gravy, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, rice and raisins, whole wheat bread.

Birthdays: Jean Tastad, LeeRoy Weisenberger, Justin Hanson

9:00am: St. John's Lutheran Quilting.

10:00am: Track at Redfield

Friday, April 22

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

School Lunch: Quesadilla, green beans, romaine lettuce, fruit.

Senior Menu: Breaded codfish, parsley buttered potatoes, creamy coleslaw, sherbet, whole wheat bread.

Birthdays: Ali Pasteur, Dwayne Coon, Lance Leonhardt, Samantha Delzer, Janice Hoffman

Saturday, April 23

DI 5K Run

Elementary PAC Carnival

Birthdays: Jim Meister, Troy Larson, Jaxon Koshney

10:00am: Track at Ipswich

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

Sunday, April 24

Birthdays: Taryn Rossow

9:00am: Emmanuel Lutheran School

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

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

9:30am: Emmanuel Lutheran fellowship



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Come and go bridal shower for Sarah Geary, bride-to-be of Sam Thorson, Saturday, April 23, 10 a.m., St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, Groton. The couple is registered at Bed Bath and Beyond and at Target.

Handiman looking for work

I can do almost anything from building whatever you need, repairing machinery, welding, flooring, installing windows and doors. If you're looking for work to be done around the home or farm, I'm your guy. Call me at 605/228-4172.

Now Doing Core Aeration

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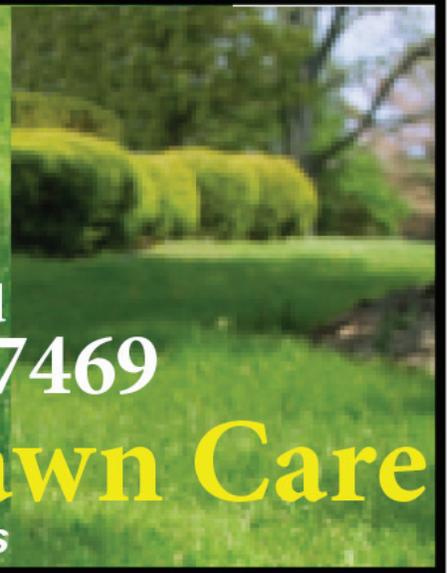
Spring/Fall Cleanups

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Cutting Edge Lawn Care

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Pappas earns outstanding officer award

Junior Keri Pappas received an outstanding presiding officer award at the state congressional debate contest held in the state Capitol building in Pierre on April 8, 2016. Pappas was also named an alternate for the national contest. Also competing in congressional debate for Groton were seniors Lily Cutler, Kelsey Iverson, and Katie Miller.



Keri Pappas

It rained!

The area finally received its first major rain of the year earlier this week. Groton recorded 1.15 inches of rain during the event. That brings the total precipitation for the year to 2.20 inches, still below the average of 3.22.

The Life of Julia Ekse Fransen

Julia Ekse was born on the family farm near Wallace, South Dakota on May 8, 1916 to Knute & Brita (Shjeruheim) Ekse. She was the youngest of 16 children.

In 1941, Julia moved to San Francisco with a sister and cousin and worked at an ammunition factory and later at an oil refinery. After the war, she moved back to South Dakota graduating from Beauty school in Rapid City. She married Harold Fransen on July 26, 1947 in Sturgis. While living in Groton, Julia worked at St. Luke's Hospital in pediatrics as an aide. She loved caring for the babies and children. She was a member of ELCA Lutheran Church all her life. Julia was a woman of strong faith and believed all of life's trials could be solved by prayer.

Julia was known as a fabulous cook and famous for her delicious apple pie and potato salad. She was bilingual and very proud of her Norwegian heritage. At meals she always blessed the food with the Norwegian table prayer to the delight of her family. She was an avid reader and loved gardening.

After her husband's death in 1988, Julia moved to Wheatland, WY to be near her daughter Barb and her family. In February 2012, she moved to Shepherd of the Valley Nursing Home in Casper, WY. Her survivors include Linda (Jim) Bahr, Groton, SD; Larry (Lynette) Fransen, Casper, WY; Barb (Brian) Larson, Wheatland, WY; Greg (Erin) Fransen, Aspen, CO. She had 10 grandchildren, 10 great grandchildren and 3 great, great grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband, 9 brothers, 6 sisters, her parents and one great grandson.

Services were held at the Grace Lutheran Church in Sturgis on Monday, April 25, 2016. Honorary pallbearers were all her grandchildren who loved her dearly.



 **livestream**

School Board, 7:30 p.m., April 25th

FCCLA Style Show, 7 p.m., April 28

FFA Banquet, 6:30 p.m., April 29

gdilive.com

SCHINKEL IN ABERDEEN CHORUS

Lee Schinkel will be singing with the Aberdeen Area Mens Chorus, when they present their annual spring concert, May 1, 4 pm, at the Aberdeen Presbyterian Church.



1942 Football Team

Back Row: Assistant Coach Erland Gustafson, James Kepke, Carroll Bingham, Allen Thede, Laurence Odland, Kenneth Schaller, Bob Murray, James Harms, Robert Flihs, George Alberts, Randall Peterson

Middle Row: Head Coach Perry Doney, Robert Voight, Einor Larson, Duane Voight, Kenneth Ives, LaVerne Ahern, Bill Rock Jr., Wallace Karnopp, Harvey Dorfschmidt, Eugene Liebel, Assistant Coach Ralph Converse

Front Row: Irvin Flihs, Francis Lorenz, Donald Wood, Alyn Miller, Manley Green, Howard Jones, Virgil Larson, Marvin Flihs, Wayne Bautista

Doney Field Football Sign

The Groton Area School Board is planning to replace the "Doney Field" sign that is currently on both the east and west sides of the crowd's nest in the football field.

This sign is rather small and beginning to show the effects of adverse weather.

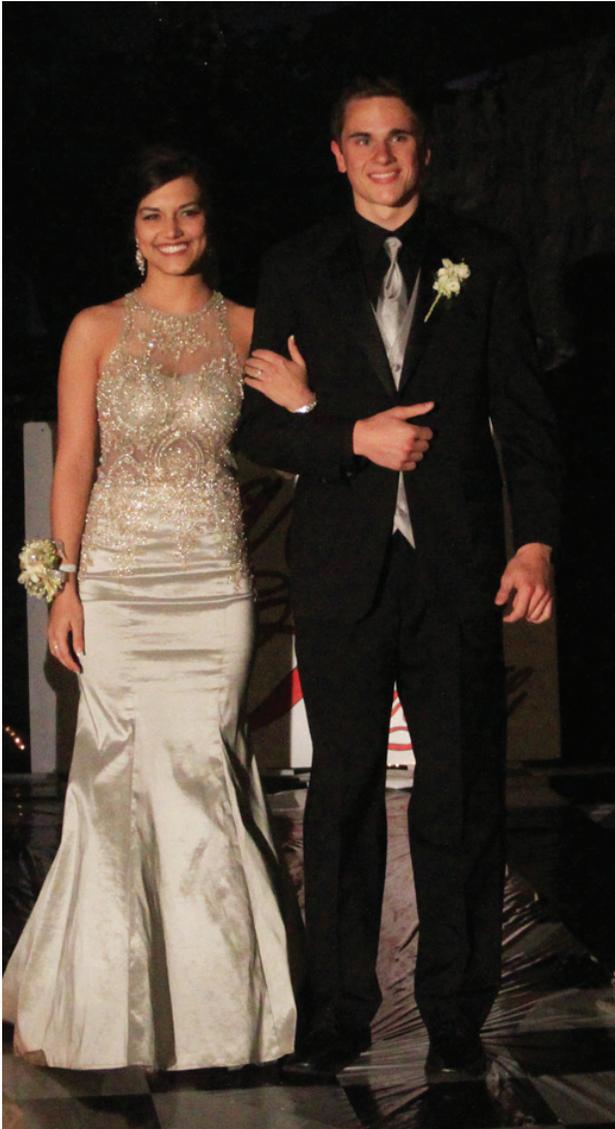
The field had been named after Perry Doney, a highly esteemed football coach in Groton from 1938-1942. Under his coaching skill the football team won three consecutive Conference Championships. Due to this outstanding achievement, the Groton Board of Education named the field "Doney Field" in 1939.

Players on this football team either are still living here or have offspring who live in the Groton School District. Some of them are Emery Sippel, Manley Green, Bob Pray Sr., Kenneth Schaller, George Alberts, Jerry Rix, and Irvin Flihs.

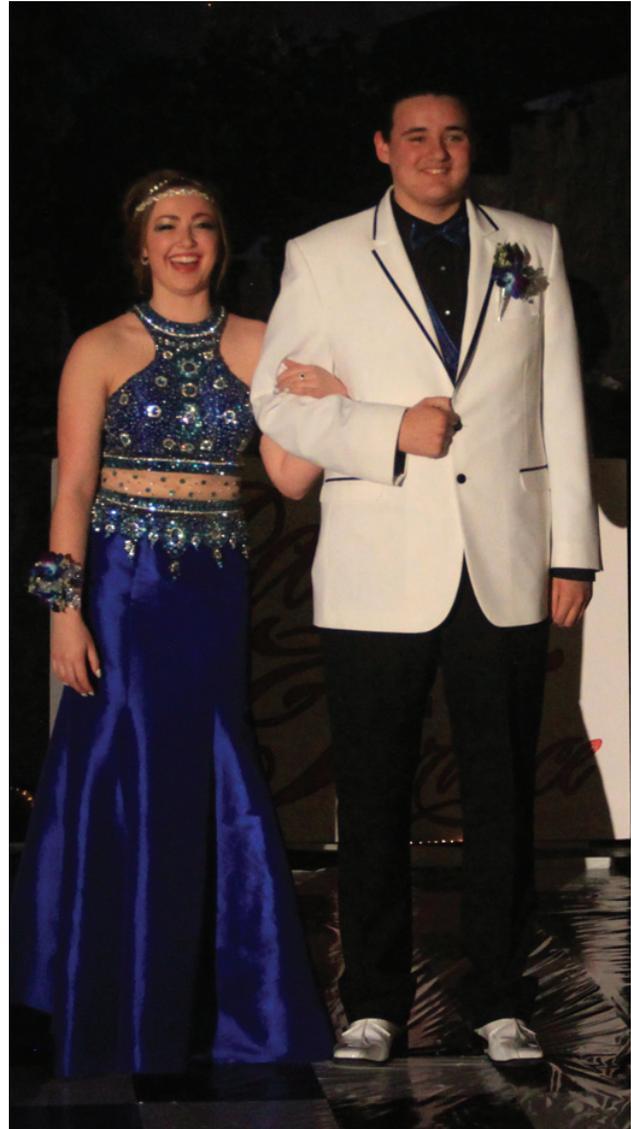
A quote from Service Signs for \$3000 would cover the cost of manufacturing and installing a sign 30" x 216" which would be placed on the new football field scoreboard. Anyone interested in donating for this project should contact the school and ask for Superintendent Joe Schwan at 397-8381.

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Macy Knecht
escorted by Jerad Nielsen

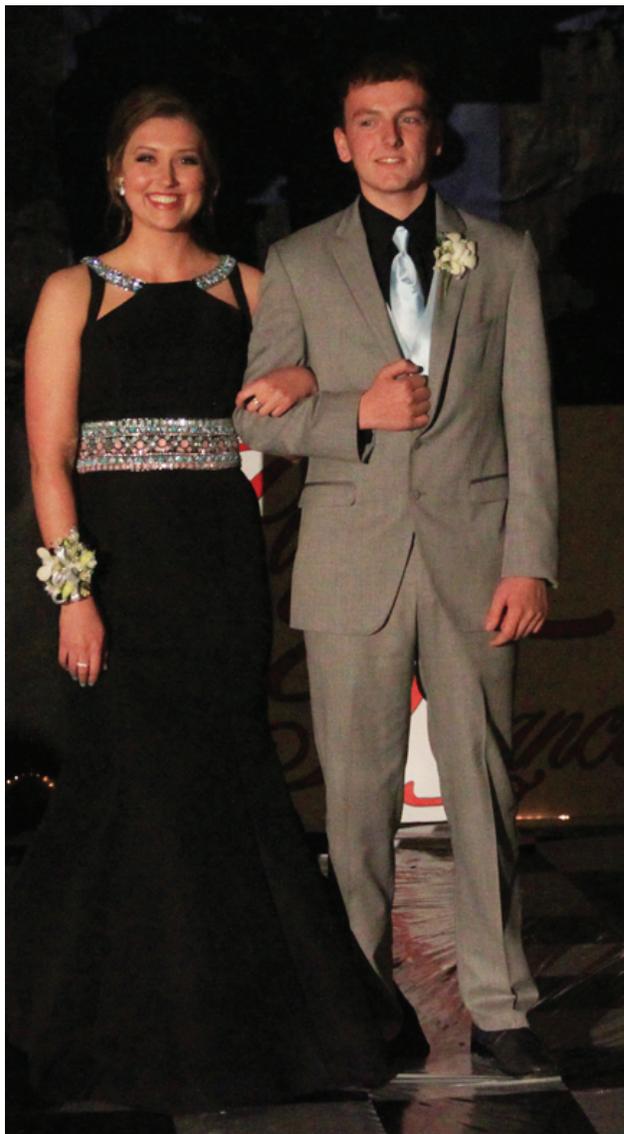


Kari Hanson
escorted by Aaron Severson

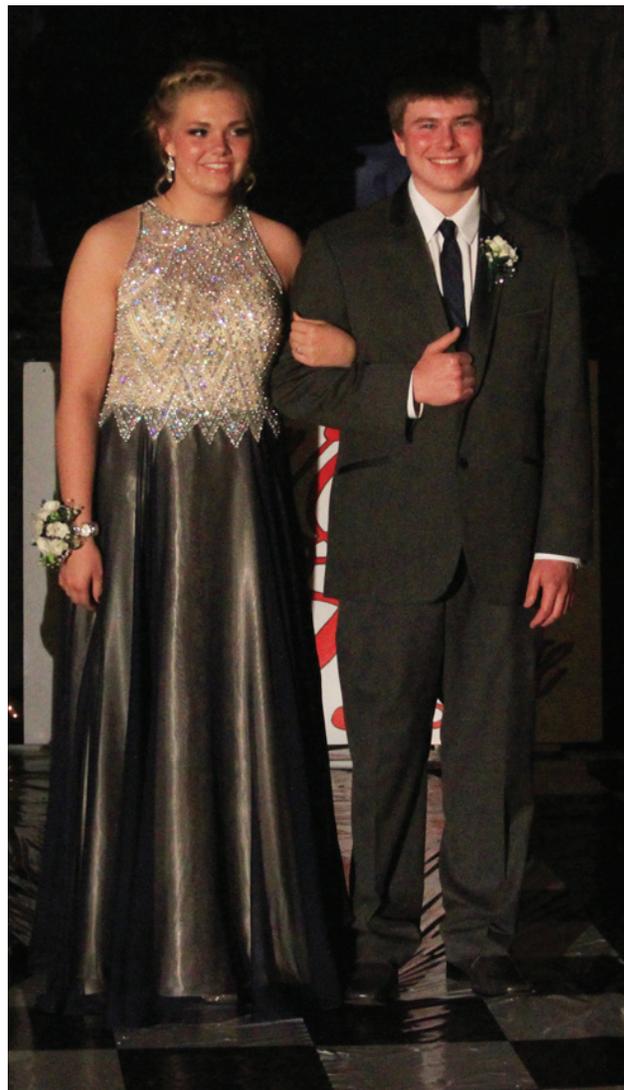
The Groton Area prom was held Saturday evening in the high school gym. The Groton Independent will be featuring couples from the prom during the next few weeks. There were 52 couples at the prom. HD DVDs of the prom are available from the Independent for \$26.50 or can be mailed out for \$30. Call 605-397-7285 or mail check to Independent, 110 N Washington St., Groton SD 57445-2252.

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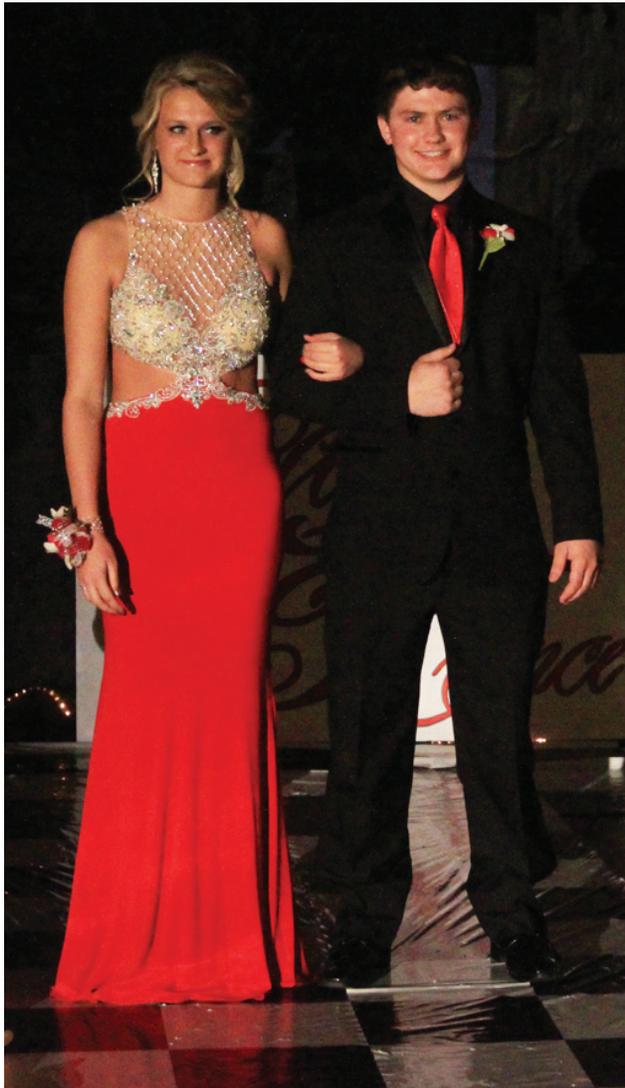
Alex Stange escorted by Lane Weig



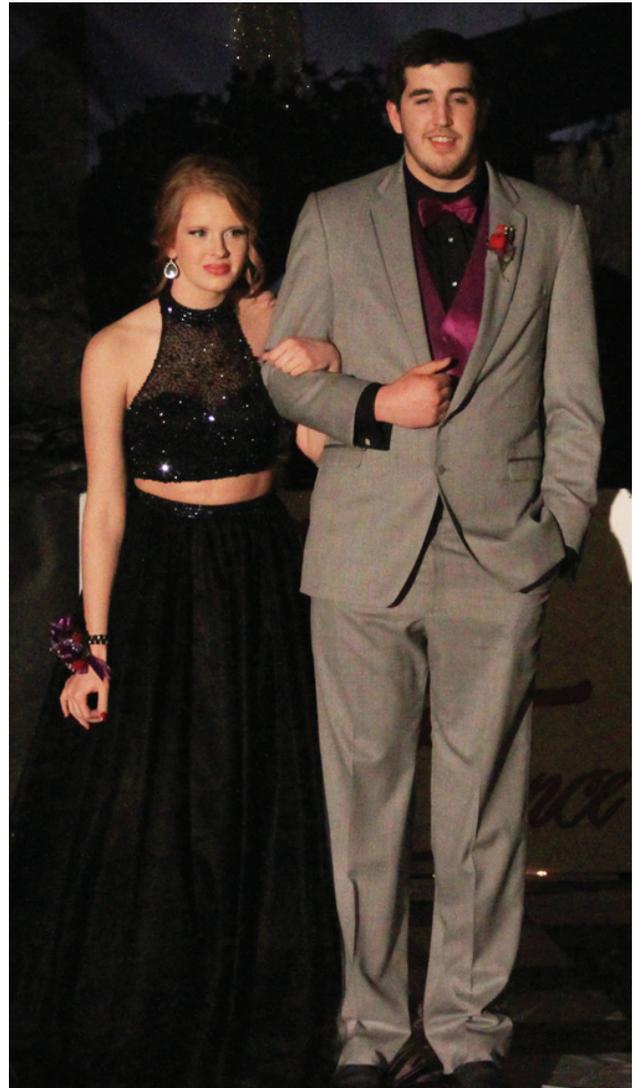
**Jessica Bjerke
escorted by Shane Simon**

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Harleigh Stange
escorted by Patrick Gengerke



Josie Doeden
escorted by Hunter Lerew

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Today in Weather History

April 21, 2007: Heavy rains of 2 to 2.50 inches caused flash flooding in and around Watertown. Many streets were flooded in town, along with several roads outside of town. A warm front extending across the region was the focus for heavy rain, along with severe weather, during the evening across far north-east South Dakota. Hail up to the size of quarters, along with heavy rains of over 2 inches, caused some flooding mainly in Codington and Hamlin counties.

1958 - Portions of Montana were in the midst of a spring snowburst. Snowfall amounts ranged up to 55 inches at Red Lodge, 61 inches at Nye Mine, and 72 inches at Mystic Lake. (David Ludlum)

1967 - Severe thunderstorms spawned 48 tornadoes in the Upper Midwest. Hardest hit was northern Illinois where sixteen tornadoes touched down during the afternoon and evening hours causing fifty million dollars damage. On that Friday afternoon tornadoes struck Belvidere IL, and the Chicago suburb of Oak Lawn, killing 57 persons. (David Ludlum)

1980 - The temperature at International Falls MN hit 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the Gulf of Mexico to New England and the Great Lakes Region, with twenty-nine cities reporting record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 82 degrees at Caribou ME, 94 degrees at Mobile AL, 95 degrees at Monroe LA, and 93 degrees at New Orleans LA, were records for the month of April. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - After having had just twelve rainouts in the previous twenty-six years at Dodger Stadium, a third day of heavy rain in southern California rained out a double-header at Dodger Stadium which had been scheduled due to rainouts the previous two days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - The temperature at Las Animas, CO, soared to 100 degrees to establish a state record for April. Twenty-two cities in the central and southwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Eight cities equalled or exceeded previous April records. (The Weather Channel) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail in Oklahoma, and also caused some flash flooding in the state. Thunderstorms over the Southern High Plains produced golf ball size hail at Roswell NM and El Paso TX. Easterly winds and temperatures near zero produced wind chill readings as cold as 50 degrees below zero for the spring festival (Piuraagiaqta) outdoor events at Barrow AK. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2007 - The South Plains and Panhandle of West Texas were hit by an outbreak of severe thunderstorms. Between the hours of 5 and 6 pm, several thunderstorms developed across the western South Plains. Around 7 pm, a supercell produced a tornado which touched down around Fieldton (southwest of Olton) and then moved just south and east of Olton, doing damage to several structures and equipment. The thunderstorm continued to move northeast across northeast Lamb, northwest Hale, southeast Castro and southwest Swisher Counties, producing a long-lived tornado (along with hail up to the size of tennis balls). By 7:45 pm, the storm approached the town of Tulia in Swisher County. A tornado touchdown was reported in the town, causing major damage. The tornadic thunderstorm continued to move northeast across Swisher County over open country through about 8:30 pm. (NWS Lubbock, TX)

golden
living

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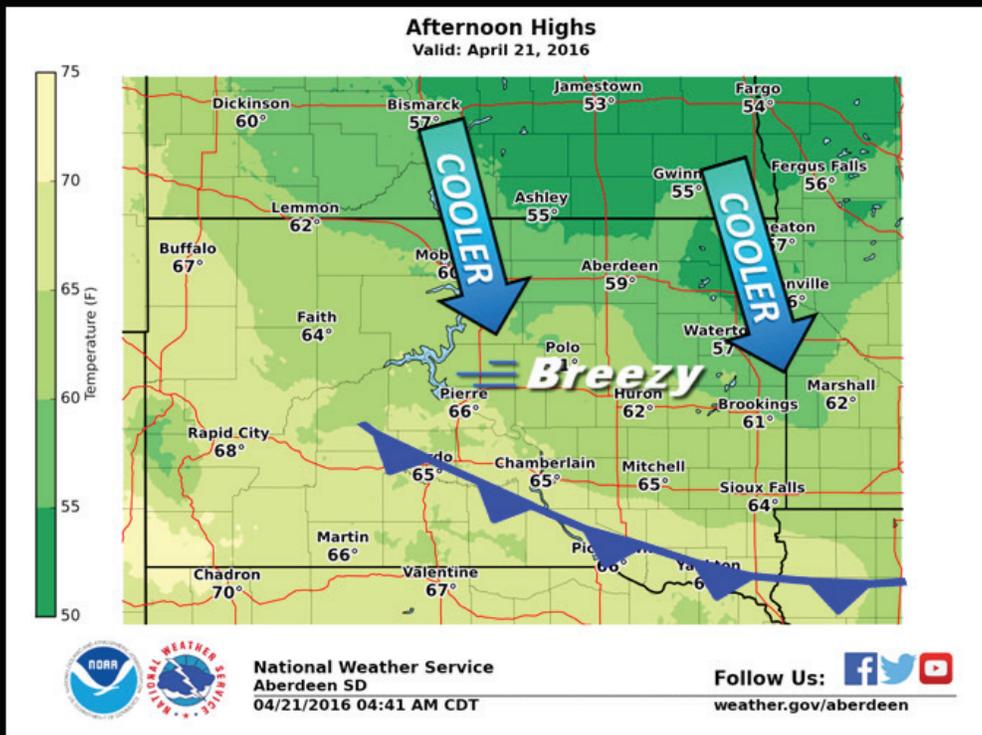
**1106 N 2nd St., Groton
605/397-2365**

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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Sunny and Breezy	Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny and Breezy then Sunny	Chance T-storms	T-storms Likely and Breezy
High: 58 °F	Low: 30 °F	High: 65 °F	Low: 46 °F	High: 76 °F	Low: 51 °F	High: 63 °F

Cooler And Breezy Today



National Weather Service, Aberdeen SD

Published on: 04/21/2016 at 4:46AM

A cold front will sweep through the region this morning, resulting in winds becoming breezy from the north. Dry conditions will continue into the weekend - with temperatures increasing into the 60s and 70s for Friday - and into the 70s and 80s for Saturday. There is a chance for storms late Saturday into Sunday.

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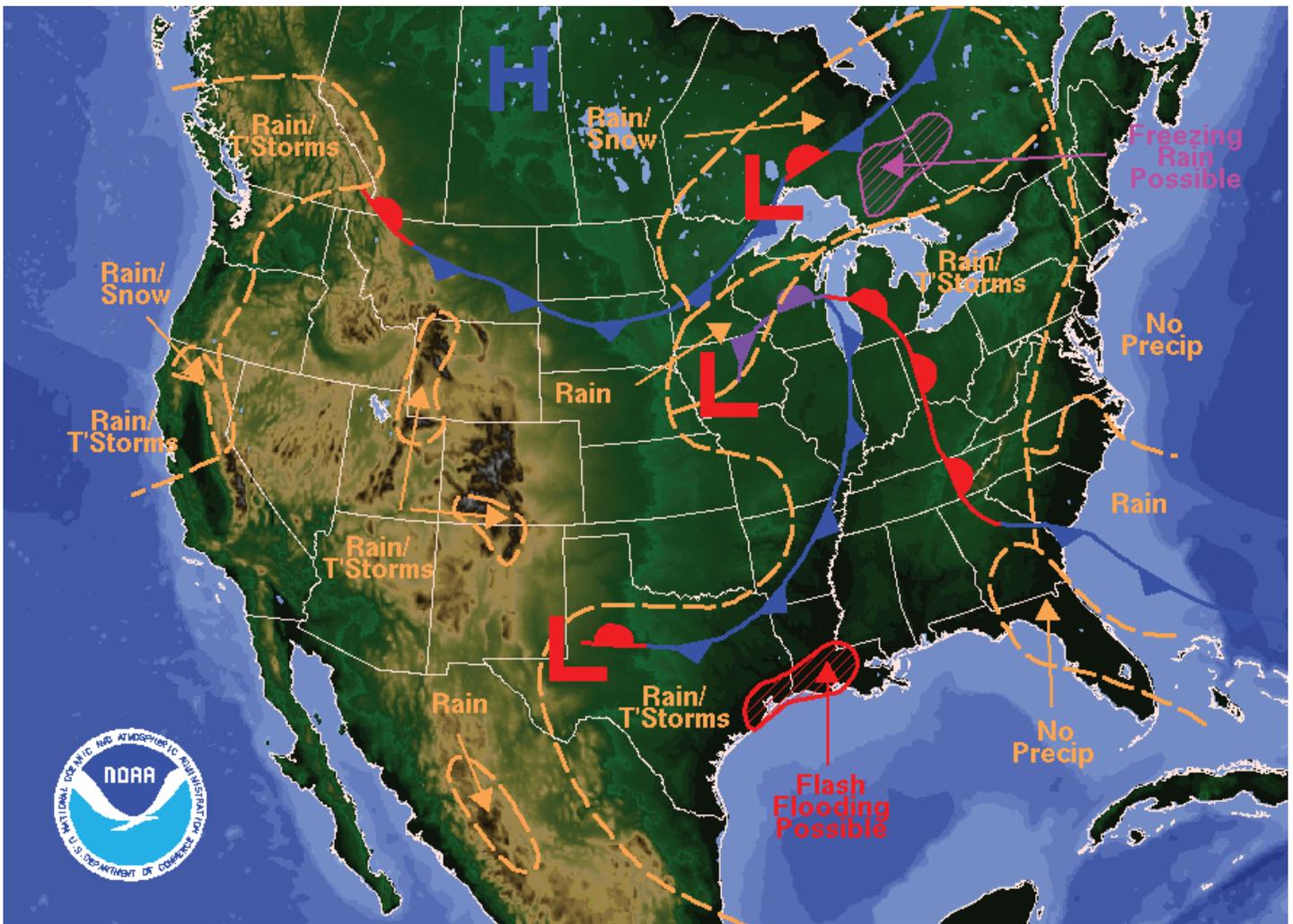
Yesterday's Weather

High: 62.6
Low: 46.2
High Gust: 17

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 97° in 1980
Record Low: 16 in 1936
Average High: 60°F
Average Low: 34°F
Average Precip in April.: 1.11
Precip to date in April.: 1.25
Average Precip to date: 3.29
Precip Year to Date: 2.20
Sunset Tonight: 8:28 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:35 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Thu, Apr 21, 2016, issued 4:53 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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Daily Devotional

LIGHT AT THE END

Not far from my home was a lengthy covered bridge. My first visit was a frightening experience. Before we drove through the bridge my uncle stopped just inside of the entrance. Looking behind me I saw the large opening and the glowing sunlight. But when I looked before me, I said, "Look out, Uncle Ed. You can drive in but you won't be able to get out because the hole at the other end is too small for the car."

I soon discovered that I was wrong. When we drove out of the bridge, the "hole" at the end of the bridge was bigger than I thought it was and the problem was solved.

Sometimes life is like that. The "little hole" we look through may seem small and insufficient for our passage. The darkness surrounds us and the light is not bright enough for us to see our way clear. Doubts and fears overwhelm us.

Yet as we face the fears and doubts with the Lord's help we can get through them. As we read in Proverbs, "The way of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, which shines ever brighter until the full light of day."

In the Bible, light stands for wisdom and righteousness. When we are surrounded by darkness and there is little light to give us a sense of where God is leading us, we must stand fast and trust in His wisdom and know that because of His righteousness we are safe. As we learn to trust in His Word, we will gain confidence in Him and the journey He has prepared for us. We will learn that where He is leading us and what He is doing with us and through us is in keeping with His will for us. Although it may be difficult for us to believe that the "full light of day" is coming, we have the promises in His Word that it will.

Prayer: Give us the faith, Father, to believe that we are safe and secure as long as we trust in You and follow the directions You have given us in Your Word to follow in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Proverbs 4:18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

Mission man sentenced prison on methamphetamine charges

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Mission man has been sentenced to 10 years and six months in prison on methamphetamine charges.

Authorities say 31-year-old Jason Willard Menard was sentenced on Monday. He pleaded guilty in February to distributing 500 grams or more of methamphetamine beginning in 2013.

Authorities say Menard was a leader in his distribution network and had numerous dealers working for him.

This case was investigated by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Law Enforcement Services and the Northern Plains Safe Trails Drug Enforcement Task Force.

Governor invites families to camp on Capitol lawn in June

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard says families can bring tents to the South Dakota state Capitol lawn for a campout.

The free event is set to start June 10. It's meant to encourage families to learn outdoor skills and camping on the lawn of the Capitol in Pierre.

Daugaard says state residents are lucky to live in a state with a significant number of outdoor opportunities available. Activities at the Capitol event include nature programs, kayaking, fishing and rock climbing.

There are some tents and sleeping bags available to borrow if families don't have equipment. Several meals are also going to be provided.

Rosebud man sentenced for abusive sexual contact and assault

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A Rosebud man has been sentenced to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to abusive sexual contact and assault related to an incident involving children.

U.S. Attorney Randolph J. Seiler said 25-year-old Benton Brave Hawk was sentenced this week and turned over to the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service.

Prosecutors say that between December 2014 and March 2015, Brave Hawk watched two children overnight at their home in Rosebud and at some point went to a bed where siblings were sleeping.

Prosecutors say Brave Hawk had abusive sexual contact with the female child and later hit the male child with a belt.

Bureau of Indian Affairs head to speak at Mines commencement

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs will deliver the keynote address at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology 173th commencement.

Michael Black will deliver the address May 7. In 2010, Black was named the director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which provides services directly or through contracts, grants or compacts to 567 federally recognized tribes throughout the country.

The school will award more than 370 doctorate, master's, bachelor's and associate's degrees. Black, an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and a 1986 graduate of the School of Mines, will also be awarded an honorary doctorate.

The event will take place at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Ice Arena.

Rapid City school worker charged with child sex crime

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A 39-year-old female paraprofessional at Rapid City High School has been fired and faces a charge of having an illegal relationship with a male student.

Police said Michelle Felkey was arrested late Tuesday on charges of soliciting a minor and disseminating harmful material to a minor.

KOTA television reports that Felkey appeared in magistrate court Wednesday via closed-circuit television from the Pennington County Jail. She will have the opportunity to enter a plea at a preliminary hearing set for next Friday.

Attorney information for Felkey was not immediately available.

Felkey was fired Monday from Rapid City High School, which is an alternative school. School system Superintendent Tim Mitchell said in a statement Tuesday that the system "will not tolerate behaviors that compromise the safety of our children."

Reservations in Dakotas, Washington selected for census test

REGINA GARCIA CANO, Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Two Native American reservations — one in the Dakotas and another in Washington state — have been selected as test sites ahead of the 2020 census, as officials mull whether to ask for the first time about tribal enrollment.

Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which straddles North Dakota and South Dakota, and Colville Reservation in Washington will be the focus of next year's testing on tribal lands, the U.S. Census Bureau announced this month. The bureau has enlisted the help of the tribes on those reservations as it pilots efforts to avoid a 5 percent undercount of the population seen in the 2010 census.

"By selecting these geographic areas, we are allowing ourselves an opportunity to test our methods, procedures in areas where it is difficult to deliver questionnaires by mail," said Deirdre Bishop, chief of the bureau's Decennial Census Management Division.

The test sites were selected in part because they have more than 2,000 housing units each and a large percentage of population that identifies as American Indian. The areas also hold the potential for undercounting because of their lack of traditional home addresses. Only 16 percent of housing units on Standing Rock and 33 percent at Colville are able to receive questionnaires through the U.S. Postal Service, Bishop said.

The test will allow people to respond using the traditional paper questionnaires, as well as by phone and online using computers, tablets or smartphones. Census workers will be sent to addresses that don't provide answers using any of the available methods.

In addition to the standard questions, the bureau will experiment with asking individuals to identify their tribal enrollment. The agency has met with tribal focus groups to develop three questions on tribal enrollment and has been testing them in interviews designed to study how people respond. Two of the three questions will later be selected to be used during next year's test.

The 2010 census found that 2.9 million identified as American Indian or Alaska Native alone. That figure nearly doubled among respondents who said they were American Indian or Alaska Native and another race, the census reported.

Officials suspect that one of the main reasons for the 5 percent undercount during the 2010 census was the general distrust tribal members have of the federal government. But for tribes, an accurate count is crucial because census data helps guide how billions in federal, state, and tribal funding are distributed. Tribes also use census data to attract new business and to plan new facilities and programs.

Bishop said the tribes on each test site have appointed someone to act as liaison with the agency throughout the test process. The agency will also be hiring people from the community ahead of the April 1 test date to generate awareness about the importance of answering all questions and doing so accurately.

At Standing Rock, where 8,000 people live on an area slightly bigger than Connecticut, individuals who are fluent in English and Lakota will be available to assist in translating questions for elders whose English skills are limited, said Dave Archambault II, chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. Community members familiar with the reservation's geography will also help census workers get to difficult-to-reach areas.

"Tribes know that the census data is inaccurate," Archambault said. "By being able to participate in a project like this, it will better enable the Census to collect data not just for Standing Rock but for all tribal nations. It is in our best interest to come up with innovative ways to collect accurate data in regards to our nations."

JazzFest 2016 draws The Fray, Bruce Hornsby, Tab Benoit

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Organizers of one of South Dakota's largest annual music festivals have announced the main state lineups for JazzFest 2016.

Sioux Falls Jazz and Blues announced Wednesday that The Fray, Bruce Hornsby and the Noisemakers and Tab Benoit will be headline the main stage events for the festival, planned for July 14-16 at Yankton Trail Park in Sioux Falls.

Other major artists scheduled to perform include the Kenny Wayne Shepherd Band, Andra Day and Coco Montoya.

The annual festival, now in its 25th year, has grown from a small backyard party into an event that draws more than 100,000 people.

Lawrence County leaders to tour site of proposed rock quarry

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — Lawrence County commissioners plan to tour the site of a proposed rock quarry before deciding whether to approve it.

Rapid City-based Mountain View Ranches LLC is seeking a county permit for a 192-acre sand, gravel and rock quarry off Crook City Road.

Some area residents think the operation would jeopardize historic trails and lead to other problems including dust and road damage.

The county's planning and zoning board earlier recommended the commission approve a permit with several conditions aimed at limiting the quarry's impacts on the surrounding area.

Commissioners plan an on-site tour April 28 to help them decide. A final decision might not come until early June.

Hamas praises Jerusalem bus bomber as 'martyr'

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — The Islamic militant group Hamas is praising a Palestinian as a "martyr" for carrying out a bus bombing that injured about 20 people in Jerusalem this week.

In an announcement on one of its websites, Hamas names the bomber as Abdel Hameed Abu Srour. The statement says Srour was a member of Hamas, but stops short of claiming responsibility for the attack.

About 20 people were injured in the bombing, some seriously, including a teenage girl who suffered severe burns. A hospital spokeswoman confirmed Wednesday one man later died, but did not name

him.

The blast came amid a seven-month wave of Palestinian attacks that has killed 28 Israelis and two Americans. At least 190 Palestinians, the majority said by Israel to be attackers, were killed in that time.

Justice Department appears open to interrogation suit

ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has signaled that it won't try to block a lawsuit arising from the CIA's harsh interrogation techniques, leaving the door open for a court challenge over tactics that have since been discontinued and widely discredited.

Lawyers call the government's stance unprecedented, but also a recognition that a once-secret program is now largely out in the open. They say it's the first time the Justice Department has not sought, as its first step, to dismiss a lawsuit over the interrogation program by arguing that its mere existence is too secret to discuss in court. Judges have previously accepted that assertion, turning aside cases about a program that was designed to extract intelligence from suspected militants captured overseas.

The lawsuit at issue, pending in federal court in Washington state, accuses the two Air Force psychologists who designed the interrogation program of endorsing and teaching torture tactics under the guise of science.

Although the Justice Department isn't part of the case, it submitted a filing ahead of a Friday hearing saying that it wanted to ensure that certain classified information — such as identities of interrogators and locations of detention sites — remains private as the suit moves forward. But the lawyers who brought the case were heartened that the government did not immediately invoke the state secrets privilege, which protects the government's right to shield sensitive information in lawsuits. Instead, the Justice Department suggested that it was willing to let the suit proceed through the information-sharing stage known as discovery.

"The government is actually going to show up at the hearing instead of trying to shut it down," said Dror Ladin, a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union, which brought the case. "It's going to be suggesting procedures that might allow the case to go forward."

That's a departure for the Justice Department, which has successfully fended off multiple lawsuits by invoking the state secrets privilege.

A notable example was the case of Khaled El-Masri, a German citizen who unsuccessfully sued after he said he had been beaten and sodomized in a CIA-run prison in Afghanistan known as "the Salt Pit." Courts sided with the government in holding that the danger that state secrets could be revealed far outweighed the injuries he suffered.

The veil of secrecy surrounding CIA interrogations was pierced by the 2014 release of the executive summary of a scathing Senate report on the program. That report said the interrogation techniques — including sleep deprivation, waterboarding and beatings — had inflicted pain on al-Qaida prisoners far beyond the legal limits and did not yield lifesaving intelligence.

In their filing, Justice Department lawyers acknowledged that the release of the report "had the effect of disclosing a significant amount of information concerning the detention and interrogation program," including specific interrogation techniques and confinement conditions. But they also said other categories of information remain secret and that the two psychologists will likely be asked to disclose classified information if the case moves forward. They did not rule out the possibility of eventually invoking the state secrets privilege to prevent disclosure of certain information.

The ACLU sued the psychologists, James E. Mitchell and John "Bruce" Jessen, last October on behalf of three former CIA prisoners. One, Gul Rahman, was alleged to have been interrogated at the Salt Pit

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and subjected to isolation, darkness and extreme cold water, and was later found dead of hypothermia. The other two, Suleiman Abdullah Salim and Mohamed Ahmed Ben Soud, were held in CIA prisons but never charged with crimes and are now free.

It alleges that the psychologists, despite having no expertise on al-Qaida, devised a program for the CIA that drew from 1960s experiments involving dogs and the theory of "learned helplessness." The two spent years training military officials to resist interrogations and had subjected U.S. troops in training sessions to harsh techniques, but had no experience as interrogators themselves, the Senate report says.

The pair worked as independent contractors, which the Justice Department has conceded.

A lawyer for the men, Henry Schuelke III, declined to comment. They have sought to dismiss the case, arguing among other things that the court lacks jurisdiction to hear a matter best reserved for the "political branches of the U.S. government."

A hearing Friday will likely include discussion of how to protect the secrecy of certain information if the case proceeds. Those procedures could include having Justice Department lawyers in the room during depositions, or being given the opportunity to review disclosures by the defendants about the interrogation program.

Stephen Vladeck, a national security law professor at American University, said it was too early to know the significance of the government's filing. The lawsuit might eventually be dismissed, or as the matter proceeds through discovery, the Justice Department might yet decide that it involves too many secrets after all and should be dismissed, he said.

"Whether this is going to have the consequences that I suspect the ACLU hopes remains to be seen," he said.

APNewsBreak: EU keeps sanctions threat on Thai seafood **RAF CASERT, Associated Press**

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union is maintaining the threat of a seafood import ban on Thailand because the global exporter is still not doing enough to improve its fisheries and labor practices, officials said Thursday.

The 28-nation EU is keeping up the pressure because even some Thai legislation enacted last year to curb illegal practices was not sufficiently followed up by action over the past months, two EU officials with knowledge of the ongoing talks told the Associated Press.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is seen as a major contributor to dwindling fish stocks across the globe, while in Thailand it has also led to illegal labor practices amounting in some cases to slave labor.

"We continue to have serious concerns about the steps taken by the Thai authorities to fight illegal and unregulated fishing activities. This means that further action by the EU Commission cannot be ruled out," said one official, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the talks. Thai authorities insist they are working hard to fundamentally change the practices of the past.

The news that Thailand would continue to work under a so-called yellow card threat came Thursday as the EU Commission took Sri Lanka off the list after threatening it with sanctions for four years, the official said, lauding the island nation in the Indian Ocean for its reforms. At the same time Kiribati, Sierra Leone and Trinidad and Tobago were slapped with yellow cards for not cooperating.

Thailand was given a yellow card exactly one year ago. The third-largest global seafood exporter, with a stake of 8.1 percent of global exports, needs the wealthy European market to maintain its seafood

prominence. Annual Thai fish exports to the EU are estimated to be worth between 575 million and 730 million euros (\$650 million and \$825 million).

Beyond illegal fishing though, Thailand also faces the slavery issue. The Associated Press has exposed during a two year investigation labor abuses amounting to slavery. In addition to freeing more than 2,000 slaves, the reporting resulted in the arrest of a dozen alleged traffickers—so far eight have been convicted and sentenced—the seizing of millions of dollars' worth of seafood and vessels, several lawsuits, and legal actions by governments and corporations.

EU officials have said that the slavery and labor issues are intimately intertwined with the illegal fishing industry, and that a cleanup of the sector will automatically also have an impact on the labor situation.

EU officials said that dialogue is still proving difficult.

"Lately we have been receiving less evidence of reform from them and more evidence from third countries and NGOs" of illegal practices or a lack of enforcement, the official said.

Both sides are to meet again next month in Brussels amid hope progress can be made.

Volkswagen reaches judge's deadline for diesel car fix

SUDHIN THANAWALA, Associated Press

TOM KRISHER, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Time is up for Volkswagen to meet a federal judge's deadline to detail how it will make nearly 600,000 diesel cars rigged to cheat on emissions tests comply with clean air laws.

Senior U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer said he wanted to know the timing of the fix and any planned payments to vehicle owners by a court hearing set for Thursday. That is when a deal is expected to be announced between Volkswagen, the U.S. government and private lawyers for the automaker to buy back some of the vehicles and spend just over \$1 billion to compensate owners, a person briefed on the matter said.

The agreement would give some owners the choice of having Volkswagen repair their cars or buy them back, but it does not include plans on how to repair the vehicles, according to the person, who asked not to be identified because the deal hadn't been made public.

Those plans, and the cost of the fixes, apparently are still under negotiation.

Compensation for car owners was among the details Breyer was seeking, but the judge was more focused on ending the ongoing pollution by getting the vehicles to comply with clean air laws.

He said last month that issue at the very least "must be resolved" and threatened a trial this summer if Volkswagen didn't meet his deadline. It was unclear whether the deal would satisfy Breyer.

The "deal in principle" includes a maximum amount of spending, but the final details, such as how much each owner would get, are still being worked out, according to the person briefed on the matter.

With \$1 billion to spend, it works out to about \$1,700 per car. But some owners of newer models who get just a software fix may receive little. About 325,000 owners of older cars that require more extensive repairs likely will get more, because the repairs could affect mileage and performance.

Shares in Volkswagen were up 5.6 percent in early trading in Europe on news of a deal with the government.

Analyst Marc-Rene Tonn at Warburg Research estimated the direct financial impact on Volkswagen from the emissions scandal worldwide at 28.6 billion euros (\$32.3 billion). The company also faces losses from declines in market share and having to lower its prices to keep customers.

Any U.S. settlement could influence what happens in Europe and in other countries, he said. "Very generous payments to U.S. customers may add to some greediness here, too."

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The owners and the U.S. Department of Justice sued the company after it acknowledged in September that it intentionally defeated emissions tests and put dirty vehicles on the road.

Volkswagen told its shareholders last year it had set aside \$7.3 billion to help defray the potential costs of a recall or regulatory penalties. Most outside observers have said that figure is likely far too low. The company faces as much as \$20 billion in fines for Clean Air Act violations alone, before paying to fix the cars or compensate their owners.

Representatives for Volkswagen, the lawyers, and the government all declined comment Wednesday. Wyn Hornbuckle, spokesman for the Justice Department said federal officials would wait until Thursday's hearing before speaking. John Gersten, a spokesman for a law firm representing hundreds of Volkswagen owners, said a confidentiality order barred the firm from making any comment.

Breyer could order an early trial if he's unhappy, but that would divert resources that should be committed to finding a solution, said Michael Steel, an attorney at Morrison & Foerster who has advised car manufacturers about air quality matters.

"If an early trial is scheduled, the parties will put all their energy into preparing for battle instead of negotiating to settle," he said. "So the tool has to be used with great care. It is perhaps more effective as a threat than an actual order."

Volkswagen says in court documents that it does not believe a trial is appropriate.

The first item on Thursday's agenda is a report on the status of fixing the cars and "related discussions." It also includes a request to add the Federal Trade Commission to the case. The FTC has sued Volkswagen alleging deceptive advertising. The owners' lawyers also are seeking documents that Volkswagen provided to the law firm Jones Day, which the company has hired to investigate how the cheating happened.

10 Things to Know for Today

The Associated Press

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

1. WHERE OBAMA IS DISCUSSING THE FIGHT AGAINST IS

The president is in Saudi Arabia, where he meets with top officials from six Gulf Arab nations.

2. US MONEY MAKEOVER

Harriet Tubman, an African-American abolitionist born into slavery, will replace Andrew Jackson as the new face on the \$20 bill.

3. WHICH STATE COULD SWAY RACE FOR GOP NOMINATION

Pennsylvania will send 54 uncommitted delegates to the Republican National Convention, where they could be key in crowning the party's presidential nominee.

4. TIME'S UP FOR VOLKSWAGEN

The car company faces a U.S. judge's deadline that demands it explain how nearly 600,000 diesel cars rigged to cheat on emissions tests will comply with clean air laws.

5. NEPAL STILL AWAITS REBUILDING

Virtually no government rebuilding has happened a year after an earthquake shattered the Himalayan nation.

6. WHO COULD BE SUED

The U.S. Justice Department signals it won't try to block lawsuits arising from CIA's harsh interrogation.

7. CLIMATE AGREEMENT OFF TO EARLY START

More than 150 countries are expected to sign off early on the Paris Agreement on climate change this

week in a symbolic triumph for a landmark deal that once seemed unlikely.

8. WHY ECUADOR IS RAISING TAXES

President Rafael Correa says he is raising sales taxes and putting a one-time levy on millionaires to help pay for reconstruction after a deadly quake.

9. DEATH OF A PRO WRESTLING PIONEER

Chyna, the WWE star who became one of the best-known and most-popular female professional wrestlers in history, has died.

10. WILL HE PLAY?

The Golden State Warriors may not know until Thursday whether Stephen Curry will play in their next NBA playoff game.

Obama visits UK; Overshadowed by debate about leaving EU

JILL LAWLESS, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It's springtime in London, but President Barack Obama might sense a chill in the air. The U.S. leader will be welcomed by British Prime Minister David Cameron and wined and dined by the royal family on a three-day visit to the U.K. that starts late Thursday.

But Britain's looming June 23 referendum about whether to stay in the 28-nation European Union has strained the "special relationship," with several senior U.K. politicians bluntly telling the president to butt out of Britain's debate. They have branded Obama "anti-British" and "unsuccessful" and accused him of meddling for suggesting that the U.S. would be happier if Britain stayed in the bloc.

The White House says Obama is willing to speak out on the subject.

"If he's asked his view as a friend, he will offer it," U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes said, adding that the American stance was clear. "As the president has said, we support a strong United Kingdom in the European Union."

Obama's agenda before he leaves for Germany on Sunday includes talks with Cameron on the global economy, on countering an increasingly assertive Russia and on the fight against the Islamic State group.

The president's British stopover — one of a series of international visits during his last year in office — will also include a lunch with Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle on Friday — a day after her 90th birthday — and a dinner hosted by Prince William, his wife Kate and Prince Harry at the younger royals' Kensington Palace home.

But for the British media, the visit will be dominated by the debate over an possible EU exit, dubbed "Brexit."

Cameron, who is meeting Obama for talks Friday at 10 Downing St., is eager for the president's intervention. Cameron is leading the campaign to stay in the EU, but faces opposition from within his own Conservative government and widespread skepticism among voters about the benefits of membership in the bureaucratic Brussels-based behemoth that is the EU.

Backers of the Leave side have lined up to accuse Obama of interfering.

Nigel Farage, leader of the anti-immigrant U.K. Independence Party, called Obama "the most anti-British American president there has ever been." Conservative lawmaker Jacob Rees-Mogg said Britons would not "want to be told what to do by a rather unsuccessful American president who has had one of the least successful foreign policies in modern history."

Even London's Conservative mayor, Boris Johnson — born in New York and resolutely pro-American — has accused Obama of hypocrisy for urging Britain to give up some of its sovereignty to a powerful multinational body.

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"I just think it's paradoxical that the United States, which wouldn't dream of allowing the slightest infringement of its own sovereignty, should be lecturing other countries about the need to enmesh themselves ever deeper in a federal superstate," Johnson said Tuesday.

Cameron said Wednesday that British voters will make the final decision about the country's future — but "listening to what our friends say in the world is not a bad idea."

"I struggle to find the leader of any friendly country that thinks we should leave," he said.

Tim Oliver, an expert in trans-Atlantic relations at the London School of Economics, says Obama is in a no-win situation.

"He would be criticized if he didn't say something, and he is criticized for saying something," Oliver said.

Obama is not the only American offering his opinion. Eight former U.S. Treasury chiefs said Wednesday in a letter to the Times of London that Brexit could diminish Britain's influence and threaten London's "global primacy" as a financial center.

Oliver said many American politicians, policymakers and diplomats regarded the EU referendum as "a bit of an unwanted headache" and believed a Brexit would weaken Britain on the world stage.

"From the U.S. perspective, this doesn't serve anyone's interest," he said. "It doesn't make sense for the U.S. It doesn't make sense for NATO. It doesn't make sense for the European Union. It doesn't even make sense for the U.K. So who does this benefit?"

Myanmar media company greases wrong palm, flouts gift limit

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's new government scolded a media group for flouting guidelines against corruption by presenting an envelope with more than \$4,000 as a gift to an official.

The limit to such gifts is 25,000 kyats (\$21).

The state Myanmar News Agency reported Thursday that the president's office had announced that the media company was notified of violation when it gave 5 million kyats (\$4,237) in cash to the personal assistant of an important official as a present during the Buddhist new year festival last week.

The announcement named neither party involved, saying no action would be pursued as it was the first violation and fell under a grace period.

The money would be given to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement for building water supply facilities, it said.

The guidelines enacted earlier this month also include a yearly limit of 100,000 kyats (\$85) in gifts to civil servants. The new government, whose de facto head is Nobel Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, has declared tackling the country's serious corruption as a priority.

Under the previous military-backed government, civil servants were allowed to accept gifts worth up to 300,000 kyats (\$254).

Pennsylvania GOP presidential delegate chase adds to mystery

MARC LEVY, Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Pennsylvania, long an afterthought in presidential primary stakes, may emerge as a key player in crowning this year's Republican presidential nominee.

Pennsylvania will send a whopping number of delegates to July's unsettled Republican National Convention who, under a state party rule, can vote for whichever candidate they choose.

As a result, Pennsylvania's April 26 statewide primary election is relatively meaningless — a beauty pageant. What is meaningful, however, is whom primary voters will select to send to Cleveland as the 54 uncommitted delegates.

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"And then the drama begins," said Michael McMonagle, a delegate candidate from Montgomery County who supports Texas Sen. Ted Cruz. "Who can persuade who?"

Polls show New York businessman Donald Trump leading both Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich in Pennsylvania, where primary contests are usually so late that the eventual presidential nominee is no longer in doubt.

This year, there's a real campaign in Pennsylvania, and it's about the delegates.

On Pennsylvania's primary ballot are 162 people who are running to be a GOP convention delegate. They are elected by congressional district, three for each of Pennsylvania's 18 districts for a total of 54.

Seventeen other delegates — the state party chairman, Rob Gleason, Pennsylvania's two national GOP committee members and 14 picked in May by party leaders — must vote for the winner of Pennsylvania's statewide primary election, but only on the first convention ballot. Beginning with the second ballot, they are as uncommitted as the 54 elected delegates.

For now, campaigns are trying to win pledges of allegiance from delegate candidates and, later, they expect to jockey to get party leaders to pick the campaigns' supporters as the 14 delegates.

Many delegate candidates are relatively anonymous, and some are better-known officeholders. But the delegate candidates' names appear on the ballot without any affiliation to a presidential candidate, meaning voters won't necessarily know who they are really supporting.

"You can go in there and vote for Trump and vote for three delegates that are three votes against Trump," said Rep. Lou Barletta, R-Pa., a state co-chairman of Trump's campaign.

For the Democrats, the process is less mysterious: Primary voters select 127 delegates who are affiliated on the ballot with either former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton or Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. The rest of the 210 Democratic convention delegates are picked by the party and most must support the winner of the state's presidential primary vote.

Republican Party officials and political operatives say they expect an onslaught of delegate persuasion to begin in earnest after the election. A below-the-radar persuasion effort began last week, with Trump and Cruz loyalists telephoning delegate candidates to try to secure pledges of support. The Trump and Cruz campaigns have released a list of supportive delegates and are preparing campaigns to get them elected.

Some delegate candidates say they feel bound, at least on the first convention ballot, to vote for whichever presidential candidate wins their congressional district. Many are remaining noncommittal, at least publicly.

"I think that is my responsibility to hear everybody out and make a judgment at some point," said Calvin Tucker, a delegate candidate from Philadelphia. "I think that is the purpose of being uncommitted."

There is some high-level support for Kasich in the Pennsylvania GOP — including former Gov. Tom Ridge and national GOP committeeman Bob Asher — and that creates the potential that a bloc of delegate votes will favor Kasich.

The last time a Republican convention was so unsettled, in 1976, candidate Ronald Reagan picked one of Pennsylvania's senators, Richard Schweiker, as his running mate in an effort to pick up support from the state's delegates.

Asher is cautioning delegates against taking a hard stance for or against a particular candidate.

"We really have to consider who we think has the best chance of beating Hillary Clinton," Asher said, "and when we get to Cleveland, we need to put our prejudices aside."

Pennsylvania GOP presidential delegate chase adds to mystery

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The NBA makes new play in Africa in pursuit of fans

GERALD IMRAY, AP Sports Writer

The NBA is making a new play for fans in Africa by splitting with the continent's biggest sports broadcaster and teaming up with a Zimbabwean telecommunications entrepreneur who started his first business with \$75.

The NBA announced Thursday that it has a new multiyear deal with Econet Media to show live games and other NBA programs on Econet's pay TV, Internet and mobile platforms in sub-Saharan Africa from the 2016-17 season. The deal makes Econet the NBA's official broadcaster in sub-Saharan Africa and will offer viewers over 500 games a year, the NBA said, including the playoffs and finals. It also includes WNBA games.

It will see the NBA end its relationship with South Africa-based satellite TV broadcaster SuperSport. That contract expires at the end of this season. The NBA didn't disclose financial details or say exactly how long the Econet agreement was for.

"I can tell you this is the largest partnership in the history of the NBA in Africa," NBA vice president and managing director for Africa Amadou Gallo Fall said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press.

Fall confirmed the new agreement to the AP ahead of the public announcement.

Econet began life as a cellphone network in Zimbabwe, where founder Strive Masiyiwa started his first company with \$75. He also fought a long legal battle against the government of President Robert Mugabe to be allowed to compete against Zimbabwe's state-run telecommunications company.

Masiyiwa now has telecom and media businesses across Africa, and in North America, South America, Europe and Asia. Masiyiwa's net worth was estimated to be \$600 million in 2014, according to Forbes Magazine.

The partnership would likely offer Africans more affordable access to the NBA even though it would still be on Econet's new pay TV service. Distributing more content on mobile devices could also help the NBA's reach on a continent where only a few have satellite or pay TV, but millions have cellphones and other wireless devices.

"In Africa, a mobile device is the first screen for many," Fall said. "We really wanted to tap into the opportunity that space offers."

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Econet was "the ideal partner to extend our reach in sub-Saharan Africa."

With a population of more than 900 million, sub-Saharan Africa is one of the last frontiers for the NBA. Basketball is popular in parts of West Africa, but is generally a minor sport for the rest.

To change that, the NBA has had an office in Johannesburg, South Africa, run by Fall since 2010. Last year, the league brought over Chris Paul, Luol Deng, the Gasol brothers and a list of other NBA stars to play an exhibition game at an arena in downtown Johannesburg, its first game in Africa. It was the first of the big U.S. sports leagues to go to Africa. But to highlight the challenge, the game wasn't sold out even though it was held in a small, 4,000-seat arena.

Still, the exhibition was preceded by talk from Silver, who also made the trip, that the NBA might be

ready for a pre-season and ultimately a regular-season game in Africa in the “not-too-distant future.” Without giving a timeframe, Fall said “I can guarantee you that’s the plan.”

Before that, the NBA needs to spread the word in Africa and try and catch up with soccer, which currently dominates the sports channels. The NBA plans to have platforms to show live games in all 54 countries in Africa within five years, Fall said.

“It’s a massive continent,” he said. “There’s an opportunity for multiple sports to grow and prosper.”

Trump, Cruz feud shifts to luxury seaside resort

STEVE PEOPLES, Associated Press

THOMAS BEAUMONT, Associated Press

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (AP) — The messy fight for the Republican presidential nomination is shifting to a luxury seaside resort in south Florida as Donald Trump and chief rival Ted Cruz quietly court party leaders ahead of another set of high-stakes delegate contests.

Cruz conceded publicly for the first time that he doesn’t have enough support to claim the nomination before the party’s summertime national convention, but he also vowed Wednesday to block Trump from collecting the necessary delegates as well. The Texas conservative predicted a contested convention that many party loyalists fear could trigger an all-out Republican civil war.

“What’s clear today is that we are headed to a contested convention,” Cruz told reporters in between private meetings with Republican National Committee members gathered at the Diplomat Resort & Spa for the first day of their three-day annual spring meeting.

Campaigning in Indiana, Trump railed against his party’s leadership, even as his senior lieutenants courted GOP officials behind closed doors in Florida.

“It’s a rigged, crooked system that’s designed so that the bosses can pick whoever they want and that people like me can’t run and can’t defend you against foreign nonsense,” Trump charged at the Indiana State Fairgrounds.

Roughly at the same time, Trump’s newly hired political director, Rick Wiley, was hosting a series of private meetings at the Florida resort with party officials from states set to vote in the coming weeks. The veteran political operative, who previously worked for the RNC, is tasked with helping Trump play catch-up in the complicated state-by-state nomination process.

Trump’s top aides were set to deliver a private briefing to RNC members Thursday afternoon outlining his path to victory.

Both Trump and the Democratic front-runner, Hillary Clinton, were pushing ahead toward Northeast primaries on an increasingly direct path to party nominations after trouncing their challengers Tuesday in New York.

Clinton, now 81 percent of the way toward clinching the Democratic nomination that eluded her eight years ago, can lose every remaining contest and still prevail. Advisers to rival Bernie Sanders offered no signs of the Vermont senator giving up before the Democrats’ Philadelphia convention.

Trump is increasingly optimistic about his chances in five states set to vote on Tuesday: Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland. He is now the only Republican candidate who can possibly collect the 1,237 delegate majority needed to claim the nomination before the party’s July convention. Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich have been mathematically eliminated, yet both contend they can win the nomination at the convention.

Despite getting shut out of the delegate race in New York, Cruz is aggressively courting delegates across the nation who could hold great sway at the convention.

Of a convention fight, Cruz said: “I believe we will have a tremendous advantage in that battle.”

The side-by-side GOP efforts at this late stage — with Trump amassing primary victories while Cruz digs for the support of delegates who could settle the nomination — are unprecedented in recent presidential campaigns and add to the deeply uncertain nature of the race.

While the primary campaign is a focus of the RNC meeting, party leaders are painfully aware that any changes in the nomination process could fuel Trump's charges of an unfair system. Party chairman Reince Priebus has discouraged any rule changes this week.

Priebus believes the convention rules should be left to the separate rules committee elected at the convention, made up of delegates being elected to seats across the country, said RNC senior strategist Sean Spicer.

"The chairman's view is that the rules of the convention should be set by the delegates, by the grass-roots Republican voters," Spicer said.

Half-mile tunnel found on US-Mexico border, cocaine seized

ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — U.S. authorities said Wednesday that they discovered a cross-border tunnel that ran a half-mile from a Tijuana house equipped with a large elevator to a lot in San Diego that was advertised as a wooden pallet business, resulting in seizures of more than a ton of cocaine and seven tons of marijuana.

It was the 13th sophisticated secret passage found along California's border with Mexico since 2006, including three on the same short street in San Diego that runs parallel to a border fence with a densely populated residential area on the Mexican side. The unusually narrow tunnel was only about three feet wide, equipped with a rail system, lighting and ventilation.

The tunnel was unusual because it was used for cocaine, not just marijuana, said Laura Duffy, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of California. Tunnels are often built for marijuana because its bulk and odor make it more difficult to escape border inspectors' scrutiny than cocaine and other drugs.

The elevator, which was big enough for eight to 10 people, was located in the closet of a Tijuana house whose floors were strewn with mattresses, Duffy said. The tunnel zig-zagged for 874 yards to the fenced commercial lot in San Diego, where the exit was covered by a large trash bin.

Other tunnels that have ended in California were inside houses and warehouses.

"It's a rabbit hole," Duffy told reporters. "Just the whole way that it comes up and that it comes up out right into the open, it is a bit ingenious, I think, and it's something completely different than what we've seen."

Investigators didn't know when the tunnel was completed. Margarita Ontiveros, who works at a law office next to the San Diego lot, said the tenants arrived about a year ago and often bought and sold wooden pallets.

"They loaded and unloaded a lot of pallets," Ontiveros said. "They sold very cheap."

Investigators began to monitor the lot daily last fall after Border Patrol agents assigned to the area saw heavy traffic and grew suspicious, said Duffy. The prosecutor said she was "fairly confident" that the first drug load was sent earlier this month but didn't rule out the possibility that some got through undetected.

Six people were arrested in the San Diego area Friday on drug- and tunnel-related crimes, including one U.S. citizen, two Cubans who were granted asylum and three Mexicans who were legally entitled to be in the country, Duffy said.

Authorities saw a trash bin forklifted on to a truck at the San Diego lot on April 13 and followed it to a parking lot in San Diego, a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investi-

gations investigator said in a criminal complaint. Two days later, San Diego County sheriff's deputies stopped a truck after it left the parking lot, seizing 2,240 pounds of cocaine and 11,030 pounds of marijuana.

Marijuana found in the tunnel and trash bin brought the total pot haul to more than seven tons, authorities said.

The discovery demonstrates the enduring appeal of tunnels to smugglers, despite the significant time and money required to build one. Dozens have been found along the U.S.-Mexico border in recent years, mostly in California and Arizona. Many are found incomplete.

The San Diego-Tijuana region is popular because its clay-like soil is relatively easy to dig with shovels and pneumatic tools, and both sides of the border have warehouses that provide cover for trucks and heavy equipment.

Officials watching 'high risk' dams after Houston storms

JUAN A. LOZANO, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Two aging dams deemed "extremely high risk" by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are at record pooling levels in Houston's west side after this week's torrential rainfall, but are working well and have undergone improvements in recent years, authorities said Wednesday.

The dams — at 50 percent capacity — are classified as high risk only because they're about two decades beyond their life expectancy and in a populated area, said Corps spokeswoman Sandra Arnold.

However, a Corps report issued on the dams in 2012 offered more worrying criteria for the classification, noting that such structures are "critically near failure or at extremely high risk under normal operations."

The National Weather Service issued flood warnings Wednesday evening for the fast-growing neighborhoods around the reservoirs behind the Addicks and Barker dams. The warnings were effective through Saturday afternoon. Water levels in the reservoirs are expected to crest this weekend.

In the unlikely event that the dams collapse, downtown and the highly populated area in sprawling west Houston would likely see deaths as well as \$60 billion in property damage, said Richard Long, a project operations managers with the Corps.

But the current conditions are no reason to panic, he added. Improvements done the last few years have shored up the 70-year-old structures and an ongoing \$72 million construction project will greatly strengthen them.

"The dams are in good condition," he said. "We have 24-hour surveillance occurring."

The monitoring of the dams comes as the Houston-area deals with the effects of heavy rain — 18 inches in some spots — that walloped the area Sunday night and Monday. Creeks and streams getting runoff from the rain have continued to rise above their banks, prompting neighborhood flooding and additional evacuations on Wednesday by residents from homes and apartment complexes.

Officials said another person had died in the Houston-area flooding, raising the toll to eight.

Kim Jackson, spokeswoman for the Harris County Flood Control District, said crews assessing damage on Wednesday were still hindered by rain and floodwaters in some areas. Officials have so far catalogued about 1,000 homes with flood damage — a number she said "will go up considerably."

Long said it will take a long time to drain the reservoirs behind the Addicks and Barker dams in controlled releases. There is about two months' worth of water to get rid of. Each dam held about 100,000 acre feet of water on Wednesday.

The dams were constructed in the mid-1940s to collect excessive amounts of rainfall. The water is released downstream at a controlled rate, preventing flooding in downtown Houston and other urban

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areas to the east.

A weather service statement says the water level in the Addicks Reservoir was measured Wednesday night at 101.4 feet. It's expected to crest at 103.2 feet, far surpassing the previous record for the reservoir of 97.46 feet set in March 1992. The water in Barker Reservoir was 93.8 feet and expected to crest at 97.7 feet, exceeding the March 1992 record of 93.6 feet.

While the dams are not expected to reach 100 percent capacity, part of the reservoirs are on public property, meaning that additional water that comes into the reservoirs from rivers and streams is expected to flow into surrounding public roadways and some subdivisions, possibly flooding a number of homes, Long said.

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett said officials are considering acquiring sandbags for deployment on "non-governmental land" behind the Addicks and Barker reservoirs due to the potential flooding of homes.

But he said the damage should be limited.

"I know people's nerves are on edge," he said. "There should be very few homes.

"We probably are, or certainly are past the worst of this. And we have to make sure we do the recovery right."

The Corps of Engineers' recent improvements on the dams include additional filters to control seepage, additional lighting and emergency power "to have around the clock ability to operate the dams and to ensure their inspections and function when we get pools like we're having right now," Long said.

"From this one flood event ... the operations of (the dams) ... have prevented over \$3 billion in damage downstream of these projects," he said.

Despite reassurances by the Corps on the integrity of the dams, there still remains a worry the structures might fail, said Jim Blackburn, a Houston environmental attorney who in 2011 filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Sierra Club related to reducing runoff into the two reservoirs.

"If we lose Addicks and Barker, that will be absolutely catastrophic," he said. "And we should be doing as a community everything we can to protect them. They are the best flood control investments we have in this community."

3 officials charged in Flint water crisis; more predicted

MIKE HOUSEHOLDER, Associated Press

ED WHITE, Associated Press

FLINT, Mich. (AP) — The Flint water crisis has become a criminal case, with two state regulators and a city employee charged with official misconduct, evidence-tampering and other offenses over the lead contamination that alarmed the country and brought cries of racism.

For nearly 18 months, the poor, majority-black city of 100,000 used the Flint River for tap water as a way to save money — a decision made by a state-appointed emergency manager — while a new pipeline was under construction. But the water wasn't treated to control corrosion. The result: Lead was released from aging pipes and fixtures as water flowed into homes and businesses.

"This is a road back to restoring faith and confidence in all Michigan families in their government," state Attorney General Bill Schuette said Wednesday in announcing the first charges to come out of the disaster, blamed on a series of bad decisions by bureaucrats and political leaders.

He warned there will be more charges — "That I can guarantee" — and added: "No one is off the table."

Gov. Rick Snyder didn't acknowledge the problem until last fall, when tests revealed high levels of lead in children, in whom the heavy metal can cause low IQs and behavioral problems.

Michael Prysby, a former district engineer with the state Department of Environmental Quality, and

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Stephen Busch, a supervisor in the department's drinking water office, were charged with misconduct, conspiracy, tampering with test results and misdemeanor violations of clean-water law. The felonies carry maximum penalties of four to five years in prison.

Among other things, they were accused of failing to order anticorrosion chemicals added to the water to coat the pipes and prevent them from releasing lead.

Flint utilities administrator Michael Glasgow, who oversaw day-to-day operations at the city's water plant at the time, also was charged Wednesday with tampering with evidence for allegedly falsifying test results and with willful neglect of duty.

Busch and Prysby pleaded not guilty and were released on bail. Both were suspended without pay. Their attorneys did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

Glasgow was also placed on leave and awaited a court appearance. A telephone number for him could not be found, and it wasn't known whether he had a lawyer.

The crisis — and the state's slow and dismissive response to complaints about the water from experts and residents — led to allegations of environmental racism, became an issue in the presidential race during Michigan's Democratic primary in March, and sent other U.S. cities rushing to test their water, particularly in older neighborhoods with lead pipes.

"They failed Michigan families. Indeed, they failed us all," Schuette said of the men charged. "I don't care where you live."

Essentially, all three were accused of failing to do their duty to provide safe drinking water.

"This is rare," said Neil Rockind, a Detroit-area defense attorney and former prosecutor. "It's very hard to find a similar case where people are charged for just being personally bad or neglectful at their job. Usually there's some personal corrupt intent involved."

He said outrage over the Flint water mess has created a mood "where someone has to pay."

For months, people in Flint have been relying on filters and bottled water. Some still do not trust what comes out of their faucets, even though the city rejoined the Detroit-area water system last fall and anticorrosive phosphates are being added.

The governor filled a few jugs of filtered Flint tap water this week and pledged to drink it for 30 days to show it's safe.

"It's a good first step, but it's a small step," Flint resident Melissa Mays said of the criminal charges. "These are lower-level people, and I want to know who was instructing them to do what they did. I think it's important that we can see some form of accountability being laid out, but at the end of the day we still can't drink or bathe in our water safely."

Outside experts have also suggested a link between the river and a deadly Legionnaires' disease outbreak. During a 17-month period, there were at least 91 cases, including 12 deaths, across Genesee County, which includes Flint. That's a fivefold increase over what the county averaged before.

After the crisis broke open, DEQ Director Dan Wyant and his spokesman resigned. The chief of the department's drinking water office was fired. And the director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chicago-based Midwest office stepped down.

The Flint debacle exposed a problem that extends well beyond the one-time industrial powerhouse.

An Associated Press analysis of EPA data found that nearly 1,400 water systems serving 3.6 million Americans exceeded the federal lead standard at least once between the start of 2013 and last September.

Most U.S. cities stopped installing lead pipes in the 1930s to carry water from main lines under the streets and into homes. But a survey by the American Water Works Association found that 6.5 million

of these pipes are still in use.

Some researchers question whether chemical treatment and routine testing for lead in the water are enough, arguing that the only way to remove the threat is to replace the plumbing. The cost, though, could be huge.

Michigan lawmakers are considering legislation to give Flint an emergency \$25 million to replace thousands of lead pipes.

Virtually no gov't rebuilding 1 year after Nepal quake

BINAJ GURUBACHARYA, Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — The violence of the 7.8-magnitude earthquake left countless towns and villages across central Nepal in a shambles. Almost one year later, a shambles they remain.

The country has made almost no progress in rebuilding hundreds of thousands of homes, schools and government buildings, as well as some 600 historical structures, including ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples, monuments and palaces.

Nearly a million children still have no school to attend. Millions of villagers were forced to winter in flimsy pop-up tents and corrugated tin shacks, erected haphazardly at high altitudes and across the rolling plains.

The government's reconstruction agency has so far approved zero projects. Some citizens have started rebuilding on their own, but most are still waiting — either because they are afraid of running afoul of new, promised building regulations, or because they still hope to receive government grants.

Many of them are still living in rows of temporary shelters made from salvaged wood covered with corrugated metal sheets that are likely to be their only protection when rainy season returns in two months.

"This has been home for all of us for the past year and it looks like we are going to be here for a long time. All we hear is the government is going to give us money to rebuild our homes, but when is that going to happen? Our kids are getting sick and we have no money, job or a government that is going to come to our rescue," said Keshar Narayan, a farmer living with eight family members in a tin shed on the outskirts of Kathmandu.

The government was quick to promise help after the April 25, 2015, earthquake, which killed nearly 9,000 people, but a year later only a few families in Dolkha district have begun to get the money. They have each received 50,000 rupees (\$467), the first installment of the 200,000 rupees promised by the government to each family who lost their home. Dolkha was among the hardest-hit districts and the epicenter of another major quake that struck May 12.

As they wait for help, even prayer can be dangerous. Many in the deeply spiritual Himalayan nation seek comfort in now-ramshackle stone temples left standing askew, sometimes held up just by wooden beams.

"Every time I come to pray in the temples, I am not sure if I will even leave in one piece. We have to risk our lives just so we can pray," housewife Shanti Shrestha said in Kathmandu while holding her temple offering of a stick of burning incense and a marigold flower. "We all are very angry ... for a year nothing has been done."

The lack of progress isn't for want of money. Nepal, facing an estimated \$6.6 billion reconstruction bill, has received \$4.1 billion in pledged donations so far.

The problem, officials and aid workers say, is tangled bureaucracy and government malaise. Some frustrated donors have simply given up.

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"We just lost a donor who wanted to give \$400,000," said UNESCO's representative to Nepal, Christian Manhart. "Everything seems to be blocked because there are very lengthy government procedures."

The UNESCO office alone has about \$1.8 million budgeted for Nepal, still waiting to be spent.

The government has been embroiled in political infighting while facing months of ethnic protests in which more than 50 people were killed. Since the earthquake, there has been a change of government and a new constitution that took seven years to craft.

It took nearly nine months for Nepal just to set up a department to deal with quake reconstruction. But there are still no guidelines for how to approach the task. It also isn't clear which buildings are even being considered for reconstruction funds.

A Nepalese law requiring that government contracts go to the lowest bidder is also a problem, said Suresh Suras Shrestha, head of the world conservation section at the government's Department of Archaeology, which is in charge of monuments and heritage sites. The lowest bidder may not have the skills or knowledge to take on structures dating back to the 5th or 6th century.

"The donors who want to rebuild our monuments need to follow our rules and procedures," Suresh Suras Shrestha said.

They will also have to keep waiting to find out what those rules and procedures are.

The Department of Archaeology has defended its efforts, noting that its workers have reinforced some buildings that weren't heavily damaged. It has also opened the public bidding process for 39 projects, and expects about \$20 million in funding to be released for the first phase of work once the contracts are finalized. There is no clear indication of when that might happen. Restoring all monuments is expected to cost about \$200 million.

"The politicians just don't care about our temples. If the king was still ruling these temples and palaces would have already been built," Hindu priest Ram Singh said, referring to the monarchs who acted as guardians of Nepal's monuments until the monarchy was abolished in 2008.

Piles of crumbling red brick are all that remain of the four-story Kastamandap, the 10th-century temple from which the capital of Kathmandu got its name.

Just to the east of that, hundreds of devotees still visit the temple palace of the Kumari, a girl revered by both Hindus and Buddhists as a living goddess, though its brick walls are precariously propped up by dozens of wooden beams. The Kumari, who continues to live in the temple palace, is among dozens of girls who have held the honor for the past four centuries; each steps aside once she reaches puberty.

Bricks, stones and splintered wood collected from the rubble left by the collapse of Kathmandu's 10th-century Durbar Square palace remain in storage until architectural experts can sort through them and put them back in place. Nothing has been done to fix the damaged palace in the medieval town of Bhaktapur, east of the capital.

Many of the small Buddhist temples, stupas and monasteries surrounding the 5th-century hilltop shrine of Swayambhunath lie in ruins. It is also called the "monkey shrine" for the thousands of monkeys that congregate on the spot at the northwest edge of Kathmandu. One of its damaged dome-shaped stupas, Tashi Golma, remains covered in wire mesh and corrugated tin to protect it from deteriorating further and from theft.

In Nepal, where majority of the people are Hindu, these monuments and temples are important for cultural, religious and historical reasons. People visit temples regularly and go there for festivals, weddings and coming-of-age ceremonies.

Tired of waiting for government help, some local officials and communities are doing what they can on their own. Residents of Bhaktapur are already rebuilding a 17th-century temple to the Hindu god Vishnu, relying on volunteer labor and funds. It's unclear how much it will cost, said local heritage de-

partment official Ram Govind Shrestha, but local officials plan to solicit donations and start charging tourists for visiting.

"It is really difficult to look at our damaged heritage," he said. "So we just decided to begin."

Chinese electric car maker rides a bus into U.S. market

A Chinese automaker that sold more electric cars last year than Tesla, Nissan or GM is taking a back road into the American market on a battery-powered bus

SHENZHEN, China (AP) — The Chinese automaker that sold more electric cars last year than Tesla, Nissan or GM is taking a back road into the American market on a battery-powered bus.

Detouring around the cost and risk of consumer sales, BYD Co. has quietly built a U.S. business supplying rechargeable buses to environmentally-minded transit agencies. Its factory north of Los Angeles, opened in 2013, is on track to deliver 300 this year.

The company has dipped its toe into the U.S. auto market by launching test fleets of plug-in electric taxis in Chicago and New York City.

Consumer sales are coming but BYD has yet to decide when, said Micheal Austin, its vice president for the United States. He said it might start developing a sales network in the next two years.

"We have the manufacturing scale that can drive the cost to a point where we can bring vehicles to export markets including the United States, Latin America and Europe that will be game-changing," said Austin at BYD's headquarters in this southern city adjacent to Hong Kong.

Once that comes, "we get brand recognition because people already are riding our buses," said Austin.

BYD — the name stands for "Build Your Dreams" — is part of an emerging wave of Chinese companies that stand to profit from global demand for solar and wind power, electric cars and other clean and renewable energy.

They benefit from rising consumer interest abroad and heavy spending at home by the ruling Communist Party. Chinese leaders see what they call "new energy" as a field where China still can win a profitable leading role.

"I have no doubt BYD eventually can crack the market in Europe or the U.S.," said Cosmin Laslau, who follows the electric vehicle market for Lux Research in Boston.

It might take five to 10 years to achieve an "equal footing" with GM, Nissan or Tesla, "but it's surely doable if we look sufficiently far out," Laslau said.

"By deploying these buses first (in the United States), BYD can get an early lesson in how its batteries fare," he said. "And if they are successful, they can point to that and say the battery you are going to get in your electric vehicle has already done a half-million miles in buses."

In 2014, China spent \$83.3 billion in renewables, nearly one-third of the global total. That includes construction of hydro dams and wind farms, research grants to manufacturers and subsidies to customers.

China surpassed the United States last year as the biggest market for electrics by number of units sold, boosted by government subsidies of up to 60,000 yuan (\$9,500) per vehicle.

BYD's sales rose to 61,722 autos, beating Tesla Motors Inc.'s sales of 50,580 plug-in vehicles and more than triple the 15,393 Volts sold by General Motors Co. Nissan Motor Co. says sales of its Leaf over the past five years total 211,000, which based on previous data suggests about 56,000 were sold last year.

Unlike startups that are burning cash, BYD is profitable. The company, in which Warren Buffett's

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Berkshire Hathaway Corp. owns a 10 percent stake, has yet to release 2015 results but said in January profit rose about 500 percent from a year earlier.

BYD's consumer models are, like the Volt, "dual mode" hybrids — plug-in electrics with a small gasoline generator to extend the range beyond one charge's 150 to 200 miles (250 to 300 kilometers).

The company started out as a battery developer, founded in 1995 by engineer Wang Chuanfu and 20 co-workers from a state-owned company. It grew to supply about half the global market for mobile phone batteries before expanding into electric vehicles with the 2002 purchase of a small producer of gasoline cars that became BYD Auto Ltd.

Last year marked the first time BYD Auto supplied more than half of BYD's revenue. The rest comes from sales of batteries, solar panels, mobile phone components and power-management technology.

BYD's workforce of 180,000 includes 15,000 engineers in battery development. At its Shenzhen headquarters, a spiral parking structure has 400 spaces to charge taxis and employee cars. The company has its own test track for buses, modeled on the U.S. Department of Transportation's bus testing site in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

The first two buses out of the BYD factory in Lancaster, California, went to the nearby Antelope Valley Transit Authority, which plans to become the first all-electric U.S. fleet.

The agency is buying 85 BYD buses for a total of \$72 million. They include 14 60-foot-long (18-meter-long) articulated buses that can carry 120 people with a range of up to 200 miles (320 kilometers) on one charge, 30 commuter coaches and 41 40-foot (12-meter) standard buses.

The 40-foot (12-meter) buses cost \$660,000, compared with \$500,000 for a diesel hybrid, according to the agency's executive director, Len Engel. But maintenance is cheaper: Most buses need new tires after as little as 20,000 miles (32,000 kilometers) but the BYD vehicles are still on their first set after 50,000 miles (80,000 kilometers).

"It's slightly more expensive," said Engel. But with annual savings of up to \$50,000 on maintenance "that is paid back in three years and after that we are making money."

Other buyers include transit agencies in Los Angeles, Long Beach and Gardena in California, Denver and St. Albert in western Canada.

Several Silicon Valley technology companies are talking with BYD about possible double-deck commuter buses for employees with coffee bars, leather interiors, video games and work stations, said Peter Mobley, BYD's marketing director for North America.

Outside North America, BYD buses are in use at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport and in Japan, Hong Kong, Finland, Denmark and Uruguay.

BYD's consumer models are, like GM's Volt, "dual mode" with plug-in charging and a small gasoline engine to generate extra power if needed to help extend the range.

BYD's workhorse is the e6, a boxy, midsize all-electric hatchback used by taxi companies in China and Europe. The company has a test fleet of 20 in Chicago and is preparing 50 in New York City.

The brand also is moving upmarket. A family of SUVs ranging from subcompact to luxury and named for Chinese dynasties including the Song, Yuan and Tang have leather interiors and rear-view video.

To reach American consumers, BYD will need to "bring something new to the table," said Laslau. He said a newcomer might target budget-minded buyers with a model priced under \$35,000 with a range of at least 200 miles (320 kilometers) on a charge.

Austin said BYD can meet that today but thinks the price has to be even lower — below \$30,000.

"We're not a toy for the rich," he said. "We're going after the mass market. And if you are delivering that, you have to be cost-competitive."

BYD's batteries are heavier than its competitors' but the company says their iron phosphate chemical

mix is safer than those made of lithium and cobalt that sometimes can catch fire if punctured.

Abroad, BYD faces more hurdles in countries that don't promote electric vehicles as aggressively as China does.

In its home city of Shenzhen, the local government has bought more than 4,000 buses and the government of surrounding Guangdong province ordered 6,432 this week. The state-owned utility installs charging stations — something BYD cannot take for granted in other markets.

In the United States, BYD faces a "very large undertaking" of setting up a sales and service network before consumer sales could start, said Austin, a "battery guy" who joined BYD in 2007 from Motorola Inc., where he had helped manage purchases of the Chinese company's batteries for mobile phones.

"Our success in 2015 has probably accelerated some of our plans to bring consumer electric vehicles to export markets," he said. "We have a big job preparing ourselves for that."

Paris climate deal on track for early start

KARL RITTER, Associated Press

CARA ANNA, Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — About 160 countries are expected to sign the Paris Agreement on climate change Friday in a symbolic triumph for a landmark deal that once seemed unlikely but now appears on track to enter into force years ahead of schedule.

U.N. officials say the signing ceremony Friday will set a record for international diplomacy: Never before have so many countries inked an agreement on the first day of the signing period.

That could help pave the way for the pact to become effective long before the original 2020 deadline — possibly this year— though countries must first formally approve it through their domestic procedures.

"We are within striking distance of having the agreement start years earlier than anyone anticipated," Brian Deese, an adviser to President Barack Obama, said in a speech last week at Reed College in Portland, Oregon.

The U.S. and China, which together account for nearly 40 percent of global emissions, have said they intend to formally join the agreement this year. It will enter into force once 55 countries representing at least 55 percent of global emissions have done so.

"There's incredible momentum," former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, who heads the U.N. Development Program, told The Associated Press. "We're moving as quickly as possible to action."

She said her agency is working with more than 140 countries on climate change-related issues, and that financing to make the Paris Agreement a reality is "critical, and let's hope everyone lives up to commitments made."

The agreement, the world's response to hotter temperatures, rising seas and other impacts of climate change, was hammered out in December outside Paris. The pact was a major breakthrough in U.N. climate negotiations, which for years were bogged down with disputes between rich and poor countries over who should do what to fight global warming.

The mood was so pessimistic after a failed 2009 climate summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, that U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres said she thought a global deal wouldn't happen in her lifetime. Now she expects the Paris Agreement to take effect by 2018.

Under the agreement, countries set their own targets for reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The targets are not legally binding but countries must update them every five years.

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That's because scientific analyses show the initial set of targets that countries pledged before Paris don't match the long-term goal of the agreement to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), compared with pre-industrial times. Global average temperatures have already climbed by almost 1 degree C. Last year was the hottest on record.

"Even if the Paris pledges are implemented in full, they are not enough to get us even close to a 2-degree pathway," said John Sterman, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "I don't think people understand how urgent it is."

The latest analysis by Sterman and colleagues at the Climate Interactive research group shows the Paris pledges put the world on track for 3.5 degrees C of warming. A separate analysis by Climate Action Tracker, a European group, projected warming of 2.7 degrees C.

Either way, scientists say the consequences could be catastrophic in some places, wiping out crops, flooding coastal areas and melting glaciers and Arctic sea ice.

Small island nations and other vulnerable countries managed in Paris to get others to agree to an aspirational goal of keeping the temperature rise below 1.5 degrees C, which many analysts say won't be possible without removing vast amounts of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

"In Paris they reached what was possible diplomatically and maybe went a little bit beyond it," Sterman said. "I think we should celebrate it. But the physics of the climate are relentless."

There is some good news. Global energy emissions, the biggest source of man-made greenhouse gases, were flat last year even though the global economy grew, according to the International Energy Agency. Some say that shows countries are finally driving their economies forward without burning massive amounts of oil, coal and gas.

Still, those fossil fuels are used much more widely than renewable sources like wind and solar power.

After signing the agreement, countries need to formally ratify it. Procedures for doing that vary among countries. The U.N. says about 10 countries, most of them small island developing states, will deposit their instruments of ratification on Friday and that the world body will have a better idea by the end of the day which other countries intend to ratify the agreement this year.

The Obama administration says the deal is consistent with existing U.S. law and doesn't require the approval of the Republican-controlled Senate, where it would likely face stiff resistance. The administration is expected to treat the deal as an executive agreement, which needs only the president's approval.

Analysts say that if the Paris Agreement enters into force before Obama leaves office in January, it would be more complicated for his successor to withdraw from the deal, because it would take four years to do so under the rules of the agreement.

Also, there would be "a strong negative reaction globally that any administration would have to take into account," said David Waskow of the World Resources Institute in Washington.

U.N. officials say most countries attending Friday's signing ceremony in New York will be represented by their head of state or government. Secretary of State John Kerry will represent the United States.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is encouraging countries to use the signing to announce time-lines for implementing the agreement, U.N. officials say. Those who don't sign the agreement Friday have a year to do so.

The U.N. says the previous record for opening-day signatures for an international agreement stands at 119. That record is from the signing of the Law of the Sea Treaty in 1994.

Renowned Cuban pro-reform economist fired as chill sets in

ANDREA RODRIGUEZ, Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — One of Cuba's most renowned advocates of economic reform has been fired from his University of Havana think tank for sharing information with Americans without authorization, among other alleged violations.

The dismissal of Omar Everleny Perez adds to a chillier mood that has settled over much of Cuba as the country's leaders try to quash the widespread jubilation that greeted President Barack Obama's historic trip to the island last month.

The Cuban Communist Party's twice-a-decade Congress ended Tuesday after four days of officials issuing tough warnings about the need to maintain a defensive stance against what they called the United States' continuing imperialist aspirations. Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez described Obama's visit as an "attack on the foundation of our political ideas, our history, our culture and our symbols." President Raul Castro described the U.S. as an "enemy" seeking to seduce vulnerable sectors of society, including intellectuals and members of Cuba's new private sector.

While that was going on, Cuban academics began sharing the news that Perez had been dismissed from his post at the Center for Studies of the Cuban Economy on April 8, less than three weeks after Obama's visit.

Perez is one of the country's best-known academics, an expert in developing economies who served as a consultant for Castro's government when it launched a series of market-oriented economic reforms after he took over from his brother Fidel in 2008. Perez made dozens of trips to universities and conferences in the U.S. and frequently received foreign visitors researching the Cuban economy.

Reached by The Associated Press on Wednesday, Perez confirmed his dismissal by center director Humberto Blanco for having unauthorized conversations with foreign institutions and informing "North American representatives" about the internal procedures of the university.

The dismissal letter described Perez, 56, as "irresponsible" and "negligent" for continuing to engage in unauthorized activity after warnings from his superiors. It also accused him of receiving unauthorized payments for a study of the South Korean economy and said he was barred from returning to work for at least four years.

Perez said he believed Cuban authorities were seeking to make an example of him not because of the allegations in the letter, but because of his critical writings about the slow pace of economic reforms.

"Sometimes they don't like what you write or think," he told the AP.

Perez was one of the first state economists to begin publishing in non-government publications, including several run by the Catholic Church. In 2010, he became a key consultant in reforms implemented by Raul Castro that include the legalization of hundreds of new types of private businesses, a loosening of restrictions on foreign investment, the opening of a real estate market and the handing of unused agricultural land to small farmers.

"I'm still a revolutionary and a nationalist and I believe in many of the reforms that Raul Castro is undertaking," he said.

Cuba's system is based on the communist government's total oversight of virtually all elements of society, including the press, arts and academia.

While room for debate has grown somewhat under Raul Castro, and Cubans openly criticize the government in private conversations, intellectuals who publicly offend official sensibilities have found themselves losing their state jobs and other privileges.

"His call to speed up the reforms and make them coherent may have served to frighten some of the forces of immobility in the bureaucracy," said Armando Chaguaceda, a Cuban political scientist based

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at the University of Guanajuato in Mexico. "It's a terrible message to economists that will affect the government's own capacity to hear feedback about its reforms."

Political scientist Esteban Morales was expelled from the Communist Party in 2010 for two years for denouncing corruption. Sociologist Roberto Zurbano lost his job at a state cultural center after discussing racism in Cuba in an editorial published in The New York Times. In 2013, musician Roberto Carcasses was temporarily barred from cultural institutions after criticizing the government during a concert, and director Juan Carlos Cremata was prevented last year from putting on a production of Eugene Ionesco's "Exit the King," a play about a once-powerful dying leader.

Pavel Vidal, a former colleague of Perez now working in Colombia, said the University of Havana was taking limits on academic work to an extreme.

"The public work of academics has been coming under increasingly greater control," he said, even as Castro's reforms make it more urgent for the country to have "new ideas and an open and honest debate about the future of the country."

Asian stocks rise, buoyed by US stocks' gains and weaker yen

TERESA CERAJANO, Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Asian stocks rose in early trading Thursday, buoyed by a rise in U.S. stocks following an uptick in oil prices. A weakening of the Japanese yen pushed Tokyo's benchmark higher.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 gained 2.0 percent to 17,236.37, as exporters' shares gained, since a weaker yen usually tends to boost their profits. Hong Kong's Hang Seng climbed 1.8 percent to 21,610.86. The Shanghai Composite index added 0.1 percent to 2,976.02. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 rose 1.1 percent to 5,339.10. South Korea's KOSPI was up 0.7 percent to 2,018.81. Southeast Asian markets were higher.

WALL STREET: Financial and energy companies led a modest increase in U.S. stocks Wednesday, giving the stock market its third gain in a row. The markets got a boost from a 4 percent climb in the price of oil. When oil prices rise they tend to favor battered energy stocks and financial companies such as banks, which have been in the doldrums due to investor concerns that loans to struggling oil companies could go bad. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 42.67 points, or 0.2 percent, to 18,096.27. The Standard & Poor's 500 index added 1.60 points, or 0.1 percent, to 2,102.40. The Nasdaq composite index gained 7.80 points, or 0.2 percent, to 4,948.13. The Dow is now up almost 4 percent for the year, while the S&P 500 is up about 3 percent. The Nasdaq narrowed its loss to 1.2 percent.

THE QUOTE: "Asian markets look set to follow Wall Street's lead today," said Alex Furber, CMC Markets' Senior Client Services Executive. "The Nikkei opened in the green, helped also by a weaker yen, whilst Australia's ASX 200 was also up at the open."

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude oil shed 11 cents to 44.07 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange after a settlement of 44.18 on Wednesday. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 17 cents to \$45.97.

CURRENCIES: The euro fell to \$1.1299 from \$1.1303 on Wednesday. The dollar fell to 109.71 yen from 109.85 yen.

Today in History The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, April 21, the 112th day of 2016. There are 254 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

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On April 21, 1926, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II was born in Mayfair, London; she was the first child of The Duke and Duchess of York, who later became King George VI and the Queen Mother. Christened Elizabeth Alexandra Mary, the princess became monarch upon the death of her father in 1952, beginning a 64-year-old reign surpassing that of Queen Victoria.

On this date:

In 1649, the Maryland Toleration Act, providing for freedom of worship for all Christians, was passed by the Maryland assembly.

In 1789, John Adams was sworn in as the first vice president of the United States.

In 1816, Charlotte Bronte, author of "Jane Eyre," was born in Thornton, England.

In 1836, an army of Texans led by Sam Houston defeated the Mexicans at San Jacinto, assuring Texas independence.

In 1910, author Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, died in Redding, Connecticut, at age 74.

In 1930, fire broke out inside the overcrowded Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, killing 332 inmates.

In 1940, the quiz show that asked the "\$64 question," "Take It or Leave It," premiered on CBS Radio.

In 1955, the Jerome Lawrence-Robert Lee play "Inherit the Wind," inspired by the Scopes trial of 1925, opened at the National Theatre in New York.

In 1960, Brazil inaugurated its new capital, Brasilia, transferring the seat of national government from Rio de Janeiro.

In 1976, clinical trials of the swine flu vaccine began in Washington, D.C.

In 1986, a rediscovered vault in Chicago's Lexington Hotel that was linked to Al Capone was opened during a widely watched live TV special hosted by Geraldo Rivera; aside from a few bottles and a sign, the vault turned out to be empty.

In 1996, oddsmaker Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder died in Las Vegas at age 77.

Ten years ago: Nouri al-Maliki (NOO'-ree ahl-MAHL'-ih-kee) was nominated by the Shiites as Iraq's prime minister after outgoing Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari (EE'-brah-heem ahl JAH'-fah-ree) gave up his bid for another term. Chinese President Hu Jintao (hoo jin-tow) wrapped up his U.S. tour with a visit to Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Miss Kentucky Tara Elizabeth Conner was crowned Miss USA during the pageant in Baltimore.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama announced the Justice Department was assembling a team to "root out any cases of fraud or manipulation" in oil markets that might be contributing to \$4 a gallon-plus gasoline prices. Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., announced he would step down amid a developing ethics probe over how he'd handled an admitted extramarital affair with a former staffer and whether he tried to illegally cover it up. (The Senate Ethics Committee referred the case to the Justice Department, which decided not to prosecute Ensign.) Jess Jackson, 81, founder of the Kendall-Jackson winery, died in Geyerville, California.

One year ago: An Egyptian criminal court sentenced ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi to 20 years in prison over the killing of protesters in 2012. An Indonesian court found an American couple, Tommy Schaefer and Heather Mack, guilty of premeditated murder and sentenced them to prison in the death of Mack's mother, Sheila von Wiese-Mack, on the resort island of Bali. The head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Michele Leonhart, announced her retirement in the wake of allegations that DEA agents had attended sex parties with prostitutes. Pope Francis accepted the resignation of U.S. Bishop Robert Finn, who'd pleaded guilty to failing to report a suspected child abuser. Mary Doyle Keefe, 92, the model for Norman Rockwell's iconic 1943 Rosie the Riveter painting, died in Simsbury, Connecticut.

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Today's Birthdays: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is 90. Actress-comedian-writer Elaine May is 84. Actor Charles Grodin is 81. Actor Reni Santoni (REH'-nee san-TOH'-nee) is 78. Anti-death penalty activist Sister Helen Prejean is 77. Singer-musician Iggy Pop is 69. Actress Patti LuPone is 67. Actor Tony Danza is 65. Actor James Morrison is 62. Actress Andie MacDowell is 58. Rock singer Robert Smith (The Cure) is 57. Rock musician Michael Timmins (Cowboy Junkies) is 57. Actor John Cameron Mitchell is 53. Rapper Michael Franti (Spearhead) is 50. Actor Toby Stephens is 47. Rock singer-musician Glen Hansard (The Frames) is 46. Actor Rob Riggle is 46. Comedian Nicole Sullivan is 46. Football player-turned-actor Brian White is 43. Olympic gold medal pairs figure skater Jamie Sale (sah-LAY') is 39. Rock musician David Brenner (Theory of a Deadman) is 38. Actor James McAvoy is 37. NFL quarterback Tony Romo is 36. Actor Terrence J is 34. Actress Gugu Mbatha-Raw is 33. Actor Christoph (cq) Sanders is 28. Rock singer Sydney Sierota (Echosmith) is 19.

Thought for Today: "I try to avoid looking forward or backward, and try to keep looking upward." — Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855).