

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, May 14

Birthdays: • Linda Johnson • Pam Rix • Sheila Johnson • Kevin Radke • Madisyn Waage • Alesha Peterson • Ryan Schelle
4:30pm: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church Mass

Sunday, May 15

Birthdays: • Beth Hendrickson • Pearl Dean • Brandee Sundstrom • Casey Dennert • Marcy Blackmun
9:00am: Emmanuel Lutheran worship with communion
9:00am: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church Mass
9:00am: St. John's Lutheran Worship
10:00am: Heaven Bound Ministries worship at Pierpont Church
11:00am: United Methodist Church Worship
2:00pm: GHS Graduation
3:30pm: Emmanuel Lutheran fellowship at Golden Living Center (Emmanuel men serve)

Monday, May 16

School Breakfast: Cook's Choice
School Lunch: Cook's Choice.
Senior Menu: Chicken alfredo, lemon buttered broccoli, fruit dessert, French bread.
6:30am: Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study
10:00am: 7th/8th NEC Meet at Britton
10:00am: NEC Girls Golf meet at Milbank
7:30pm: St. John's Lutheran Christian Literature Circle

Tuesday, May 17

School Breakfast: Cook's Choice
School Lunch: Hot dogs/brats, baked beans, potato chips, brownie.
Senior Menu: Roast pork, baked potato with

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

The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **Closed**

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McKinsey Gruber

BRIDE-TO-BE OF SAM SMITH

WHEN

SATURDAY | MAY 14 | 9:30 to 11:30 A.M.

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Fifth Grade D.A.R.E. Graduation



In back, left to right, are Shelby Hendrickson, Ethan Pigors, Corbin Reich, Cole Simon, Cadance Tullis and Ellie Weismantel; in the middle row, left to right, are Caleb Hanten, Porter Johnson, Ava Kramer, Tate Larson, Tannor McGannon, Kaylynn Overacker and Officer Justin Cleveland; in front, left to right, are Joe Achen, Dylan Anderson, Ashtyn Bahr, Brenna Carda, Jack Dinger, Kamryn Flihs, Shallyn Foertsch and Brooke Gengerke. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



In back, left to right, are Janel Lone, Andrew Marzahn, Tyson Parrow, Shaylee Peterson, Marlee Tollifson, Ava Tunheim and Police Chief Stacy Mayou, in the middle row, left to right, are Nicole Figueroa, Chase Gackle, Ethan Gengerke, Jace Gleason, Aeydon Johnson, Aspen Johnson and Jakob Lewandowski; in front, left to right, are Michael Aalseth, Kaleb Antonsen, Jackson Bahr, Carter Barse, Cole Bisbee, Ethan Clark, Sierra Ehresmann and Danny Feist.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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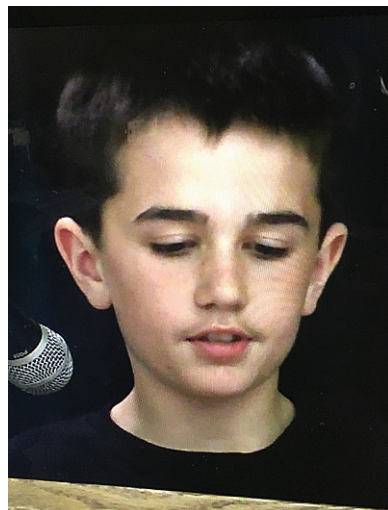
Elementary Principal Brett Schwan gave the opening remarks and the welcome at the D.A.R.E. graduation. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



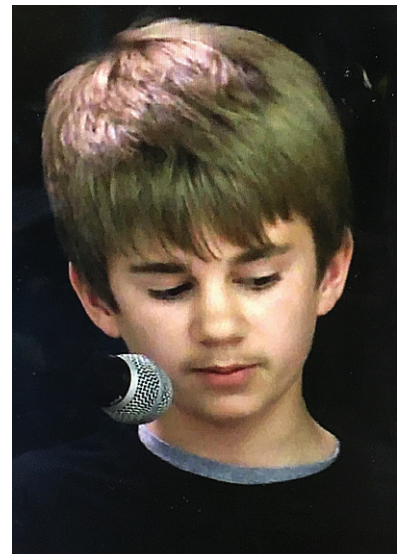
State Trooper Levi Jensen was the guest speaker at the Groton Fifth Grade D.A.R.E. graduation held Friday in the GHS Gym. He talked about his dog who is able to snuff out drugs. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Andrew Marzahn's essay placed third on Janel Lone's side. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jacob Lewandowski's essay placed first on Janel Lone's side. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Cole Bisbee's essay placed second on Janel Lone's side. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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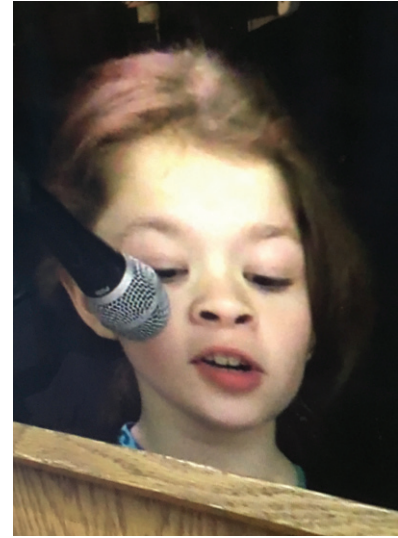
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Ava Kramer's essay placed third on Shelby Hendrickson's side. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Ellie Weismantel's essay placed second on Shelby Hendrickson's side. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

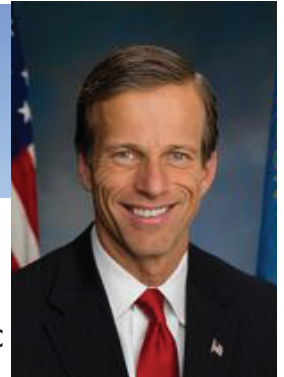


Kamryn Fliehs' essay placed first on Shelby Hendrickson's side. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Essay contest winners were Andrew Marzahn, third place; Jacob Lewandowski, first place; Cole Bisbee, second place; Kamryn Fliehs, first place; Ava Kramer, third place; and Ellie Weismantel, second place. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



South Dakotans Feeling the Effect of the Obama Economy

Late last month, the federal government released preliminary numbers on economic growth in the first quarter of 2016, and let me tell you, the news wasn't good. The U.S.

economy grew at a dismal rate of 0.5 percent during the first three months of the year, which essentially means it barely grew at all. While any one report of slow or nonexistent economic growth is bad, under President Obama, weak growth has become the new norm.

2.1 percent. That's how much (or how little, depending on how you look at it) the economy has grown, on average, since June 2009 when the recession officially ended. In the typical post-1960 recovery, by contrast, economic growth averaged 3.7 percent. And while a 1.6 percentage point difference might not sound like a lot, it's a huge difference. It's the difference between a stagnant economy and a flourishing economy. More importantly, for families across South Dakota, it's the difference between surviving and thriving.

For too many American families, this slow economic growth and dismal recovery has prematurely ended a lot of their dreams – dreams like owning their own home, sending their kids to college, and having a secure retirement. And the kind of growth we need to turn this ship around is nowhere in sight. Sadly, the Obama economy has some leading economists wondering if 2 percent growth is something Americans should just start getting used to.

Fortunately, though, we're not condemned to the Obama economy's weak growth, because if you look at the president's record, it's easy to see why our economy is still sputtering along. A failed trillion-dollar stimulus, \$1.7 trillion in new taxes, Obamacare, more than 2,700 new federal regulations, and federal debt that has nearly doubled on the president's watch. I could go on and on. The upside to all of this is that the president's policies don't have to be permanent.

We can repeal Obamacare and the incredible burdens it's placing on families and small businesses. We can replace the president's tax hikes with comprehensive tax reform that focuses on lowering taxes for families and making America the best place in the world to do business. And we can repeal some of the thousands of burdensome regulations the president has imposed over the last seven-plus years in office.

It's sometimes easy to forget that every regulation the government imposes, no matter how small, has a cost – and those costs are paid by American families and businesses. Take for example the president's decision to allow the EPA to regulate ponds and ditches on private land. The Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule will have significant economic impacts for farmers, ranchers, and other property owners, who will likely be hit with new federal permits, compliance costs, and the threat of significant fines.

Repealing some of the worst of President Obama's regulations, like WOTUS, would drastically reduce the burdens facing American families and businesses, and that would put more money in families' pockets and free up business to do what they do best – innovate and create jobs.

If we continue on the path we're on right now, we might be the first generation of Americans to leave the next generation worse off, but we don't have to be. We can reverse the course the president has set during his administration and put in place the kind of policies that will grow our economy and lift the burdens on American families. Senate Republicans have already been working to undo the worst policies of the Obama administration, and we're going to continue to fight until our nation's economy is thriving and all families have the opportunity to achieve the American dream once again.



Addressing the Opioid Epidemic

It could start with a headache. Or perhaps an injury from sports or even a military deployment. Maybe it was a surgery and the prescription pain medication was supposed to be used only for a short time. Eventually, however, the medicine you relied on to heal became the drug that made you sick.

Nationwide, around 15 million Americans abuse prescription drugs annually, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Drugs like hydrocodone, oxycodone, and morphine – which as a category are called opioids – are frequently prescribed by doctors and some are even common in medicine cabinets and on bathroom counters across South Dakota. If they are abused or happen to fall into the wrong hands, they can be fatal.

In 2013 alone, the latest year where reliable data is available, 32 South Dakotans died from opioid overdoses. Nationwide, we lose one person to a drug overdose almost every 12 minutes.

Earlier this month, I voted to advance a series of bills that combat the opioid epidemic and help heal those suffering most. It was a bipartisan effort that I'm incredibly proud of.

One of the bills, which I helped lead on, specifically addressed opioid addiction in mothers who are pregnant or just had their babies. The number of infants born to mothers dependent on drugs nearly quadrupled from 2004 to 2013. In South Dakota, there were more than 200 reported cases of opiate use by new moms between 2009 and 2013, according to a presentation given at SDSU in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Health.

The bill I cosponsored improved the support offered for counseling, pediatric health care, prenatal and postpartum health care, and parental training. It also created a pilot program for state substance abuse agencies to figure out ways to bridge the gaps in service for pregnant and postpartum women who are addicted to drugs.

In addition to these provisions, I helped pass legislation to get first responders better access to the training and equipment needed for administering new medicines that can reverse opioid overdoses on the spot. This is a goal the South Dakota legislature has been working toward as well, passing legislation in recent years to help give first responders and family members better access to these life-saving antidotes. I'm hopeful our efforts on the federal level can support what's already being done in the state.

Treating only the symptoms will not cure the problem though. Approximately three-fourths of the world's opioid prescription drugs are prescribed in the U.S. – even though we only comprise about 5 percent of the world's population. If this legislation becomes law, it would bring together federal agencies, state medical boards, health care professionals, and experts from pain and addiction-recovery communities, challenging them to come up with better practices to manage acute and chronic pain.

The Senate has also acted on a bipartisan legislative package to fight opioid addiction. With two strong bills on the table, the House and Senate will be coming together to work out the differences before getting it to the President to sign. There's momentum on both sides to get this done, so I'm optimistic new provisions will take effect soon.

No state – no community – is immune from opioid addictions. Whether in Sioux Falls, Pierre or Pine Ridge, families are struggling with it. But while it is a chronic disease, it doesn't have to be terminal. I'm hopeful new federal resources will be available soon. Still, to overcome the epidemic, all of us need to play a role. If you or a family member is concerned about the use or abuse of prescription pain medication, please talk to your doctor immediately. Help is out there.

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Today in Weather History

May 14, 1982: Torrential rains pushed the Bad River over the banks at Fort Pierre. One house four miles outside of Fort Pierre had to sandbag. Rainfall amount of 3.83 inches was recorded in Pierre.

1896 - The mercury plunged to 10 degrees below zero at Climax, CO. It was the lowest reading of record for the U.S. during the month of May. (David Ludlum)

1898 - A severe thunderstorm, with some hailstones up to 9.5 inches in circumference, pounded a four mile wide path across Kansas City MO. South-facing windows were broken in nearly every house in central and eastern parts of the city, and several persons were injured. An even larger hailstone was thought to have been found, but it turned out to be a chunk of ice tossed out the window of a building by a prankster. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac) (The Weather Channel)

1923: An early morning violent estimated F5 tornado cut a 45-mile path of destruction through Howard and Mitchell counties in Texas. 23 people lost their lives and 250 sustained injuries. The path width of the tornado reached 1.5 miles at one point, and entire farms were "wiped off the face of the earth". The First Baptist Church in Colorado City, Texas became an emergency hospital for tornado victims.

1987 - Seven cities across the western U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as unseasonably hot weather made a comeback. The record high of 103 degrees at Sacramento CA was their ninth in eleven days, and also marked a record seven days of 100 degree heat for the month. Their previous record was two days of 100 degree heat in May. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Sunny and dry weather prevailed across the nation. Temperatures warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the Great Plains Region and the Mississippi Valley. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather in south central Texas and the Southern High Plains Region during the afternoon and evening hours. Thunderstorms produced softball size hail at Spearman and Hitchcock, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from northwest Texas to western Missouri. Severe thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including nine in Texas. Four tornadoes in Texas injured a total of nine persons. Thunderstorms in Texas also produced hail four inches in diameter at Shamrock, and hail four and a half inches in diameter near Guthrie. Thunderstorms over northeastern Kansas produced more than seven inches of rain in Chautauqua County between 9 PM and midnight. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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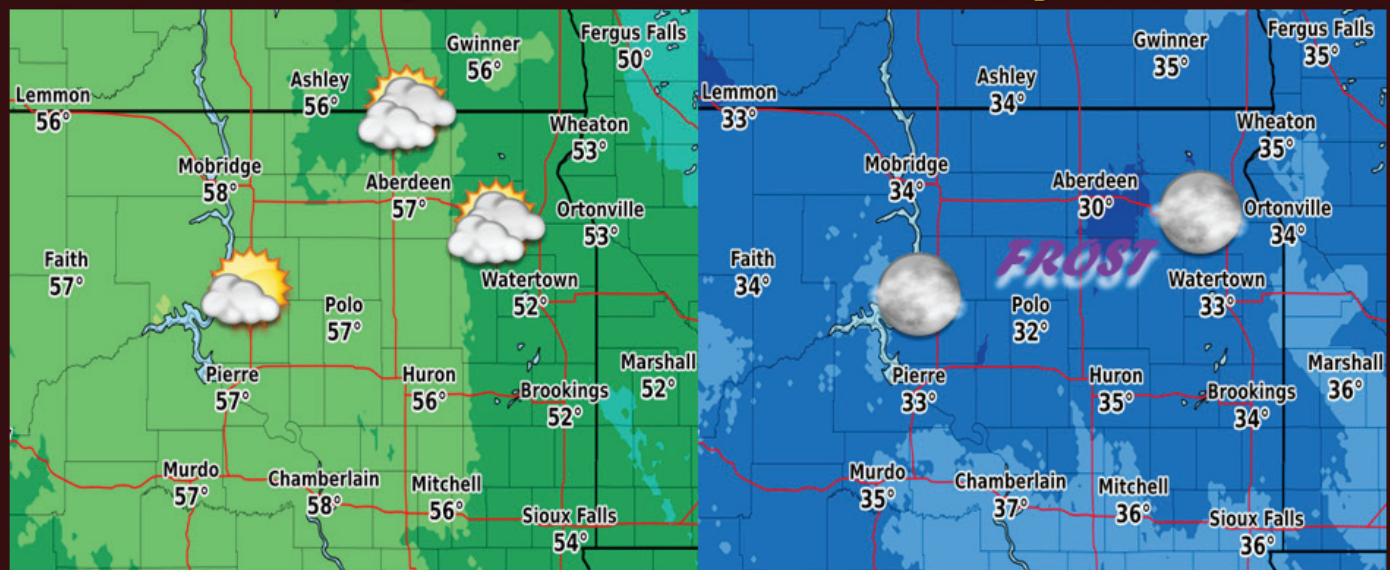
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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
Frost then Slight Chance Rain	Mostly Cloudy then Frost	Frost then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 56 °F	Low: 30 °F	High: 66 °F	Low: 41 °F	High: 66 °F	Low: 39 °F	High: 67 °F

Just A Tad Warmer Today/Tonight

Todays Highs

Overnight Lows



National Weather Service, Aberdeen SD

Published on: 05/14/2016 at 5:02AM

It will be just a tad warmer today, although a weak system will bring clouds into the eastern Dakotas. We could see another night with readings down around freezing for much of the area. Over the course of the work week - temperatures will see a steady warming trend.

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Yesterday's Weather

High: 47.6 at 12:05 AM

Low: 34.5 at 11:52 AM

High Gust: 36 at 2:07 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 94° in 1932

Record Low: 24 in 2004

Average High: 68°F

Average Low: 44°F

Average Precip in May: 1.43

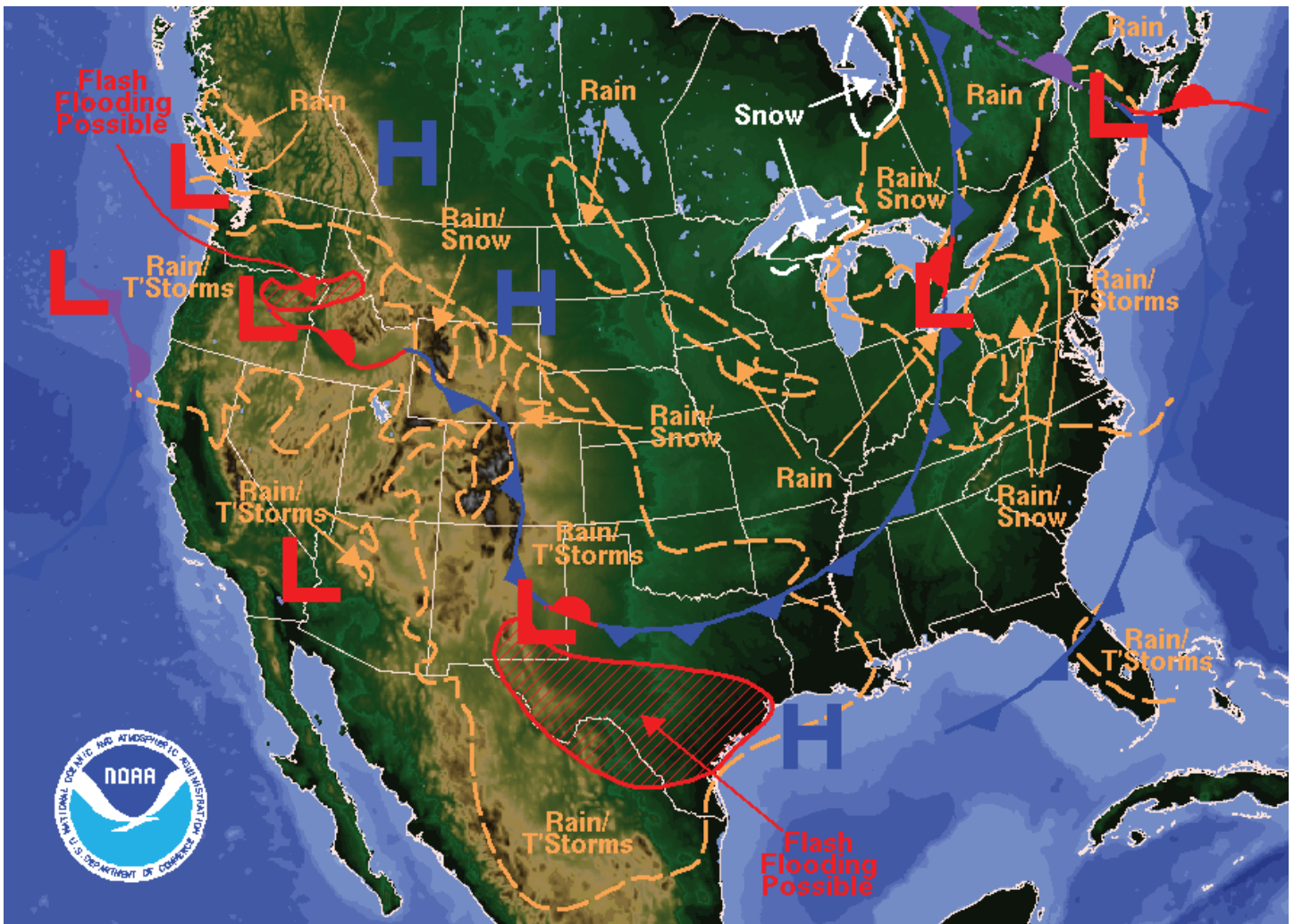
Precip to date in May: 0.11

Average Precip to date: 5.46

Precip Year to Date: 3.50

Sunset Tonight: 8:56 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:02 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Sat, May 14, 2016, issued 4:39 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Kong based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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FAITHFUL FORECASTER

Harold stopped by the gift store to purchase a barometer to inform him of changing weather conditions. When he got home he hung it on the wall in his library. After a few moments he decided to see if it was working. When it warned him of an impending tornado, he became angry and took it back to the store demanding a new one.

Pleased with his new one, he hurried home to hang it on the wall in the place of the one he thought was not working properly. As he turned the corner of the street, he was shocked with disbelief. While he was gone, a tornado came through town and his home was completely destroyed.

Many look at the Bible the way that Harold looked at his barometer: They doubt it or deny it or attempt to distort its message one way or another. But one's opinion will not alter the invitation to salvation or the promise of judgment.

God's Word warns us that "each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment." We hear little about judgment because it is not a popular theme in today's culture. God's Word and promises are as certain as His love and salvation. We cannot change facts – only accept or reject them.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to accept the teachings of Your Word and be prepared for Your judgment and to live knowing we will stand before You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

News from the Associated Press

Police apprehend man wanted in shooting of tribal officer

ROSEBUD, S.D. (AP) — Officials with the Rosebud Indian Reservation police say a man accused of shooting and wounding a tribal officer earlier this week has been apprehended, but would give no further details.

Linn Crossdog III had been at large since the shooting early Tuesday. His arrest came on the same day a reward in the case was increased to \$10,000.

Police officials referred questions about his arrest to federal authorities. FBI spokesman Kyle Loven did not immediately return a phone message.

The Rapid City Journal reports that the officer is listed in stable condition. His name has not been released.

State warns residents about Windows technical support scam

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Attorney General Marty Jackley is again warning South Dakota residents about a scam targeting computer users.

Jackley says the state's Consumer Protection Division has been inundated with reports from residents who have received phone calls from someone claiming to be with Microsoft Windows' support center and wanting access to the consumer's computer to make repairs.

The fraudulent call begins with the scammer telling consumers that their computers need an upgrade or have an issue that needs to be fixed immediately. Jackley says the scammer then connects to the computers remotely and obtains financial information and other data from consumers.

Jackley says neither Microsoft nor any of its partners make unsolicited calls to computer users. Jackley says residents who have received calls from the con artists should contact the state's Consumer Protection Division.

AG: Obama lacks authority over transgender bathroom policy

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley says President Obama doesn't have the authority to require schools to allow transgender students to use bathrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity.

Jackley's statement came after the Obama administration issued a directive Friday over bathroom access for transgender students.

The guidance from leaders at the federal Education and Justice Departments says public schools must treat transgender students in a way that matches their gender identity, even if their education records or identity documents indicate a different gender.

Jackley says the administration's directive and threat of lawsuits and withholding of federal education funding "is not a proper approach." He says he's discussing action with other attorneys general.

The guidance doesn't impose new legal requirements, but clarifies expectations for districts receiving federal funds.

14-year-old girl dies following rollover crash in Brookings

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — A 14-year-old girl has died following a rollover crash in Brookings.

Trinity Kuehn, of Brookings, died Tuesday at a Sioux Falls hospital, where she was taken after crashing the evening of May 3 in rural Brookings.

Brookings County Assistant Sheriff Scott Sebring tells the Brookings Register it appeared that Kuehn lost control of the sport utility vehicle she was driving when she tried to avoid several ruts on the road. The SUV entered the ditch and rolled.

Sebring says Kuehn has thrown from and pinned under the vehicle.

Kuehn was an eighth-grade student at George S. Mickelson Middle School. The newspaper reports stu-

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dents at the school had worn blue shirts on May 6 to create "a sea of blue" in support of Kuehn, whose favorite color was blue.

Guns stolen in South Dakota recovered from Colorado suspects

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Three handguns stolen from a Rapid City outdoors store in April have been recovered in Colorado after violent crimes.

Rapid City police say two of the guns were recovered following a standoff in Lakewood, Colorado, with a suspect in a fatal shooting. The third gun was recovered from a suspect killed in an officer-involved shooting in Aurora.

That shooting was preceded by the suspect carjacking a vehicle at gunpoint before leading police on a high-speed chase.

The guns were among 25 stolen from The Rooster store in early April. Rapid City Police Capt. James Johns says finding the rest of the guns is "a priority concern."

Honeybee colonies down 40 percent in South Dakota

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The number of honeybee colonies in South Dakota is down 40 percent.

The Agriculture Department says operations with five or more colonies totaled 30,000 on Jan. 1, down from 50,000 the previous year.

Colonies lost during the first three months of this year totaled 770, or 1 percent.

South Dakota ranks second in the nation in the production of honey.

Eagle Butte woman gets 3 years in prison for stabbing sister

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — An Eagle Butte woman has been sentenced for stabbing her sister after their parents unsuccessfully tried to lock her out of the house.

U.S. Attorney Randolph Seiler says 21-year-old Rikki Hill got into a fight with her sister on Aug. 12, 2015. He says the girls' parents pushed Hill out of the house and locked the door after Hill grabbed a knife from the kitchen, but Hill re-entered the house by crawling through a basement window.

Seiler says Hill then stabbed her sister in the arm and unsuccessfully tried to stab her in the heart.

Hill pleaded guilty in February to assault with a dangerous weapon. She was recently sentenced to three years in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release.

Motorcycle crash on Hill City's Main Street kills driver

HILL CITY, S.D. (AP) — A 25-year-old man is dead after a motorcycle crash on Hill City's Main Street.

The Highway Patrol says the crash happened about 7 p.m. Thursday when the motorcycle driver lost control on a curve and was thrown from the bike.

The man later died of his injuries. The patrol did not immediately identify him. He was alone on the motorcycle.

Criminal offenses, arrests rise in South Dakota in 2015

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Crime statistics for 2015 show an increase in overall crime in South Dakota from the previous year, some of which can be attributed to a 22 percent jump in drug arrests.

"Increased methamphetamine use is continuing to have a significant impact on higher levels of violent crime in South Dakota," Attorney General Marty Jackley said when releasing the data Friday.

The report shows drops in many property crimes and juvenile offenses but a need to strengthen prevention when it comes to drug and alcohol offenses, financial crimes and child sex crimes, Jackley said.

The statistics "reflect that overall, South Dakota remains a safe place to live as a result of strong community involvement and law enforcement efforts," he said.

Law enforcement agencies in the state last year reported about 40,000 total arrests, up nearly 6 percent from 2014. Total offenses were up 9 percent, to about 71,000.

Homicide and negligent manslaughter arrests dropped from 20 to 16. Arrests also dropped for thefts, arson, burglaries and prostitution. Arrests for sex offenses, assault, fraud, robberies, motor vehicle thefts, driving under the influence and child pornography all increased.

Juvenile arrests dropped nearly 4 percent, to about 4,700. Juvenile arrests have fallen 32 percent since a recent peak of just under 7,000 in 2009.

Students from 12 tribal nations graduating from UTTC

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Students from 12 tribal nations around the country are getting their degrees from United Tribes Technical College.

The Bismarck school run by North Dakota tribes is holding its spring commencement Friday afternoon. A traditional meal will follow.

This year's guest speaker is Brad Hawk, the Indian health systems administrator for North Dakota's Indian Affairs Commission.

Pfizer says it's blocking use of drugs for lethal injections

ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS, Associated Press

Pharmaceutical company Pfizer said Friday it was blocking use of its drugs in lethal injections, which means all federally-approved drugmakers whose medications could be used for executions have now put them off limits.

"Pfizer makes its products to enhance and save the lives of the patients we serve. Consistent with these values, Pfizer strongly objects to the use of its products as lethal injections for capital punishment," the company said in the statement made public on its website Friday.

The company's announcement has limited immediate impact. Its action is an enhancement of a previous policy that follows Pfizer's \$15.23 billion purchase of Lake Forest, Illinois-based Hospira Inc. last year. Hospira had previously prohibited the use of its drugs in capital punishment, as have several other drugmakers.

Pfizer shares closed even Friday at \$33.19.

The development means the approximately 25 FDA-approved companies worldwide able to manufacture drugs used in executions have now blocked the use of the drugs, according to Reprieve, a New York-based human rights organization opposed to the death penalty.

"Pfizer's actions cement the pharmaceutical industry's opposition to the misuse of medicines," Maya Foia, Reprieve director, said in a statement.

Pfizer's announcement was unlikely to have much effect on executions, which have slowed in recent years as drugmakers' prohibition on the drugs took effect.

However, as recently as last year, records showed that labels of Arkansas execution drugs appeared to indicate that the state's potassium chloride, which stops the heart, was made by Hospira. Pfizer spokeswoman Rachel Hooper said the company couldn't speculate on the impact of its decision.

Ohio, which last executed an inmate in January 2014, has repeatedly pushed back executions while it looks for drugs. It now has more than two dozen inmates with firm execution dates, but no drugs to put prisoners to death with.

Some remaining death penalty states have been using compounded versions of drugs that fall outside of FDA approval.

Texas, with the country's busiest death chamber, obtains its pentobarbital for lethal injections from a supplier the state identifies only as a licensed compounding pharmacy. A law that took effect last year keeps the identity of the drug provider confidential. The state has carried out six executions so far in 2016. At least eight are scheduled for the coming months, including two in June.

Texas is fighting a lawsuit trying to force it to identify drugmakers from April 2014, when attorneys unsuccessfully filed appeals to stop two executions by seeking the identity of the drug providers, and September 2015, when the state's secrecy law took effect.

Similar lawsuits about whether states must identify their providers have been argued in states including

Georgia, Arkansas and Missouri.

There have been 14 executions in the U.S. so far in 2016 in five states: six in Texas, five in Georgia and one each in Alabama, Florida and Missouri. Last year, there were 28 in six states.

Some states have passed laws allowing older methods of execution if needed. Last year, Utah approved the use of firing squads for executions if drugs aren't available, while Oklahoma became the first state to approve nitrogen gas for executions if lethal injection drugs become unavailable or are deemed unconstitutional.

In 2014, Tennessee passed a law allowing the use of the electric chair if lethal drugs can't be found. Virginia is debating a similar bill.

The seven drugs affected by Pfizer's policy: pancuronium bromide, potassium chloride, propofol, midazolam, hydromorphone, rocuronium bromide and vecuronium bromide.

AP Exclusive: Peace deal expected with armed Afghan group

LYNNE O'DONNELL, The Associated Press

KARIM SHARIFI, The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Afghan government is expected to finalize a peace deal with a notorious militant insurgent group within days, marking a breakthrough in attempts to end the 15-year war, an official and a representative of the group said on Saturday.

Ataul Rahman Saleem, deputy head of Kabul's High Peace Council, told The Associated Press that the deal with the armed wing of Hezb-i-Islami could be completed on Sunday, after two years of negotiations.

A senior representative of Hezb-i-Islami, Amin Karim, also said he expected President Ashraf Ghani to approve the final version of the agreement on Sunday.

Such a deal would mark a much-needed success for Ghani in forging peace with insurgent groups fighting to overthrow the Kabul administration. His attempts to open a dialogue with the Taliban, mainly via overtures to the Pakistan government which is believed to support it, have failed.

While Hezb-i-Islami has been a largely dormant force in recent years, and has little political relevance in Afghanistan, the deal with the Afghan government could be a template for any future deal with the Taliban. It commits the group to ending its war against Kabul, respecting the Afghan constitution, and ceasing all contact with other armed, anti-government groups.

Hezb-i-Islami is led by warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, best known for killing thousands of people in Kabul during the 1992-1996 civil war.

He is believed to be in Pakistan, though Karim has said he is in an unspecified location in Afghanistan. Under the terms of the 25-point agreement, a draft of which has been seen by AP, he could soon return to Kabul to sign a formal peace deal and take up residence.

Hekmatyar, in his late 60s, is designated a "global terrorist" by the United States and blacklisted by the United Nations along with Osama bin Laden. The agreement obliges the Afghan government to work to have the restrictions lifted.

Hezb-i-Islami has only intermittently been active on the battlefield for some time; its last known major attack was in 2013, when at least 15 people, including six American soldiers, were killed in Kabul.

Saleem said Hekmatyar's associates, including his family, all appeared united behind him and "are not dissenting with their leader." He said a few points in the agreement were still to be thrashed out, and added: "It is strongly possible that we get to the final points tomorrow and finalize the peace negotiations."

Ghani is due to return to Kabul Sunday from an official visit to London. Karim said he expected the president to give his final approval to the content of the truce agreement soon after his return.

Negotiations began in July 2014, Karim said, when Hekmatyar received a letter from Ghani, then campaigning to become president, noting that one of Hekmatyar's key conditions for peace — the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan — was about to be met.

"That was the beginning," Karim said.

Progress stalled after President Barack Obama decided to leave a 10,000-strong force in the country

through to the end of 2016 until Hekmatyar dropped the condition and renamed it “a goal” earlier this year.

Karim and a number of Afghan officials have said that a peace agreement with Hekmatyar’s group could encourage Taliban fighters to end their participation in the war, and eventually lead to a full-blown peace. Others, however, regard Hekmatyar as politically irrelevant and lacking any real influence.

Spokesmen for the Taliban were not immediately available for comment.

The agreement covers a wide range of points, including a guarantee of equality between men and women and respect for the Afghan constitution, both points of contention with the Taliban, whose 1996-2001 rule of Afghanistan was characterized by extremist attitudes that cloistered women in their houses and mandated strict religious education, to the exclusion of almost all else, for boys.

Brokered under the auspices of the High Peace Council — a government body charged with negotiating an end to almost 40 years of war — the agreement allows Hezb-i-Islami to operate as a bona fide political party and participate in elections at every level. It gives legal immunity for “all past political and military proceedings” by Hezb-i-Islami members and mandates the release of all prisoners within three months. Karim said there are about 2,000 Hezb-i-Islami prisoners in jails across Afghanistan.

The Afghan government undertakes to provide housing and security for Hekmatyar at two or three residences in places of his choosing.

One point that could attract opposition from sections of society that fear Ghani’s government is prepared to cede ground to the Taliban in return for peace — including any rollback in rights for women — is a clause that gives Hekmatyar a “consultant” role on “important political and national decisions” facing the government.

For its part, Hezbi-i-Islami pledges to end the war, function as an “active political party,” stop all military activity and dissolve all its military organizations, and cease all contact with other anti-government organizations.

Hezbollah: Insurgents killed top military commander in Syria

BASSEM MROUE, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The top commander of Lebanon’s militant Hezbollah was killed in Syria by insurgent shelling, Hezbollah said Saturday, vowing to continue its involvement in Syria’s civil war.

Mustafa Badreddine became the highest ranking casualty for Hezbollah since the group joined Syria’s civil four years ago.

The group said the blast that killed Mustafa Badreddine near the Damascus International Airport was caused by artillery shelling by “takfiri” groups, a term Hezbollah uses to refer to Sunni extremists.

The area on the southern edge of the Syrian capital is known to host positions of several militant groups including al-Qaida’s branch in Syria, known as the Nusra Front.

Rami Abdurrahman who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that according to his network of activists in the area on the ground, there has been no shelling in the airport area since Wednesday.

“Hezbollah must come forward with proof about the death of its commander,” Abdurrahman said by telephone.

Hezbollah’s statement said Badreddine’s killing will only boost the group’s “will and intention to continue fighting these criminal gangs until they are defeated.”

It added that defeating insurgent groups in Syria was “the wish” of Badreddine who was also known among the group’s ranks as Zulfiqar.

Hezbollah’s statements hinted that the group will continue to be deeply involved in the conflict next door that has killed more than 250,000 people since 2011, including more than 1,000 Hezbollah fighters.

“It is the same battle against the American-Zionist project that the terrorists are spearheading,” Hezbollah’s statement said.

Hezbollah has sent thousands of fighters to Syria to back President Bashar Assad’s government against militants trying to remove him from power.

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The group announced Badreddine's death on Friday without saying when the attack occurred. It said at the time that an investigation has been launched into the cause of the blast.

The 55-year-old Badreddine had directed Hezbollah's operations in Syria since its fighters joined Assad's forces in 2012, the group's biggest-ever military intervention outside of Lebanon. Thousands of guerrillas fighting alongside Syria's military were crucial to tipping the battlefield in the government's favor on multiple fronts, from the suburbs of Damascus to the northern province of Aleppo.

With Badreddine's death, Hezbollah is likely to rely on a younger generation of commanders, moving away from the veterans who came of age during Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war or during Hezbollah's 18-year war against Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, which ended in 2000.

One possible successor, Ibrahim Aqil, is among the last major figures from that generation. A member of Hezbollah's highest military body, the Jihad Council, Aqil has been involved in the Syria fighting and is suspected in hostage-takings in the 1980s and a bombing campaign in Paris in 1986.

For original Trump team, a moment to celebrate and reflect

JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — They were the core of the original Trump team, a small group of largely obscure political operatives who signed on a year ago for the seemingly quixotic presidential campaign of an oft-mocked celebrity businessman.

Yet there they were in the lobby of the Trump Tower in New York City, sharing a very public embrace as Donald Trump's victory in Indiana made it clear he was on track to be the Republican nominee for president. The improbable had come to pass.

"It's professionally very satisfying," campaign manager Corey Lewandowski said in an interview. "A lot of us have been here from the very beginning when the professional pundits said this was a career-ender and we weren't going anywhere."

"We've done something no one thought could be done," Lewandowski said.

Lewandowski's path to Trump Tower was an unlikely one. He grew up in Lowell, Massachusetts, worked as a political operative on Capitol Hill, graduated from the New Hampshire state police academy and took a job with Americans for Prosperity, a Koch brothers-backed advocacy group.

He had no national campaign experience when Trump, after a brief introduction, hired him on the spot to run his bid.

Neither did Trump's spokeswoman, Hope Hicks, a former Ralph Lauren fashion model and a public relations pro who worked for Trump's daughter, Ivanka, and became essentially a one-woman communications shop for a campaign that has attracted unprecedented media attention. Nor did Dan Scavino, a longtime executive at the Trump Organization and golf course manager who became the campaign's social media director.

"These are people who just believed in my father and what he was doing," Eric Trump, one of the candidate's children, said in an interview on Thursday. "That's what makes it special. They wanted to drop everything they were doing to help out. We have a fraction of the staff that other campaigns have yet look where we are."

Scavino, Lewandowski and national political director Michael Glassner were among the members of the campaign staff watching on television when Ted Cruz announced he was suspending his campaign, clearing the path for Trump to become the GOP standardbearer. No one quite remembers who initiated the group hug that was captured on Twitter feeds.

"I will never forget that evening," Scavino said. "(I) thought we would be celebrating winning Indiana and it turned out to be the evening we celebrated the nomination. Without question, it was a historical evening that will go down in the history books."

Iowa conservative Sam Clovis signed on with Trump in August, after quitting former Texas Gov. Rick Perry's struggling campaign. At the time, the move prompted more than a few raised eyebrows in the state's Republican circles, but Clovis says now that his instincts were right.

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"I never took it personal," said Clovis, national co-chairman and policy adviser. "The idea was that I felt that Mr. Trump had a lot to offer the country and we worked hard. It's been a really hard fought battle."

"We're not a typical campaign," Clovis said. "We've done this with a relatively small number of people." And it hasn't all been smooth.

Lewandowski was arrested for simple battery of a reporter, though prosecutors declined to press charges. The original team has been expanded, particularly as it girded for a possible battle with Cruz over delegates, and there has been friction between the old guard and the new, more seasoned hires led by longtime Republican operative Paul Manafort. And more changes seem to be on the horizon as the campaign shifts to the general election.

But that Tuesday night won't be soon forgotten.

"We took a lot of arrows for a long time from a lot of people," said George Gigicos, the campaign's lead advance man. "Vindication is a good word. It's been incredible to start at the bottom and end up on top."

US set to renew, but tweak, sanctions against Myanmar

MATTHEW PENNINGTON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. business lobby says it is high time to drop the remaining U.S. sanctions on Myanmar, but human rights activists and U.S. lawmakers say not so fast.

Former political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi is now running the government after winning elections. Still, the military continues to wield considerable power.

That poses a dilemma for President Barack Obama, who wants to encourage investment but not lose leverage to encourage further reforms. So next week, Obama is expected to renew sanctions for another year. The administration could take some state-run companies off a U.S. Treasury blacklist.

Secretary of State John Kerry will be traveling to Myanmar on May 22 to signal support for the civilian-led government that took power last month and for further democratic and economic reforms, the State Department said Friday.

The U.S. waived its longstanding bans on investment and trade in 2012 after the country also known as Burma began shifting from a half-century of repressive military rule. The U.S. still forbids business dealings with companies majority-owned by the military and dozens of companies and individuals designated by Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. The U.S. also bans arms trading and imports of rubies and jade, one of Myanmar's most lucrative industries.

The authority under which sanctions are imposed is the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which empowers the president to regulate commerce with another country in response to "an unusual and extraordinary threat" to the United States. Some 20 countries are subject to such a declared emergency.

"Does an emergency still exist as it did in Burma five or 10 years ago?" said John Goyer, senior director for Southeast Asia for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which is pushing lifting of Myanmar-specific sanctions that it says create uncertainty for investors. He said that where necessary, the U.S. could blacklist companies and individuals under different sanctions programs.

Although several major U.S. firms like Coca-Cola, General Electric, Chevron and Caterpillar are now operating in Myanmar, U.S. investment of \$248 million represents less than 1 percent of total foreign investment there, a much lower proportion than in other Southeast Asian countries, Goyer said.

Human rights activists see matters through a different prism. They cite continuing repression of 140,000 stateless Rohingya Muslims confined to squalid internment camps, and abuses by Myanmar's army in long-running hostilities against ethnic armies.

"The current sanctions regime is deliberately limited and creates incentives for human rights abusers to clean up their act," said Matthew Smith, executive director of the group Fortify Rights. "These measures are sensible and should remain in place. Known human rights abusers shouldn't profit from improved bilateral relations."

U.S. lawmakers of both parties have also urged Obama to renew the sanctions authority that expires on May 20.

In a letter to the president this week, seven House members said that despite the electoral success of Suu Kyi's party, "there is no path toward ending the military's extraordinary and powerful role in civilian politics." Under the current, junta-era constitution, the military controls three key government ministries and 25 percent of parliamentary seats.

Congressional aides briefed by the administration this week said they expect the sanctions authority to be renewed but for some non-military state-owned enterprises to be either removed from the Treasury blacklist, or get waivers. The aides spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss the matter before the announcement. The aides said that the administration is also considering the duty-free trade benefits for Myanmar, but it's unclear when that might happen.

Tin Htut Oo, former chairman of Myanmar's National Economic and Social Advisory Council, said sanctions were slowing down trade. He stressed the importance of the U.S. restoring duty-free trade benefits to help the economy grow.

"The U.S. can still put some particular sanction on Myanmar but the unnecessary ones, especially (ones) that affect the people, farmers and poor people, should be lifted," he said.

Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Arizona found in contempt of court

WALTER BERRY, Associated Press

JACQUES BILLEAUD, Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The six-term sheriff of metro Phoenix has been found in contempt of court for disobeying a federal judge's orders in a racial profiling case, bringing the lawman who calls himself "America's Toughest Sheriff" a step closer to a possible criminal contempt case that could expose him to fines and even jail time.

Friday's ruling marked one of the biggest legal defeats in long career of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who is known for cracking down on illegal immigration, and was expected to lead to greater court oversight of his office.

U.S. District Judge Murray Snow set a May 31 hearing for attorneys to discuss penalties. Shortly thereafter, Snow said he will issue an order on remedies and whether he will refer the case for criminal contempt.

Arpaio, a month away from turning 84, is running for re-election for the job he's held since 1993. Dan Saban, a former police chief in suburban Buckeye who ran unsuccessfully against Arpaio in 2004 and 2008 and is in the race again, said Friday that it was time for the longtime sheriff to resign.

The civil contempt finding doesn't disqualify Arpaio from holding office. It's unclear whether a criminal contempt finding would prevent him from serving as sheriff. A felony contempt conviction would force him from office, but the judge has the option of recommending either a misdemeanor or felony contempt case.

Arpaio and three of his top aides "have demonstrated a persistent disregard for the orders of this court, as well as an intention to violate and manipulate the laws and policies regulating their conduct," Snow wrote in his 162-page finding of facts ruling.

"We have begun our reading and analysis of this lengthy document, and expect to file a responsive memorandum," attorneys for the sheriff's office said in a statement late Friday afternoon. "Despite disagreeing with some of the court's findings, the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office will continue to work with the court-appointed monitor, the ACLU and plaintiffs to comply with the court's orders, as it has since January 2014."

Snow ruled three years ago that Arpaio's officers systematically racially profiled Latinos in regular traffic stops and immigration patrols. He ordered a sweeping overhaul of the agency, including making patrol officers wear body cameras and conducting more training to ensure officers aren't making unconstitutional traffic stops.

Arpaio has acknowledged violating Snow's orders, including letting deputies conduct his signature immigration patrols 18 months after the judge barred them.

The judge said Friday that Arpaio "engaged in multiple acts of misconduct, dishonesty and bad faith" related to those who sued over the racial profiling and "made multiple intentional misstatements of fact" while testifying during a hearing.

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Snow is expected to require Maricopa County to compensate Latinos who were illegally detained during the 18 months that Arpaio's office violated the prohibition on its immigration patrols. The county has already paid out \$41 million over the past eight years in the case, and taxpayers will have to pick up an additional \$13 million over the next year.

"The irony is, while citizens pay the bill for the sheriff's violation of the previous court orders, they are the only ones who can remove Arpaio from office and restore professionalism to our law enforcement agency," said county Supervisor Steve Gallardo, a longtime Arpaio critic who will be voting on the spending.

Lawyers who pressed the case against Arpaio say at least 190 people were pulled over in violation of the order to stop immigration patrols, though they contend the number of victims is likely much higher. They said Arpaio violated the order because he wanted to look tough on immigration during a difficult 2012 election and later used his powerful position to insulate himself from the consequences of his decision.

One of those attorneys, Cecilia Wang of the American Civil Liberties Union, said Arpaio's defiance must end.

"Strong remedies are needed to protect the community's rights, starting with internal investigations that root out misconduct," she said. "Willing or not, the sheriff will be made to comply with the law."

An internal investigation into the violation didn't find any policy infractions and didn't result in discipline against any employees, even though Arpaio's top aide acknowledged defying the order.

The judge found Chief Deputy Jerry Sheridan lied under oath and was in contempt on two counts. Lt. Joe Sousa and retired Chief Deputy Brian Sands each were found in contempt of one count.

The contempt case also examined a secret investigation by the sheriff's office that opponents say was intended to discredit Snow. Arpaio has been accused of retaliating against his critics in the past but vigorously denied investigating the judge.

He insists the investigation examined claims that someone had hacked the bank information of thousands of people. Snow has said the investigation tried to prove a "bogus conspiracy" between him and the U.S. Justice Department, which was pursuing a separate civil rights lawsuit against Arpaio.

The sheriff had testified that others in his office ran the investigation. Snow said the inquiry was relevant to the contempt case because it raises questions about whether Arpaio testified truthfully about it.

Reyes banned through May under MLB domestic violence policy

PAT GRAHAM, AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — Jose Reyes now knows when he can return. His role — and perhaps his future — with the Colorado Rockies remain as murky as ever, especially given the emergence of rookie shortstop Trevor Story.

Reyes was suspended through May 31 on Friday, the second player penalized under Major League Baseball's new domestic violence policy. Reyes agreed to the punishment and won't appeal, the commissioner's office said. The penalty stemmed from an alleged altercation with his wife at a Hawaii resort last October.

In Reyes' absence, Story has taken his job and become one of baseball's big surprises this season. Story ranks among the big league leaders with 11 homers and 28 RBIs and is batting .275.

"I don't worry myself too much in the future or what's going to happen when Jose comes back," Story said. "Take it day by day and things will work out."

The Rockies are still formulating a plan with Reyes — whether he will head to Arizona for extended spring training or maybe on a minor league rehab assignment.

"We are in phase 2 of this, which is, 'OK, what next?' and, 'What now?'" Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich said. "There is no sense or need to put the cart before the horse before we fully understood what the penalty was going to be under the policy."

"Now we're going to have to start truly re-engaging with Jose and his agent, making sure we're on the same page."

The four-time All-Star shortstop will lose 52 days of pay under the agreement, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press, which amounts to \$6,251,366 of Reyes' \$22 million salary. The person

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spoke on condition of anonymity because that aspect of the penalty wasn't made public.

"I want to apologize for everything that has happened," Reyes said in a statement released by the players' union. "I am sorry to the Rockies organization, my teammates, all the fans and most of all my family."

The 32-year-old has not been with the Rockies all year and will miss the first 59 days of the season, which currently covers 51 games. But outfielder Carlos Gonzalez doesn't think the chemistry in the clubhouse will be drastically altered once he does return.

"He's a guy who will bring a smile to the field. He enjoys the game," Gonzalez said. "It's never bad when you have talent on your team."

Bridich refused to speculate about whether he will look to trade Reyes.

"Everybody has kind of been in limbo, Jose included, the Rockies included," Bridich said. "We'll see what goes on. But any of those sorts of conversations — not at liberty to comment on right now."

Earlier this week, New York Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman joined the team after serving a 29-game penalty.

Discipline under the MLB policy, which was agreed to last summer after a number of high-profile incidents involving NFL players, isn't predicated on a conviction. Reyes had been scheduled to go to trial April 4 after pleading not guilty to abusing a family or household member. Hawaii prosecutors dropped charges before the trial date and said his wife was not cooperating.

Reyes is a career .290 hitter with 479 stolen bases in 13 seasons, and his contract with the Rockies runs through the 2017 season and includes a club option for 2018. He won the 2011 NL batting title while with the New York Mets — who opened a three-game series Friday night at Colorado with a 5-2 loss.

"It's been a long time since I've been around Jose Reyes, but there was nobody more shocked — knowing him and being around him — than I was," Mets manager Terry Collins said. "Let's get it behind us and let's move on. I think he's a great player and love him as a human being. Hope it's all settled."

Reyes' penalty without pay was retroactive to Feb. 23, when he was put on leave ahead of the Rockies' spring training report date for position players. Commissioner Rob Manfred said Reyes has agreed to contribute \$100,000 to one or more charitable groups that focus on preventing and treating survivors of domestic violence.

"I am encouraged by Mr. Reyes' commitment to the treatment provisions of the policy in order to ensure that such an incident does not occur in the future," Manfred said in a statement.

Last Oct. 31, Reyes was arrested at the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea. According to a recording of a 911 call released by police, a hotel security guard reported the woman had injuries to her leg and scratches on her neck.

Reyes was released after posting \$1,000 bail and was ordered to stay away from his wife for three days. He pleaded not guilty to abusing a family or household member.

Chapman agreed in March to a 30-game suspension after an altercation with his girlfriend last October in Florida. A rainout cut the games he missed to 29.

Chinese bullet train in Venezuela stalls as alliance derails

JOSHUA GOODMAN, Associated Press

ZARAZA, Venezuela (AP) — It was once billed as a model of socialist fraternity: South America's first high-speed train, powered by Chinese technology, crisscrossing Venezuela to bring development to its backwater plains. Now all but abandoned, it has become a symbol of economic collapse — and a strategic relationship gone adrift.

Where dozens of modern buildings once stood, cattle now graze on grass growing amid the rubble of the project's gutted and vandalized factory. A red arched sign in Chinese and Spanish is all that remains of what until 16 months ago was a bustling complex of 800 workers.

That's when the project's Chinese managers quietly cleared out.

As with many unfinished politically motivated projects dotting Venezuela — government critics call them "red elephants" — the decaying infrastructure contrasts with the railway's promising beginnings.

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A decade ago then-President Hugo Chavez dreamed up the Tinaco-Anaco railway as a way to populate the plains and attract development from long-dominant coastal areas. Stretching 300 miles (468-kilometers), it was intended to move 5 million passengers and 9.8 million metric tons of cargo a year at speeds up to 135 miles (220 kilometers) per hour.

Chavez turned to China, one of his closest ideological allies, for engineering and financing for the project, part of a \$7.5 billion deal that has made Venezuela the world's top recipient of Chinese loans. A consortium of state-run companies led by China Railway Group Ltd, the world's largest train maker, was tasked with carrying out construction.

But completion is four years overdue, and work, when it happens at all, has slowed to a crawl. At one barracks facility visited by The Associated Press, half a dozen workers huddled under the shade of a giant cement mixer, while two shirtless managers lounged at a control panel smoking cigarettes.

Nowhere are the project's declining fortunes more visible than in Zaraza, a sweltering crossroads town of 75,000 where what used to be an arena-sized factory churning out concrete railroad ties was located. In government news reels from 2013, the complex can be seen towering over manicured lawns and outdoor basketball courts where Chinese and Venezuelan workers socialized.

Shortly after the last Chinese managers left in January 2015, a mob of local residents — some of them armed — ransacked the site and hauled away everything of value. First to go were power generators, computers and air conditioners on the back of pick-up trucks. Vandals then tore apart dozens of buildings to scavenge for metal siding, copper wiring and ceramic tiles, some of which are now on sale at roadside stalls.

Jesus Eduardo Rodriguez, who owns and lives on the sprawling ranch where the factory was built, said the plundering lasted two weeks.

Several witnesses who declined to be named for fear of reprisals said the looting took place in plain view of National Guard troops, who they allege were on the take and working in collaboration with the town's pro-government mayor, Wilfredo Balza, which is why the incident never garnered media attention.

Balza did not return repeated phone calls and text messages seeking comment and was said to be unavailable when AP journalists visited City Hall.

"They destroyed everything," said Rodriguez, who eventually moved giant cinder blocks to cut off road access to the derelict property, which had become a haven for criminal gangs. "We just came to the house and almost cried, watching what they were doing."

E-mails to China Railway in Beijing went unanswered and the company didn't comment despite phone calls and two visits to its office in Caracas.

The factory's demise appears to have been triggered by Venezuela's cash crunch.

In a June 2013 interview with local television network Televen, the then-head of Venezuela's state rail authority acknowledged owing \$400 million to the Chinese. Union leaders who for years complained of late salary payments say that has only multiplied as the economy spins further out of control. With foreign reserves at a 13-year low and inflation forecast to surpass 700 percent this year, Venezuela has fallen behind on payments to foreign enterprises from airlines to the service companies that extract the oil on which this OPEC nation's economy depends.

Until recently, China had been a lifeline for Venezuela. Since 2007 it bankrolled the administrations of Chavez, who died of cancer in 2013, and current President Nicolas Maduro with a mix of cash, loans and investment commitments totaling \$65 billion, according to a database maintained by Boston University and the Inter-American Dialogue. Back when commodity prices were high and South America's economies booming, such deals in Venezuela and elsewhere in the region seemed a safe bet.

But lately, as China struggles with its own financial woes and the oil used as loan collateral has plunged in value, Venezuela is finding that kind of support harder to come by. A high-level mission to Beijing in February returned empty-handed.

Kevin Gallagher, a Boston University political scientist and the author of two books on China's economic ties to Latin America, said the Chinese are increasingly concerned about their exposure to an imploding Venezuela.

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"Now the whole underbelly is falling out," said Gallagher, who was recently in Beijing gauging the state of the economic partnership. "The Chinese right now are completely panicked about risk."

This week senior U.S. intelligence officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss their assessments by name, said that while China may be willing to ease repayment terms to help Venezuela stave off a meltdown, it is unwilling to provide any more financing to what they described as a bottomless rabbit hole.

Corruption may also be having a chilling effect. Six Venezuelan officials were arrested in 2013 and 2014 for allegedly embezzling \$84 million from a Chinese development fund.

Outwardly, at least, there's no sign of concern.

"China pays high attention to the development of China-Venezuela relations and will continue maintaining the interactions between the two sides on all fields and at all levels to enhance mutual friendship and trust, promote mutually benefiting cooperation and promote mutual growth," China's Foreign Ministry said in a faxed response to questions.

But President Xi Jinping's government appears to be quietly hedging its bets. In addition to avoiding throwing good money after bad, they've quietly been courting a newly emboldened Venezuelan opposition that is trying to force Maduro's recall or resignation.

The contacts began at a meeting of the Socialist International, a worldwide network of left-leaning political parties, in New York last July attended by opposition Venezuelan politicians and members of the Chinese Communist Party, according to a Venezuelan participant who spoke on condition of anonymity so as not to jeopardize the relationship. The same politician then traveled to Beijing at the party's invitation to brief officials on the opposition's plans following its landslide victory in December's congressional elections.

China's ambassador has also dined privately with opposition leaders, the politician said, despite Venezuelan government warnings to foreign diplomats not to meet with individuals they accuse of trying to destabilize the country. Opposition leaders, who used to accuse China of acting as Maduro's enabler, have softened their criticism, sensing they'll need help digging Venezuela out of its economic hole if they rise to power.

The diplomatic dance means little to Omar Correa, who like many in Zaraza was captivated by the railway project's promise of progress. He still proudly wears the blue overalls emblazoned with the corporate logo of his former Chinese employees, only now he herds livestock amid the factory ruins.

"Are they going to come back?" a visibly stricken Correa asked. "I really hoped to see that train running one day."

Obamas welcome leaders, celebrities to Nordic State Dinner

KATHLEEN HENNESSEY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Famous people and people just famous-for-Washington scored coveted invitations to Friday night's White House state dinner honoring the leaders of Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Denmark and Norway.

Will Ferrell, who famously parodied past President George W. Bush on "Saturday Night Live," and Bellamy Young, first lady on the TV show "Scandal," made the cut, as did recently retired late-night host David Letterman, "Girls" actress Allison Williams and actor-comedian Aziz Ansari.

Ferrell's wife, Viveca Paulin, was born in Sweden, he told reporters as he arrived for what he said was his first White House dinner.

"I hope we don't do anything wrong," Ferrell said.

Other guests with Nordic ties were Marcus Samuelsson, the Sweden-raised chef who was a guest chef for the President Barack Obama's first state dinner seven years ago, and Joel Kinnaman, a Swedish-American actor who played a politician in "House of Cards."

The Nordic party was a twist for the White House — state dinners typically celebrate a single head of state. But Friday's affair capped a multilateral U.S.-Nordic summit, a gathering Obama used to laud the Nordic states as model global citizens on climate change, security, humanitarian efforts and economic equality.

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Hours later, Obama used the dinner to rib the leaders about their countries all-too-perfect reputation. As he toasted the leaders on the South Lawn, Obama promised the night wouldn't deliver any entertainment as crazy as the popular Norwegian television program "National Firewood Night." And he mocked their internal fights over which country is happiest or which is the true hometown of Santa Claus.

"These are fierce debates that take place," Obama said, before raising his glass to toast President Sauli Niinisto of Finland and Prime Ministers Sigurdur Ingi Johannsson of Iceland; Lars Loekke Rasmussen of Denmark; Stefan Lofven of Sweden; and Erna Solberg of Norway.

In his toast, Loekke Rasmussen dished it back. He noted the region's many gifts to the U.S. — including Scarlett Johansson, whose father is Danish, and Uma Thurman, whose mother is Swedish. Norway, he said, can claim GOP strategist Karl Rove. The joke was a hit in a room largely filled with Democrats.

On a more serious note, Obama added his own gratitude for the strong cultural influences the five nations have had in the U.S., in particular the Danish pastor N.F.S. Grundtvig, whose education philosophy inspired Tennessee's Highlander Folk School, where several prominent civil rights leaders trained.

Grundtvig's work "ended up having a ripple effect on the civil rights movement," Obama said, adding he "might not be standing here" were it not for his teachings.

The White House used the dinner to laud Nordic cuisine, design and even climate.

Instead of sitting around circular tables, the guests dined at wooden farm tables set with white china, beveled crystal candlesticks and soaring ice vases with white field flowers. The sleek white chairs had a clear Ikea vibe. The dinner was held in a tent with a transparent ceiling, giving guests a view of the sky that cleared just in time for the event.

The White House said the decor was meant to evoke the "cycle of northern lights and shadows."

The meal had nods to the modern simplicity of Nordic cuisine, with American twists. Appetizers included salt-cured fish — but Florida tuna, instead of whitefish. The waffles were to be served with chicken. The main course: braised beef short ribs from Nebraska, with creamy dumplings.

Dessert was an homage to the fishing industry in the form of a blue, glowing, edible fishing boat, displayed with elderberry custard pie, raspberry kringle and gooseberry cookies.

Michelle Obama didn't keep up the theme with her choice of gown. She wore a blush-colored, off-the-shoulder dress by Naeem Khan, an Indian-American designer and a first lady favorite.

Pop singer Demi Lovato provided the after-dinner entertainment, belting out her songs "Stone Cold" and "Confident."

The guest list included a large contingent from the media, including Fox News' Bret Baier, ABC's David Muir and NBC's Al Roker and Lester Holt. Cosmetics giant Bobbi Brown, NCAA president Mark Emmert, fashion designer Rick Owens and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf also made the list.

The White House often uses state dinners as an opportunity for political outreach. But in Obama's final months in office there is, perhaps, a sign of that effort winding down. Several Democratic lawmakers were on the guest list, but no Republicans.

Trump denies he posed as his spokesman during tabloid days

WASHINGTON (AP) — Back when Donald Trump's love life was tabloid heaven, a Trump spokesman with intimate knowledge of the businessman's personal relationships offered juicy stories about a failing marriage, a new live-in paramour and three other girlfriends he was juggling at once.

The spokesman identified himself as John Miller. But The Washington Post says it was actually Trump, posing as his own publicist on the phone with a reporter who wondered why Miller's voice sounded so familiar.

The Post has unearthed a recording of that 1991 phone call. The voice on the phone describes Trump as irresistible to women.

"He gets called by everybody in the book, in terms of women," says the voice. "He's got a whole open field, really."

On NBC's "Today" show Friday, Trump denied being the voice on the phone. "I don't know anything about it," he said.

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But he owned up to it at the time, describing the Miller call as a “joke gone awry,” said the Post. Trump also testified in a 1990 court case that he occasionally used the name John Miller and disclosed that his favorite alias was John Baron.

In the call with People magazine reporter Sue Carswell, the “spokesman” said “actresses just call to see if they can go out with him and things.”

He said Madonna “wanted to go out with him” and “came in a beautiful evening gown and combat boots” to hang out with Trump at the Plaza Hotel, which he owned. “He’s got zero interest that night,” said the man known as Miller, apparently meaning they did not have sex.

Trump’s marriage to Ivana Trump was ending that year and he was with Marla Maples, who would become his second wife. He was also seeing three other women, said the “spokesman,” including model Carla Bruni.

Carswell, now at Vanity Fair, told the Post she played the recording to Maples, who confirmed the call was from Trump himself and cried upon hearing him say that a ring he had given her was not meant to imply an engagement — although their engagement was announced weeks later.

Carswell says Maples persuaded Trump to invite her out with the two of them to make up for the trickery.

A Trump supporter in Congress, GOP Rep. Duncan Hunter of California, said what happened back then “has no bearing on who he is today.”

“It doesn’t matter to me one whit,” he said.

96-year-old becomes oldest USC graduate

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It took more than 60 years but a University of Southern California student has finally received his diploma.

Ninety-six-year-old Alfonso Gonzales received a bachelor of science degree in zoology on Friday, making him the oldest graduate in USC history.

The World War II veteran thought he’d already graduated when he skipped commencement exercises in 1953 because of work obligations. He was founding a soil company that he ran for 55 years.

But when relatives recently approached the university about getting a copy of his diploma, they learned he was one unit short.

Although the school no longer offers a zoology major, it crafted an independent study course through the gerontology school that included reading, video assignments, visiting other classes, and writing a thesis about his life.

USC officials call Gonzales a “wonderful inspiration.”

Today in History

The Associated Press

Today is Saturday, May 14, the 135th day of 2016. There are 231 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On May 14, 1948, according to the current-era calendar, the independent state of Israel was proclaimed in Tel Aviv.

On this date:

In 1643, Louis XIV became King of France at age four upon the death of his father, Louis XIII.

In 1796, English physician Edward Jenner inoculated 8-year-old James Phipps against smallpox by using cowpox matter.

In 1804, the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the Louisiana Territory as well as the Pacific Northwest left camp near present-day Hartford, Illinois.

In 1900, the Olympic games opened in Paris as part of the 1900 World’s Fair.

In 1925, the Virginia Woolf novel “Mrs Dalloway” was first published in England and the United States.

In 1936, British Field Marshal Edmund Allenby, 1st Viscount Allenby, died in London at age 75.

In 1940, the Netherlands surrendered to invading German forces during World War II.

In 1955, representatives from eight Communist bloc countries, including the Soviet Union, signed the

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Warsaw Pact in Poland. (The Pact was dissolved in 1991.)

In 1961, Freedom Riders were attacked by violent mobs in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama.

In 1973, the United States launched Skylab 1, its first manned space station. (Skylab 1 remained in orbit for six years before burning up during re-entry in 1979.) The National Right to Life Committee was incorporated.

In 1988, 27 people, mostly teens, were killed when their church bus collided with a pickup truck going the wrong direction on a highway near Carrollton, Kentucky. (Truck driver Larry Mahoney served 9 1/2 years in prison for manslaughter.)

In 1998, singer-actor Frank Sinatra died at a Los Angeles hospital at age 82. The hit sitcom "Seinfeld" aired its final episode after nine years on NBC.

Ten years ago: Mexico's President Vicente (vih-SEN'-tay) Fox telephoned President George W. Bush to express concern about what he called the possibility of a "militarized" U.S.-Mexican border, a day before Bush's planned Oval Office speech on immigration. Rene Preval (reh-NAY' preh-VAHL') was sworn in as Haiti's president for the second time in a decade. Former U.S. poet laureate Stanley Kunitz died in New York at age 100. Aras Baskauskas (AH'-rahs bush-KOW'-kis), a 24-year-old yoga instructor from Santa Monica, California, won "Survivor: Panama, Exile Island," the 12th edition of the CBS reality show.

Five years ago: At New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, head of the International Monetary Fund and potential candidate for president of France, was removed from a Paris-bound plane and charged with sexually assaulting a Manhattan hotel maid, Nafissatou Diallo (na-fee-SAH'-too dee-AH'-loh). (Strauss-Kahn later resigned; the charges against him were eventually dropped.)

One year ago: President Barack Obama, at a Camp David summit, assured Arab allies they were safe from the threat of an empowered Iran, pledging an "ironclad commitment" to the Sunni governments of the Persian Gulf. B.B. King, 89, the "King of the Blues," died in Las Vegas. Award-winning poet Franz Wright, 62, died in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Today's Birthdays: Opera singer Patrice Munsel is 91. Photo-realist artist Richard Estes is 84. Actress Sian Phillips is 83. Former Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., is 74. Movie producer George Lucas is 72. Actress Meg Foster is 68. Movie director Robert Zemeckis is 65. Rock singer David Byrne is 64. Actor Tim Roth is 55. Rock singer Ian Astbury (The Cult) is 54. Rock musician C.C. (aka Cecil) DeVille is 54. Actor Danny Huston is 54. Rock musician Mike Inez (Alice In Chains) is 50. Fabrice Morvan (ex-Milli Vanilli) is 50. Rhythm-and-blues singer Raphael Saadiq is 50. Actress Cate Blanchett is 47. Singer Danny Wood (New Kids on the Block) is 47. Movie writer-director Sofia Coppola (KOH'-pah-lah) is 45. Actor Gabriel Mann is 44. Singer Natalie Appleton (All Saints) is 43. Singer Shanice is 43. Actress Carla Jimenez is 42. Rock musician Henry Garza (Los Lonely Boys) is 38. Alt-country musician-singer Ketch Secor is 38. Rock singer-musician Dan Auerbach is 37. Rock musician Mike Retondo (Plain White T's) is 35. Actress Lina Esco is 34. Actress Amber Tamblyn is 33. Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg is 32. Actress Miranda Cosgrove is 23.

Thought for Today: "Silence cannot hide anything — which is more than you can say for words." — From the play "The Ghost Sonata" by Swedish author-playwright August Strindberg (born 1849, died this date in 1912).