

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 1 of 51

- 1- Recycling trailers
- 1- Kristi Peterson Bookkeeping Ad
- 1- Heifer Calf Missing
- 2- Pray 70th Anniversary Thank You
- 2 - Santa coming to Groton Subway
- 2- Bowling Scores
- 3- Gas prices are climbing again
- 4- Dr. Holm's Column
- 4- Sign up for Groton Bucks
- 4- House for Sale
- 5- Boys teams beat Hitchcock-Tulare
- 5- An ER Christmas
- 6- Varsity stat sheet
- 7- JV stat sheet
- 8- Today in Weather History
- 9 - Local Weather Forecast
- 10- Yesterday's Groton Weather
- 10- Today's Weather Climate
- 10- National Weather map
- 11 - Daily Devotional
- 12 - AP News

**Missing North of Groton, a black
600 lb. Heifer Calf.
Yellow Ear Tag #955
If found or seen,
call 605/290-1019.**

Apts for Rent

1 bedroom and HUGE 2 bedroom, 2 bath apartments available NOW! All utilities included except A/C, 1 bedroom \$504 and HUGE 2 bedroom 2 bath \$674 Please call or text 239-849-7674

Open: 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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Wednesday, Dec. 14

Senior Menu: Goulash, peas, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cheese omelette, muffin, fruit, juice, milk.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, baked beans, romaine salad, fruit.

3:30 p.m.: United Methodist Sunday School Christmas Program practice

3:45 p.m.: St. John's Lutheran Confirmation

6 p.m.: United Methodist Confirmation

6:30 p.m.: Emmanuel Lutheran League

7 p.m.: St. John's Lutheran Advent Service

7 p.m.: Emmanuel Lutheran Confirmation

7:30 p.m.: United Methodist Evening Bible Study with Pastor Thomas

Thursday, Dec. 15

Senior Menu: Christmas dinner: Ham with raisin sauce, baked sweet potatoes, Malibu blend vegetables, Christmas cookie, dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Mini pancakes, fruit, juice, milk.

School Lunch: Turkey dinner, dressing, mashed potatoes, corn, pumpkin pie.

Noon: United Methodist UMW Christmas Luncheon

5:15 p.m.: Boys Basketball at Redfield (C game at 5:15, JV at 6:30, Varsity at 8:00)

Friday, Dec. 16

Senior Menu: Spanish rice with hamburger, green beans, Mandarin oranges, chocolate pudding, whole wheat bread.

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



Pray 70th Anniversary Thank You

Thank you to everyone who sent cards, called and visited with us at the open house in celebration of our 70th wedding anniversary. Words cannot thank you enough. God bless you all.
Bob and Ruth Pray



**Santa will
be
coming to
Groton's
Subway
on
Saturday,
Dec. 17,
1-4 p.m.**

Cookies for all the kids



At the mini mall in north Groton

Coffee Cup League

Team Standings: Jungle Lanes 28, Ten Pins 28, James valley 26 1/2, Kens 21 1/2

High Games: Vickie Kramp 184; Vicki Walter 168; Joyce Walter 165, 165; Penny Stolle 165

High Series: Joyce Walter 477, Vickie Kramp 467, Penny Stolle 461

Conde National

Team Standings: Pirates 3, Giants 3, Braves 2, Colts 2, Cubs 1, Mets 1

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 209, 194; Justin Kesterson 190; Lance Frohling 190; Conner Hanson 184

Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 553, Conner Hanson 517, Lance Frohling 516

Women's High Games: Joyce Walter 202, Renee Hanlon 174, Vickie Kramp 172

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 480, Mary Larson 460, Joyce Walter 458

Gas Prices Are Climbing Again

Dec. 12, 2016 – South Dakota's average price for regular self-serve gasoline stands at \$2.147 per gallon today, up one cent over last week and up nine cents year over year.

"Globally, oil producers appear committed to reducing over-supply and rebalance the market," said Marilyn Buskohl, spokeswoman for AAA South Dakota. "Over the weekend, OPEC and non-OPEC producers reached their first deal since 2001 to limit oil output. This follows OPEC's agreement in November to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day starting next month."

The national average has increased for 14 days in a row following the OPEC oil production agreement on November 30. Today's average of \$2.21 per gallon is up three cents per gallon on the week and two cents per gallon on the month. The national average is up 20 cents compared to the same date last year.

Last month, OPEC agreed to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day beginning January 2017 and markets have continued to react to the production cut agreement with crude oil prices hitting an 18 month high. Retail prices have steadily increased following the news of the OPEC agreement, but the effectiveness of the deal and continued market impacts will hinge on all countries implementing the agreed to production levels.

	Today	Last Week	Change	Nov. 14	Change	Last year
Aberdeen	\$2.139	\$2.198	-\$0.059	\$2.24	-\$0.105	\$2.114
Brookings	\$2.467	\$2.135	\$0.332	\$2.18	\$0.291	\$2.099
Huron	\$2.242	\$2.316	-\$0.074	\$2.36	-\$0.117	\$1.999
Mitchell	\$2.317	\$2.232	\$0.085	\$2.27	\$0.052	\$1.903
Pierre	\$2.279	\$2.279	\$0.000	\$2.41	-\$0.130	\$2.265
Rapid City	\$2.044	\$2.043	\$0.001	\$2.25	-\$0.208	\$2.214
Sioux Falls	\$2.073	\$2.035	\$0.038	\$1.97	\$0.105	\$1.819
Vermillion	\$2.042	\$1.979	\$0.063	\$2.03	\$0.015	\$1.932
Watertown	\$2.207	\$2.229	-\$0.022	\$2.29	-\$0.080	\$1.934
Yankton	\$2.183	\$2.216	-\$0.033	\$2.30	-\$0.120	\$2.060
South Dakota	\$2.147	\$2.134	\$0.013	\$2.20	-\$0.050	\$2.058

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Quick Stats

Average gas prices are below \$2 per gallon in four states today including: Oklahoma (\$1.96), Missouri (\$1.97), Arkansas (\$1.98) and Texas (\$1.99).

Largest monthly increases include: Michigan (+23 cents), Indiana (+22 cents), Ohio (+21 cents), Illinois (+15 cents), Kentucky (+13 cents) and Delaware (+12 cents).

Pump prices in midcontinent states remained relatively stable. Despite recent price increases along the southern coast, the Central and Southern regions remain the cheapest markets for retail gasoline.

Oil Market Dynamics

Over the weekend, OPEC and non-OPEC producers reached their first deal since 2001 to limit oil output in an effort to reduce global over supply and rebalance the market. Producers from outside the 14-country group agreed to reduce output by 558,000 barrels per day. Of that amount, Russia has agreed to cut 300,000 barrels per day with the remaining non-OPEC members cutting the remaining 258,000 barrels to reach the agreed upon levels. As a result, traders will continue to watch how OPEC and non-OPEC members move forward with the terms of the agreement starting in 2017. At the close of Friday's formal trading session on the NYMEX, WTI was up 66 cents to settle at \$51.50 per barrel.



By Richard P. Holm M.D.

Gracious Death

He was my neighbor, not my patient; a guy my age, a man of many talents and interests, and a dear friend. He was one of those fellows who would give the shirt off his back to help you, if needed. When he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer which had spread to the liver, he, his daughters, and his friends knew how this was likely going to go. But we didn't realize how graciously he would handle the dying process until the very end.

My friend was treated with and was truly helped by chemotherapy for a while, but gradually the tumor cells developed resistance to the drugs and the Oncologist suggested no more chemo. My friend was ready to have only pain meds and hospice care. In the end, per his direction and with the help of hospice and the caring people at the Arlington Nursing Home, he shuffled off this mortal coil comfort-

comfort. When I visited him two days before his death he told me, despite an expanding belly full of cancer, that he was without pain. Most importantly, he was absolutely unafraid; courageously accepting of the dying process.

In comparison, I find it tragic and too common that patients and families are overwhelmed with a fear of death. Some suggest this disabling-dread comes from our cultural practice of protecting children from seeing death, with the intention of making life easier on them. Thus, a lifelong apprehension and running from death has become the norm. Consequently, we expect modern medicine to save us in the end, which can be a desperate, futile, and harmful hope, especially in an end-of-life situation. What's more, physicians struggle taking the time and challenge of helping people in denial face their dying process. Bottom line, too many people choose to be dragged through unnecessary suffering at their end of life, and too often doctors comply.

Rather, dying people should ask for and be reassured that enough comfort medicine will be provided and that it's going to be alright. Our profession has been improving in this regard, but certainly could do better.

When it's time, we should all have the opportunity for a gracious death, just like my neighbor.



House for Sale

3 bedroom house for sale. Groton S. D. Detached garage. 1/2 block from high school. Call (605) 397-8405.

GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce

Sign Up for Groton Chamber Bucks at the Holiday Boxes Located This week at the Olde Bank Floral 'N More and Subway

Week of Dec. 19: Lori's Pharmacy and Groton Ford

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 5 of 51

Groton boys teams win both games over Hitchcock-Tulare

The Groton Area boys' basketball team came home last night with a 72-40 win over Hitchcock-Tulare. Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 15-9, 37-19 and 54-33.

Sean Schuring made seven of 10 three-pointers to lead all scorers with 25 points. Bennett Shabazz had 12, Seric Shabazz 11, Peyton Johnson eight, Brandon Keith seven, Luke Thorson four, Frankie Wuestewald had three points and Anthony Sippel added two points.

Hitchcock-Tulare was led by Binger with 11 and Hofer with 10.

Groton Area made 26 of 56 field goals for 31 percent, was six of 11 from the line for 65 percent, had 17 team fouls, 20 assists with Schuring having five, 10 turnovers, 34 rebounds with Schuring having nine and nine steals with Schuring having three.

Hitchcock-Tulare made 12 of 38 field goals for 32 percent, was 13 of 15 from the line for 65 percent, had 31 rebounds, 14 team fouls, three assists, 19 turnovers and seven steals.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 54-17. Scoring for Groton were Jonny Doeden 12, Treyton Diegel 9, Cade Guthmiller 7, Austin Jones 6, Hunter Schaller 5, Darian Shabazz 5, Marshall Lane 2, Anthony Sippel 2, Cyrus DeHoet 2, Riley Thurston 2, and Mitch Thurston 2.

An ER Christmas

What happens in an emergency room when a medical need arises on Christmas Eve? Ten years ago this Christmas Eve Retired Pastor Bill Duncan personally found out. His wife Jana took him to Aberdeen St. Luke's ER with severe 'indigestion' only to have him go into cardiac arrest a few minutes after arriving. Fortunately, the hospital was fully equipped and staffed to care for Pastor Duncan's medical needs. He will be taking part in the Groton C&MA's annual Christmas pageant & Turkey/Ham feast for the attendance on Sunday, December 18 beginning at 5 pm to which the public is encouraged to attend.

And the pageant? It is all about what happens to a group of young people at another hospital when their friend is taken to their Christmas Eve and the friends arrive to see a crowded ER. Bring added bedlam to the scene as they seek to find their friend and her physical condition. What eventually happens in that emergency room will be a more important spiritual healing of them all, than just the physical healing of one friend.

Join the congregation of the Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance Church as they present "Code Red: An ER CHRISTMAS" at 5 pm in the church sanctuary followed by their annual complimentary banquet, Christmas Turkey/Ham dinner with all the trimmings provided by the members of the congregation for all the attendees to enjoy at no cost. Pastor Doug Duncan and the congregation invite all to come and enjoy a Christmas sharing for the whole family.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 6 of 51

VISITOR: Groton ()

NO	PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN
			FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT							
12	Schuring, Sean	F	9	15	7	10	0	0	4	5	9	1	25	5	1	0	3	16:00
40	Johnson, Peyton	F	3	6	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	8	0	1	0	0	16:00
4	Shabazz, Bennett	G	4	9	2	4	2	2	1	1	2	4	12	2	2	0	1	8:00
5	Shabazz, Seric	G	4	8	3	6	0	0	0	1	1	3	11	2	1	0	1	0:00
20	Keith, Brandon	G	2	8	1	6	2	2	2	2	4	4	7	3	1	0	2	24:00
3	Sippel, Anthony		1	2	0	1	0	0	2	1	3	1	2	2	2	0	0	16:00
10	Lane, Marshall		0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	1	0	0	16:00
11	Tuggles, Tre'von		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	16:00
14	Diegel, Treyton		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	8:00
22	Guthmiller, Cade		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
24	Wuestewald, Frankie		1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	3	0	0	1	0	8:00
30	Doeden, Jonny		0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	8:00
32	Thurston, Mitchell		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
34	Jones, Austin		0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
50	Thorson, Luke		2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									0	6	6				0			
Team Totals			26	56	14	31	6	11	12	22	34	17	72	20	10	1	9	160

Total FG% - 1st: 13/26 0.500 2nd: 13/30 0.433 Game: 0.464 Deadball Rebounds (1,0)
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 9/16 0.563 2nd: 5/15 0.333 Game: 0.452
 Total FT% - 1st: 2/2 1.000 2nd: 4/9 0.444 Game: 0.545

HOME: Hitchcock-Tulare ()

NO	PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN
			FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT							
5	Hamilton,	*	2	10	0	4	3	4	2	3	5	1	7	0	4	0	2	32:00
10	Binger,	*	4	12	1	5	2	4	1	6	7	1	11	1	5	0	4	24:00
14	Mallon,	*	2	6	0	2	4	4	1	5	6	2	8	1	0	0	0	24:00
20	Wanner,	*	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	4	4	1	5	0	0	24:00
23	Hofer,	*	2	4	0	0	6	11	1	0	1	3	10	0	3	0	0	24:00
12	Stoner,		0	3	0	2	0	0	0	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
15	Wiebe,		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
21	Anderson,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	8:00
24	Gahm,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	8:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									2	3	5				0			
Team Totals			12	38	1	13	15	23	9	22	31	14	40	3	19	0	7	160

Total FG% - 1st: 6/19 0.316 2nd: 6/19 0.316 Game: 0.316 Deadball Rebounds (2,0)
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 0/4 0.000 2nd: 1/9 0.111 Game: 0.077
 Total FT% - 1st: 7/10 0.700 2nd: 8/13 0.615 Game: 0.652

Technical Fouls: groto (0)
 : Hitch (0)

OFFICIALS :
 ATTENDANCE : 0

SCORE BY PERIODS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOTAL
Groton	15	22	17	18	72
Hitchcock-Tulare	9	10	14	7	40

Last FG: Groton 4th-08:00, Hitchcock-Tulare 4th-08:00
 Largest lead: Groton by 32 4th-08:00, Hitchcock-Tulare NONE
 Score tied: 0 times, Lead changed: 0 times

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 7 of 51

VISITOR: Groton Tigers JV ()

NO	PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN
			FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT							
10	Lane, Marshall	*	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	16:00
14	Diegel, Treyton	*	3	5	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	1	0	0	1	16:00
30	Doeden, Jonny	*	6	9	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	12	3	0	0	4	16:00
34	Jones, Austin	*	3	4	0	0	0	0	2	4	6	2	6	0	0	0	3	24:00
50	Thorson, Luke	*	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
3	Schinkel, Anthony		0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
3	Sippel, Anthony		1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0:00
4	DeHoet, Cyrus		1	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0:00
5	Shabazz, Darian		2	6	1	3	0	1	1	1	2	0	5	0	0	0	1	16:00
12	Thurston, Riley		1	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	16:00
20	Schaller, Hunter		2	4	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	5	0	0	0	1	8:00
22	Guthmiller, Cade		2	5	1	3	2	2	0	0	0	2	7	1	2	0	1	16:00
32	Thurston, Mitch		1	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	24:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									3	0	3							
Team Totals			23	45	6	16	2	3	12	8	20	9	54	7	2	0	13	160

Total FG% - 1st: 12/19 0.632 2nd: 11/26 0.423 Game: 0.511 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 4/7 0.571 2nd: 2/9 0.222 Game: 0.375 Rebounds|
 Total FT% - 1st: 0/1 0.000 2nd: 2/2 1.000 Game: 0.667 (0,0)

HOME: Hitchcock-Tulare ()

NO	PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN
			FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT							
3	Binger,	*	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	16:00
11	Gilbert,	*	3	5	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	6	0	5	0	0	32:00
12	Stoner,	*	1	6	1	5	0	0	1	1	2	2	3	2	4	0	0	32:00
21	Anderson,	*	1	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	2	3	2	0	5	0	0	24:00
24	Gahm,	*	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	0	1	0	0	16:00
0	Brooker,		0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
2	Waldner,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	8:00
15	Wiebe,		0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
25	Clark,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	16:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									1	5	6							
Team Totals			8	19	1	8	0	2	3	12	15	6	17	4	19	0	0	160

Total FG% - 1st: 4/8 0.500 2nd: 4/11 0.364 Game: 0.421 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 1/4 0.250 2nd: 0/4 0.000 Game: 0.125 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 0/2 0.000 2nd: 0/0 0.000 Game: 0.000 (1,0)

Technical Fouls: GRO (0)
 : Hitch (0)

OFFICIALS :
 ATTENDANCE : 0

SCORE BY PERIODS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOTAL
Groton Tigers JV	17	11	10	16	54
Hitchcock-Tulare	7	2	2	6	17

Last FG: Groton Tigers JV 4th-08:00, Hitchcock-Tulare 4th-08:00
 Largest lead: Groton Tigers JV by 37 4th-08:00, Hitchcock-Tulare NONE
 Score tied: 1 times, Lead changed: 0 times

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 8 of 51

Today in Weather History

December 14, 1994: Snow accumulated over all of South Dakota on the 14th, but was heavy in the central part of the state and at a few places in the northwest. The greatest accumulations were 11 inches at Murdo and 10 inches at the Lake Sharpe project and near Stephan. Numerous accidents were caused but no fatalities or injuries were reported. Eight inches of snow fell at McLaughlin and Miller, with 7 inches at Faulkton and McIntosh, 6 inches at Eagle Butte and Timber Lake, and 5 inches at Mobridge, Kennebec, and near Highmore.

December 14, 1996: Heavy snow of 6 to 20 inches fell across most of central, north central, and part of northeast South Dakota during the late evening of the 14th. Strong north winds of 20 to 35 mph created near-blizzard conditions and heavy drifting across the area. Travel was extremely difficult if not impossible, with several cars going into the ditch. A two-car accident between Blunt and Pierre left several people injured. Many activities were postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Fort Pierre, Ipswich, Kennebec, Aberdeen, and Pollock; 7 inches at Mobridge; 8 inches at Lake Sharpe, Clark, and Mellette; 9 inches at Roscoe, Gettysburg, and McIntosh; 10 inches at Highmore, Eagle Butte, 22 miles SSW of Keldron, and at West Whitlock; 11 inches at Blunt and Miller; 12 inches at Ree Heights, McLaughlin, and Onida; 13 inches at Highmore; 14 inches at Redfield; 15 inches at Timber Lake; 18 inches at Faulkton; and 20 inches at Hoven.








December 14, 1287: A powerful storm affected the Netherlands and Northern Germany on this day. Called the St. Lucia's flood, which was the day before, this storm broke a dike, flooding much of the land in what is now the Waddenzee and IJsselmeer. A significant percentage of the country's population perished in this disaster and has been rated as one of the most destructive floods in recorded history. The death toll from this storm was between 50,000 to 80,000 people. Also, 180 residents of Hickling village, which is 137 miles north-east of London was impacted from this storm. The storm surge rose a foot above the high alter in the church. From British-History.ac.uk, "Hickling was one of the townships that suffered most severely from the tremendous storm of December, 1287, no fewer than nine score persons being drowned there. In the priory the water rose more than a foot above the high altar, and all the canons fled away except two, who stayed behind and managed to save the horses and other property by bringing them up into the dormitory over the vaulted undercroft."

December 14, 1952: Trace of snow or sleet at or near Pensacola, Crestview, DeFuniak Springs, Quincy, Carrabelle, Tallahassee, St. Marks, Monticello, Madison, Mayo, Live Oak, Lake City, Glen St. Mary, and Hilliard. Frozen precipitation occurred before noon at most points, but occurred in the afternoon at Mayo and Lake City and near Hilliard. Temperatures were above freezing and snow or sleet melted as it fell.

December 14, 1997: Central Mississippi and western Alabama saw significant snowfall of 4 to 8 inches on this day. In Mississippi, this was one of the heavier snowfalls to occur since 1929. The weight of the snow caused limbs of trees to break, which knocked down power lines.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 9 of 51

Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Cold	Mostly Clear	Partly Sunny then Chance Snow	Chance Snow	Chance Snow then Snow	Snow Likely and Blowing Snow	Slight Chance Snow then Mostly Sunny
High: 5 °F	Low: -13 °F	High: 9 °F	Low: 3 °F	High: 11 °F	Low: -8 °F	High: -6 °F

HAZARD HIGHLIGHTS

OVERNIGHT

COLD Wind Chills -20 to -30°

FRI - SAT

 Storm Total Snow 3 to 8"

SAT - SUN

COLD Wind Chills -25 to -45°

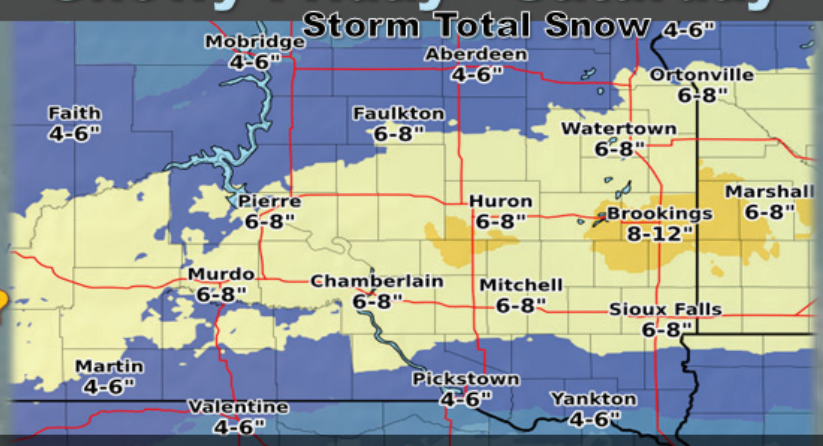


Snowy Friday - Saturday

Most snow falling Friday afternoon and evening

Travel plans Friday afternoon or evening?

Stay tuned for further updates



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 12/14/2016 5:21AM Central

Published on: 12/14/2016 at 5:32AM

A Wind Chill Advisory has been posted for late tonight into mid morning Thursday for wind chills of 20 below to 30 below zero. A Winter Storm Watch has also been issued for Friday into early Saturday for much of the southern half of South Dakota. 3 to 8 inches of snow is expected across much of the area, with much of that falling Friday afternoon and evening. Stay tuned to further updates if you have travel plans Friday afternoon or evening! www.weather.gov/abr

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 10 of 51

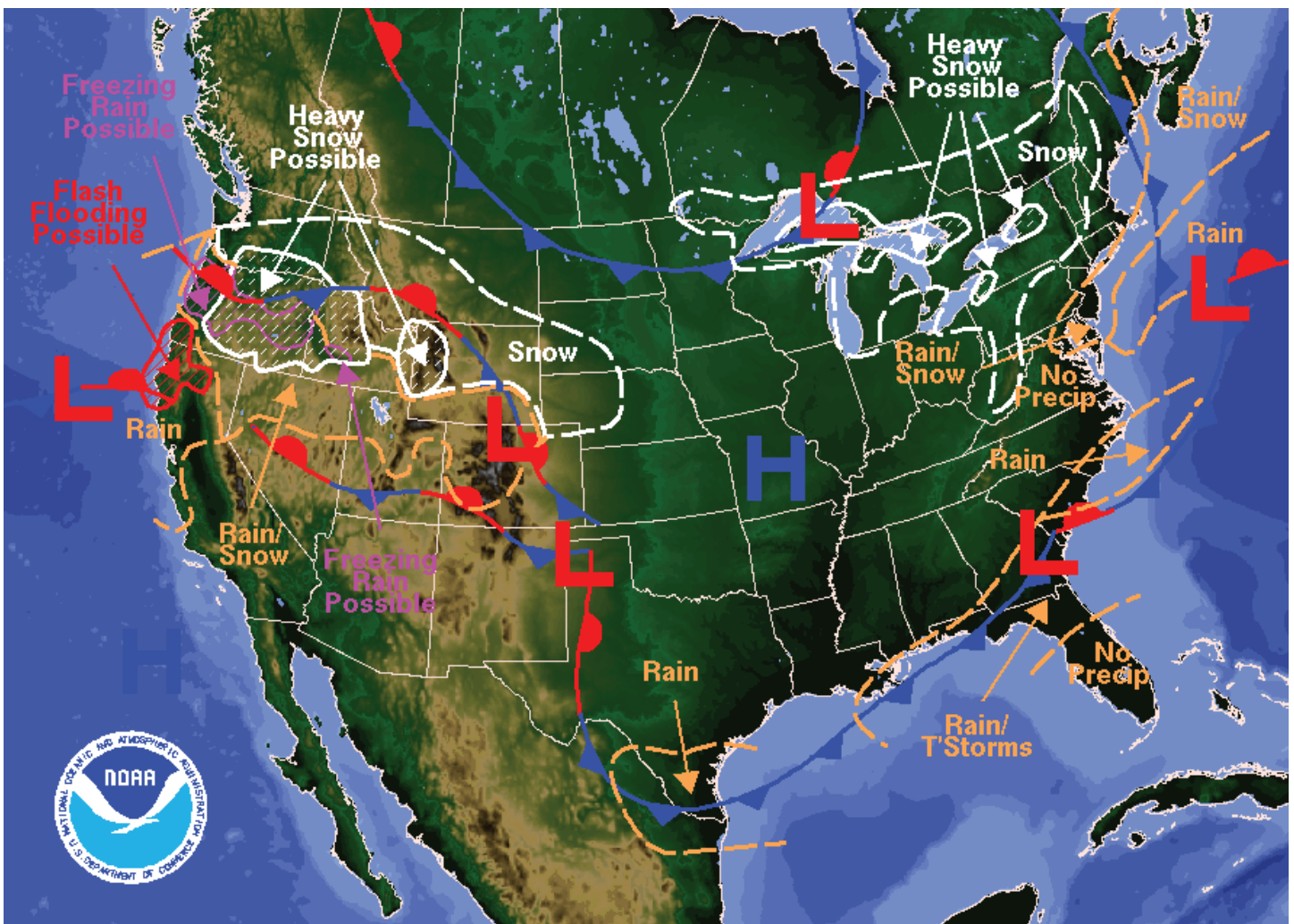
Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 12.4 F at 4:38 PM
Low Outside Temp: -13.5 F at 7:06 AM
High Gust: 18.0 Mph at 11:49 PM

Snow: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 55° in 1998
Record Low: -30° in 1917
Average High: 26°F
Average Low: 6°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.24
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.44
Precip Year to Date: 17.34
Sunset Tonight: 4:50 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:07 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Wed, Dec 14, 2016, issued 4:51 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



HOW TO START EACH DAY

What is the first thing you do each morning? The author of Pilgrim's Progress said that "He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day." It is important that we go into the presence of God before we go into the presence of men.

A woman attended a concert and realized the next morning that she had lost a diamond earring the night before. She called the manager of the auditorium and asked if it had been found. He said, "If you stay on the line, I'll check." A search was made and the diamond found. When he returned to the phone, the woman had hung up.

How like many of us. We do not expect any results when we pray. We hope He hears, yet we do not wait for His answer. So, we abandon Him and give up and live life without Him or His guidance.

David said, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee and will look up." He was saying, "I will pray and then I will wait for answers and directions." If we begin every day with God, we will end up with His blessings!

Prayer: Lord, when I begin my day I know it is important to ask for Your guidance and grace and to seek wisdom from Your Word. May I look to You for Your wisdom in every decision I make and direction in every path I take. In Your Name. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 5:3 In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 12 of 51

News from the Associated Press

Nebraska sanctions Whiteclay beer store for selling to minor

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — One of the four Nebraska liquor stores that sell millions of cans of beer near the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation has been sanctioned for selling to a minor.

The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission decided Tuesday to penalize the Arrowhead Inn. The business is expected to pay a \$600 fine for the Oct. 1 violation to avoid a 12-day suspension of its liquor license.

A 19-year-old told a Nebraska State Trooper he bought beer at the Arrowhead Inn.

The commission's Hobert Rupe says the suspension will be considered in the Arrowhead Inn's license renewal application, but the business' last violation before this case was in 2010.

The four stores in Whiteclay sold the equivalent of 3.5 million cans of beer last year near the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Tuesday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 80, Mitchell 44
Brookings 65, Yankton 50
Canton 72, Garretson 62
Colome 64, Marty Indian 44
Corsica/Stickney 83, Avon 37
Dakota Valley 68, Beresford 36
Deuel 42, Deubrook 39
Ethan 49, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 47
Faulkton 48, Sunshine Bible Academy 31
Flandreau 76, Elkton-Lake Benton 46
Gayville-Volin 68, Wausa, Neb. 42
Groton Area 72, Hitchcock-Tulare 40
Harding County 79, Tiospaye Topa 56
Herreid/Selby Area 56, Timber Lake 24
Ipswich 63, Eureka/Bowdle 53, OT
Langford 56, Leola/Frederick 29
Lead-Deadwood 60, Newell 56, OT
Miller 67, Potter County 53
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 67, West Central 46
North Central, Neb. 58, Burke/South Central 53
Parker 62, Baltic 34
Parkston 43, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 41
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 62, Brandon Valley 61
Sioux Falls Washington 67, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 33
Sisseton 51, Milbank Area 44
St. Thomas More 81, Douglas 67
Stanley County 82, Dupree 46
Sturgis Brown 71, Belle Fourche 46
Sully Buttes 62, Lyman 23
Takini 72, Wakpala 50
Tri-Valley 55, Madison 44
Vermillion 62, Lennox 52
Wall 60, Philip 51

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 13 of 51

Waubay/Summit 51, Wilmot 47
Wolsey-Wessington 80, Lake Preston 51
GIRLS' BASKETBALL
Aberdeen Central 54, Mitchell 35
Aberdeen Roncalli 52, Mobridge-Pollock 22
Avon 55, Corsica/Stickney 34
Belle Fourche 69, Sturgis Brown 55
Brandon Valley 44, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 41
Brookings 51, Yankton 46
Canistota 44, Colman-Egan 43
Colome 76, Marty Indian 69
Dakota Valley 57, Beresford 33
Dell Rapids 74, Sioux Falls Christian 47
Deubrook 64, Deuel 46
Dupree 45, Lemmon 43
Ethan 53, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 19
Faith 73, Bison 24
Faulkton 38, Sunshine Bible Academy 31
Flandreau 58, Elkton-Lake Benton 50, OT
Garretson 61, Canton 55
Gayville-Volin 44, Wausa, Neb. 32
Harding County 62, Tiospaye Topa 45
Highmore-Harrold 70, James Valley Christian 48
Ipswich 50, Eureka/Bowdle 37
Lead-Deadwood 52, Newell 47
Lennox 62, West Central 41
Lyman 62, Stanley County 36
Madison 60, Tri-Valley 34
Menno 57, Scotland 40
Milbank 57, Sisseton 36
North Central, Neb. 57, Burke/South Central 29
Parker 52, Baltic 38
Platte-Geddes 47, Kimball/White Lake 42
Platte-Geddes/Dakota Christian 47, Kimball 42
Santee, Neb. 52, Marion 46
Timber Lake 55, Herreid/Selby Area 43
Wakpala 74, Takini 38
Waverly-South Shore 52, Clark-Willow Lake JV 37

Arctic air to spread over northeast US; Midwest still cold

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Arctic cold is expected to spread across the northeastern United States while the Midwest remains frigid through the work week, forecasters said.

Much of the northern Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern states will stay cold for the next couple of days as the arctic air remains stuck over the northern Appalachians, the National Weather Service said.

The northern Plains and Upper Midwest will remain stuck in the deep freeze. Highs Wednesday will range from 20 to 30 degrees below average. Temperatures will remain well below zero in Minnesota and Wisconsin on Wednesday night.

The system also is expected to bring widespread snow from the Great Lakes to the Northeast on Thursday. Much of the central U.S. will be dry but cool.

Below-normal temperatures are expected this weekend and into Monday across the entire northern half

of the country, from the Pacific Northwest to Maine and as far south as Oklahoma, Arkansas and Virginia, according to the Climate Prediction Center.

Up to half a foot of snow also could fall from the Upper Mississippi Valley to the Northeast on Friday and Saturday, and areas east of the Appalachian Mountains could see freezing rain and sleet on Saturday.

Another arctic air mass on the heels of this cold front is expected to bring temperatures to the northern Plains over the weekend and into early next week that will be as much as 24 degrees below normal, according to Climate Prediction Center forecaster Stephen Baxter.

Tiger seized in Ohio animal crackdown euthanized in Colorado

By JOHN SEEWER, Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — One of six tigers seized nearly two years ago in a crackdown on exotic animal owners in Ohio has been euthanized just months after it was found in poor health and removed from a South Dakota sanctuary.

The tiger seized from a roadside sanctuary near Toledo in 2015 was among a dozen animals removed from the Spirit of the Hills Wildlife Sanctuary in South Dakota and sent to another sanctuary in Colorado.

Federal inspectors said this fall that the tiger had a bleeding mass in her mouth that affected her ability to eat.

Ohio Department of Agriculture officials said last month the tiger had been getting better in Colorado, but she had to be euthanized on Sunday because she was suffering from an aggressive form of cancer, said Mark Bruce, a department spokesman.

Ohio took custody of 11 animals from Kenny Hetrick's sanctuary outside Toledo after officials said he ignored warnings about needing a permit for the exotic animals. Inspectors also reported that his cages weren't secure enough to prevent an escape.

His lion named Leo was euthanized a few months after the state seizure because Ohio officials said it was in failing health, and the other animals were moved to sanctuaries in other states.

Ohio officials hauled away the animals under a new state law that came about after a man in eastern Ohio released dozens of his exotic animals before killing himself in 2011.

Hetrick and his family have been fighting the state in court, arguing that his animals were improperly taken and should be returned.

A county judge in November ruled the state unfairly denied a permit to Hetrick, who first began taking in abused and unwanted animals during the mid-1970s.

The judge initially told state officials to return the tigers, bear and three other big cats within a week, but he later put a hold on the order while the state appealed.

Anonymous donor gives Mitchell police \$10K to give out

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — Police in Mitchell are planning to give away \$10,000 over the next several days thanks to a donation from an anonymous donor.

Officers will hand out \$100 bills to random individuals during casual interactions, calls for service or traffic stops, the Daily Republic (<http://bit.ly/2gs22Fa>) reported. The goal is for all of the Mitchell Police Division's 28 police officers to give away at least one \$100 bill.

"Some of them may be people they know or maybe they took a report from them or they dealt with these people a week or two ago," said Lyndon Overweg, chief of public safety for the Mitchell Police Division. "Maybe they had seen a need while they were visiting with them. It doesn't have to be a vehicle pullover."

The money will be accompanied by a note that wishes the recipient happy holidays, asks them to share with those in need and thanks local police.

Overweg said he has already delivered a \$100 bill to a Mitchell resident who has been going through a challenging time with medical problems.

"It felt very good," he said. "We want everybody to at least experience it."

The police department said the anonymous donor selected the officers because of the challenges law

enforcement officers have recently faced.

Overweg noted that other police departments nationwide have had similar opportunities, but added: "We just thought we were blessed that somebody picked us for one of these events."

Information from: The Daily Republic, <http://www.mitchellrepublic.com>

Governor, tribal leader discuss reducing protest tensions

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press**

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple and Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault have met to discuss reducing tensions between law officers and Dakota Access oil pipeline opponents, as the main protest camp begins to clear out after the federal government stalled the \$3.8 billion project.

Developer Energy Transfer Partners and the Army are battling in court over permission for the pipeline to cross under the Missouri River in southern North Dakota, the last large chunk of construction for the project to move North Dakota oil 1,200 miles to a shipping point in Illinois. Thousands of opponents who have protested for months have been leaving their main camp in southern North Dakota in recent days due to the work stoppage and severe winter weather.

Archambault said Tuesday that the tribe estimates only about 300 people remain in the main camp. Dalrymple said in a statement that the camp might be vacated by Jan. 1, but Archambault said that's not the case. Some in the camp have said they need until the end of the year to complete their exit, while others plan to stay the winter, he said.

An unknown number of others remain in another camp nearby that's run by LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, a protest organizer. Allard didn't immediately respond to requests for comment Tuesday, but she said in a social media post Monday that "we are not going anywhere."

Some pipeline opponents fear a federal judge will give ETP permission to finish the project or that the administration of pro-energy President-elect Donald Trump will overturn an Army decision this month not to grant permission for the river crossing. The Associated Press reported Tuesday that according to people with knowledge of the decision former Texas Governor Rick Perry is Trump's choice to lead the Energy Department. Perry is on the board of ETP, although Archambault said that doesn't discourage him.

"We're not opposed to energy development — we're just asking that you don't do it off our backs," the chairman said.

The tribe and its supporters believe the pipeline threatens American Indian cultural sites and the tribe's drinking water, which is drawn from the Missouri. ETP disputes that.

Dalrymple and Archambault both said that efforts to normalize relations between the state and tribe rest heavily on reopening a state Highway 1806 bridge right outside the camp. The Backwater Bridge has been closed since being damaged by fire set by protesters in late October.

The state Transportation Department says the bridge won't be inspected until the safety of workers is ensured. Pipeline opponents think the state is deliberately leaving the bridge closed to block protesters in from the north.

"The bridge is the main issue," Archambault said. "How can we get (the blockade) removed as soon as possible so that it opens up emergency service routes, opens up commerce again for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe."

Dalrymple said the plan is to enlist the help of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to maintain safety while workers inspect the bridge. Archambault said a timeline wasn't developed during the Monday meeting, which also was attended by other Tribal Council members and state officials.

"The meeting was constructive, an important step toward rebuilding long-term relationships," Dalrymple said.

Also, prosecutor Ladd Erickson said he wants people who have been arrested for protesting against the pipeline to reimburse the state for their court-appointed attorneys. The protests have resulted in 570

arrests since August, creating an unprecedented burden for the state's court system. The Commission on Legal Counsel for Indigents plans to seek \$670,000 from the Legislature to help cover the costs of protest-related cases.

Associated Press writer James MacPherson contributed to this story from Bismarck.

Follow Blake Nicholson on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/NicholsonBlake>

Attorney general's office pushes to save parts of ethics law

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota attorney general's office is trying to salvage parts of a voter-approved government ethics overhaul after a state judge put the new law on hold while a court challenge moves forward.

Attorney General Marty Jackley's office and the wide-ranging law's sponsors asked the court in legal filings this week to save certain provisions of the law, including lower caps on campaign contributions, tougher lobbying regulations and more frequent campaign finance reporting requirements.

They contend those provisions can stand alone without portions of the law deemed unconstitutional by the court. Voters narrowly approved the ballot measure in November after backers billed it as an anti-corruption package that would improve transparency.

Circuit Judge Mark Barnett last week issued a preliminary injunction, delaying the entire law's implementation at the request of a group of two dozen Republican lawmakers and others who challenged it in a lawsuit filed against the state.

Opponents of the measure argue that provisions of the law, including an ethics commission, public campaign funding and limitations on lobbyist gifts to lawmakers, run afoul of the state or federal constitutions — or both.

Barnett ruled that those provisions may be unconstitutional and put the law on pause until a final judgment is made. But he also invited input on portions of the overhaul that could be "saved," saying his injunction could be amended.

Jackley's office and the law's sponsors argue for re-instituting provisions such as increasing to two years a ban on private lobbying by former state officials and high-level employees after they leave government, changing the penalty for bribery from a misdemeanor to a felony and requiring disclosure of the identity of someone who gives \$100 or more to an organization for use in an independent expenditure.

Those who brought the court challenge face a Wednesday deadline to file their arguments on the issue.

Dewey County sheriff releases new site of wild horse auction

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The sale of about 600 wild horses seized from a troubled sanctuary in north-central South Dakota will be held in Faith, after a sale in Philip was called off due to the auction there allegedly being harassed and threatened.

Dewey County Sheriff Les Mayer had said last week that he wouldn't disclose the new location until a few days before the Dec. 20 sale. The Rapid City Journal reports (<http://bit.ly/2hoHVMQ>) that he changed course this week.

The horses are from a Lantry-area ranch operated by the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros. Authorities seized the facility's animals in October after a state veterinarian found they were being neglected and a former ranch employee said they were being starved to death.

Society President Karen Sussman has denied wrongdoing.

Information from: Rapid City Journal, <http://www.rapidcityjournal.com>

Aleppo cease-fire collapses, threatening evacuation plans

By PHILIP ISSA and SARAH EL DEEB, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A cease-fire deal between rebels and the Syrian government in the city of Aleppo effectively collapsed on Wednesday, with fighter jets resuming deadly air raids over the opposition's densely crowded enclave in the east of the city.

The attacks threatened to scuttle plans to evacuate rebels and tens thousands of civilians out of harm's way, in what would seal the opposition's surrender of the city.

The evacuation was supposed to begin at dawn but shelling resumed in the morning hours and buses meant to be used in the pullout of rebels and civilians returned to their depots. Activists and fighters trapped in the opposition's last sliver of territory in Aleppo said pro-government forces had struck their district with dozens of rockets since mid-morning.

They said aircraft resumed bombing shortly after noon.

"They began to strike as if there's no such thing as a 'cease-fire' or 'civilian evacuation,'" said media activist Mahmoud Raslan. "They've announced they are going to kill us all."

It was not clear whether the planes were Syrian or Russian. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group reported at least six people had been killed.

A legal adviser to the rebels accused Iran of foiling the Russia- and Turkey-brokered deal by imposing new conditions on the rebels. Along with Russia, Iran backs President Bashar Assad's government and has committed advisers and elite Revolutionary Guard forces to the government's war. Turkey backs the rebels fighting to topple Assad.

Osama Abo Zaid, the adviser, said Iran was imposing new conditions for the truce, demanding the remains of Iranians killed in Aleppo be returned and that Iranian hostages held in rebel-controlled Idlib province be released. He said the conditions were "exclusively sectarian and crippling."

The Syrian government, meanwhile, withdrew its green-colored buses from the evacuation point at the edge of the city of Aleppo's opposition enclave. The Lebanese al-Manar TV, the media arm of the Lebanese militant Shiite group Hezbollah fighting alongside Assad's forces, broadcast footage of the buses leaving the evacuation point empty and said government forces had resumed fighting with rebels in the city.

Mohammed Abu Jaafar, head of forensics in eastern Aleppo, said eastern Aleppo residents felt "duped."

"People have left their shelters ... to be ready for the evacuation. I can't describe it," Abu Jaafar said. "Since the morning, they started to target the areas where people have gathered ... these people were walking to the crossings designated for exit."

Activists in eastern Aleppo blamed the violence on pro-government forces, saying they shot first. Raslan said he was reporting for a Turkish agency when a rocket crashed nearby at around 10:15 a.m. He shared an audio recording of the explosion with the Associated Press. He was unharmed.

The Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement that the rebels "resumed the hostilities" at dawn, trying to break through Syrian government positions to the north-west.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu accused the Syrian government and its allies of trying to scuttle the deal. "We see now that the regime and other groups are trying to obstruct this (deal)," he said in remarks quoted by the state-run Anadolu Agency. "This includes Russia, Iran, forces supported by Iran and the regime."

The surrender of Aleppo's remaining opposition-run neighborhoods to government control would be a turning point in Syria's civil war.

The last-minute deal was mediated by Ankara and Moscow as the rebel enclave rapidly dissolved and ceded more and more territory in the face of the brutal advance by Syrian forces, backed by Russia and assisted by Shiite militias from Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Late on Tuesday, the U.N. envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, called for immediate access to the former rebel enclave to confirm the end of military operations and to oversee the safe departure of tens of thousands of civilians and opposition fighters. De Mistura was at the Security Council where an emergency meeting for Aleppo was held.

Earlier Wednesday, the pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV broadcast footage of the government buses idling at the agreed-on evacuation point. The TV said the buses are prepared to move 5,000 fighters and their families to Atareb, an opposition-held town in the northwestern Aleppo countryside.

Brita Haj Hassan, a Syrian opposition official living in exile, said from Luxemburg that there were 800 sick and wounded people requiring immediate medical evacuation from eastern Aleppo. He said the U.N. and others had informed the opposition the evacuation had been delayed until Thursday but there was no comment from the Syrian government, the United Nations or aid groups on the ground.

The dramatic developments surrounding Aleppo — which would restore the remainder of what was once Syria's largest city to Assad's forces after months of heavy fighting and a crippling siege — followed reports of mass killings by government forces closing in on the final few blocks still held by the rebels.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the emergency meeting late Tuesday that he had received "credible reports" of civilians killed by pro-government forces as they swept into the last rebel areas in Aleppo.

Bashar al-Ja'afari, Syria's U.N. ambassador, denied any mass killings or revenge attacks, but added it was Syria's "constitutional right" to go after "terrorists," a reference to all opposition fighters.

"Aleppo has been liberated from terrorists and those who toyed with terrorism," he said. "Aleppo has returned to the nation."

Associated Press writer Dominique Soguel in Istanbul contributed to this report.

Perry would bring oil industry ties to Energy Department

By STEPHEN BRAUN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rick Perry, President-elect Donald Trump's choice for Energy secretary, has close ties to the Texas oil industry and has corporate roles in two petroleum companies pushing to get government approval for the proposed 1,200-mile crude oil pipeline that has stoked mass protests in North Dakota.

Perry's current roles as board director at Energy Transfer Partners LP and also at Sunoco Logistics Partners LP, which jointly developed the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline project, is a strong indicator of the pro-oil industry sentiment that will likely take root at the Energy Department under his oversight. Perry is close to Texas energy industry executives, and his political campaigns, including two aborted presidential campaigns, benefited substantially from their donations.

The former Texas governor would not have authority to intervene directly after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' decision last month to delay the pipeline to allow talks with the Standing Rock Sioux and other project opponents. The Army will decide whether to grant an easement near the Sioux reservation in North Dakota, and the departments of Energy, Interior and Justice and the Environmental Protection Agency have had lesser supporting roles.

Trump announced his choice of Perry in an early morning release Wednesday from Trump Tower in New York.

He called Perry "one of the most successful governors in modern history, having led Texas through a sustained period of economic growth and prosperity by developing the state's energy resources and infrastructure, and making low-cost energy available to companies and families.

"It is a tremendous honor to be selected to serve as Secretary of Energy by President-elect Trump," Perry said. "I am deeply humbled by his trust in me."

Perry's close relations with energy executives and his long-time dependence on them for political contributions signal an abrupt change of course at the Energy Department. Perry is expected to welcome the four-state pipeline and similar projects, set an open-door policy for oil industry interests and possibly tear down the department altogether.

During his unsuccessful 2012 run for the presidency, Perry proposed eliminating the Energy Department. As secretary, he would be involved in policy decisions on increasing the nation's domestic supply of oil and investments in oil exploration research and technology.

The department plays a major regulatory role in overseeing nuclear power and natural gas. It also man-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 19 of 51

ages 17 national labs charged with developing science and technology to further the nation's energy sector and conduct research to spur innovation. It also maintains and secures U.S. nuclear weapons.

Soon after stepping down as Texas governor, Perry joined Energy Transfer Partners in February 2015, and its general partner, Sunoco Logistics, one month later. Energy Transfer Partners is owned by Kelcy Warren, a Dallas billionaire who has been a loyal Perry donor during his gubernatorial and presidential runs.

During the 2016 campaign, Warren donated \$500,000 to the Opportunity and Freedom super political action committee backing Perry's run for the White House. Warren also gave nearly \$250,000 to Republican candidates and committees. The oil and gas industry was the dominant sector behind Perry's 2016 presidential effort, donating more than \$1.6 million.

Energy Transfer's 2016 annual report showed that Perry owned \$154,000 worth of partnership units. At Sunoco Logistics, Perry was awarded units worth about \$101,000, according to the firm's 2015 annual report.

Perry's wife, Anita, also owned up to \$15,000 in shares in Warren's flagship firm, Energy Transfer Equity LP, and a similar amount in Sunoco Logistics, according to her husband's 2015 presidential financial disclosure. Perry and his wife also reported owning several other energy-related investments including between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in the Dallas-based Grey Rock Energy Fund and between \$15,000 and \$50,000 in holdings in QR Energy LP.

The incoming Trump administration has said it plans to approve the controversial pipeline project, which was stalled in recent months by defiant protests by Native American and environmental opponents. The Army Corps ruled last month that it was delaying a decision on an easement for the project near the Sioux reservation in North Dakota. The decision quickly spurred legal complaints against the Army Corps by the pipeline project's developers.

Emails and phone calls to the Trump transition team and Energy Transfer Partners for comment were not returned. A spokesman for Sunoco Logistics referred questions to Energy Transfer Partners, saying that the partner firm appoints the Sunoco Logistics board.

Perry's net worth of about \$3 million does not compare to the multimillion dollar fortunes of President-elect Donald Trump and other corporate leaders named to Cabinet positions in his administration. But the former Texas governor could face similar questions about potential ethics conflicts unless he divests his assets into a government-approved blind trust.

His most recent presidential financial disclosure, filed in 2015, showed that a sizeable portion of his wealth in recent years has come from energy investments and consulting work for a Texas equipment firm that provides heavy machinery for oil exploration work.

Perry's 2015 disclosure reported \$250,000 in income during that period from Holt Texas Ltd., an equipment firm headed by Peter Holt, a long-time political donor to Perry's campaigns. Holt's San Antonio firm, known as Holt Cat, sells and rents Caterpillar equipment, including heavy-duty engines for oil exploration.

Holt, who also owns the San Antonio Spurs, has donated more than \$600,000 to Perry's campaigns since 2000. Perry had at least 11 telephone conversations with Holt's company dating back to 2008, according to a review of the governor's phone records provided previously to The Associated Press under Texas public-information laws.

Perry might also face questions about his 2014 indictment by a grand jury in Travis County, Texas, for corruption-related charges. Perry was cleared of the charges in 2015, but not before he had to defend himself in a messy public case that shadowed his 2016 presidential run.

He was indicted in August 2014 following an investigation by a special prosecutor into several actions he took as Texas governor. Perry was accused on two felony charges — threatening to veto \$7.5 million in funding to the state Public Integrity Unit and pressing for the resignation of the Travis County district attorney after she was convicted on drunk-driving charges.

Both charges were dismissed by Texas state appeals courts.

Associated Press writers Matthew Daly and Jack Gillum contributed to this report.

With Tillerson, Trump keeps betting big on business leaders

By JULIE PACE, AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — In selecting Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson as his secretary of state, President-elect Donald Trump is making the same bet he asked voters to make on him: that a track record of business accomplishment will translate into success in government.

Indeed, Trump, the first billionaire businessman to win the White House, is broadly testing that proposition across his administration. He's tapped fast food executive Andy Puzder to lead the Labor Department, billionaire investor Wilbur Ross for Commerce, financier Steven Mnuchin as Treasury secretary and Goldman Sachs President Gary Cohn as his top economic adviser. And early Wednesday, the billionaire businessman confirmed that he'd settled on former Texas Gov. Rick Perry to be the next secretary of energy.

But he's taking perhaps his biggest chance on Tillerson, pulling an executive from the rough-and-tumble world of oil production into the delicate arena of international diplomacy. If confirmed by the Senate — and his deep ties to Russia make that no sure thing — Tillerson will be at the center of discussions over the Syrian civil war, the intractable pursuit of peace in the Middle East, and potential conflicts with China, given Trump's early questioning of longstanding U.S. policy toward Beijing.

To Trump, the deals Tillerson has struck around the world for Exxon, and the relationships he has built doing so, are ample preparation for the challenges he would face as the nation's top diplomat. While Tillerson's ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin are drawing scrutiny on Capitol Hill, Trump has had good things to say about Putin, too, and Tillerson's connection doesn't appear to have given him any pause.

"Rex knows how to manage a global enterprise, which is crucial to running a successful State Department, and his relationships with leaders all over the world are second to none," Trump said Tuesday.

He's been making a similar case about himself all year as he sought to persuade voters that a real estate mogul and political novice had the skills to serve as president. He spent little time trying to show voters that his skills extended beyond the boardroom. Instead, he argued that experience was plenty.

Of Perry, Trump praised his Energy Department choice in an early morning statement Wednesday from Trump Tower in New York.

"As the governor of Texas, Rick Perry created a business climate that produced millions of new jobs and lower energy prices in his state," he said, "and he will bring that same approach to our entire country as secretary of energy ." Perry called it "a tremendous honor" to be chosen for Trump's evolving Cabinet.

As Trump set about putting his administration together, people close to him say he was quickly drawn to the idea of elite business leaders filling the Cabinet, along with those who have had success in areas outside of politics. He's tapped three retired generals for top jobs: James Mattis to head the Pentagon, John Kelly for the Department of Homeland Security and Michael Flynn as his national security adviser.

While business leaders have served in Cabinet posts under both Republican and Democratic presidents, the scope of private sector influence in Trump's burgeoning team is a stark contrast to modern predecessors. Most of President Barack Obama's Cabinet secretaries had public sector backgrounds, though Interior Secretary Sally Jewell served as CEO of the retail company REI and Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald is the retired CEO of Procter & Gamble.

Some of Trump's picks have come from a more traditional mold. Among them will be former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who has been asked by Trump to lead the Energy Department, according to people with knowledge of the decision. Trump has also selected a handful of congressional lawmakers for other top jobs.

But Trump is said to have been particularly intrigued by the prospect of breaking the mold with his choice for secretary of state, one of the most powerful and prominent positions and one that often goes to a diplomatic veteran.

Tillerson came to his attention several years ago when he beat back a motion supported by the Rockefellers — Exxon's founding family — that would have split the chairman and chief executive position into two different jobs. The president-elect was drawn to Tillerson's confidence and Texas swagger, according to people with knowledge of the decision.

"Rex Tillerson is a very Trumpian-inspired pick because it's somebody who, like Donald Trump, has a

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 21 of 51

career outside of politics, and he's somebody who is accustomed to making big deals and translating that into big impact," said Kellyanne Conway, one of Trump's senior advisers.

But for some longtime foreign policy hands, Tillerson is an uncomfortable fit.

"Rex Tillerson has done a fantastic job for Exxon Mobil shareholders," said Michael McFaul, Obama's former ambassador to Russia. "I am not sure those same skills qualify him to be secretary of state."

A native of Wichita Falls, Texas, Tillerson came to Exxon Mobil Corp. as a production engineer straight out of the University of Texas in 1975 and never left. Groomed for an executive position, he has held posts in the company's central U.S., Yemen and Russia operations.

Early in the company's efforts to gain access to the Russian market, Tillerson cut a deal with state-owned Rosneft. The neglected post-Soviet company didn't have a tremendous amount to offer, but Exxon partnered with it "to be on the same side of the table," Tillerson said, according to "Private Empire," an investigative history of Exxon by Steve Coll.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC>

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

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

1. CEASE-FIRE COLLAPSING IN ALEPPO

Shelling resumes in the besieged Syrian city and buses meant to evacuate rebels and tens of thousands of civilians have pulled back to their depots.

2. ADVANTAGE ASSAD — ALEPPO CAPTURE A KEY MOMENT

The recapture of the northern city leaves the Syrian president in control of almost all major urban areas — and poised for a bigger role globally against the Islamic State group.

3. WHO ENERGY SECRETARY PICK HAS TIES TO

Rick Perry has close ties to the Texas oil industry and has corporate roles in two petroleum companies pushing for Dakota Access Pipeline approval.

4. PICK FOR INTERIOR HAD OTHER AGENDA

During the campaign, Rep. Ryan Zinke of Montana identified his top priorities as national security, vetting of refugees, "Obamacare" and the economy.

5. WHAT FED IS EXPECTED TO DO

The central bank is expected to raise its key interest rate for the first time in a year, likely nudging up the cost of some consumer and business loans.

6. WHERE THEY'RE SEEING AN INFLUX OF MIGRANTS

The region near the border of Greece and Turkey, where refugees are taking advantage of a legal loophole that doesn't restrict land border entries.

7. WHY ABE IS MOTIVATED TO MEET WITH PUTIN

The prime minister is eager to resolve a 70-year-old territorial dispute that has kept Japan and Russia from signing a peace treaty formally ending World War II.

8. TIME TO BUNDLE UP

Arctic cold is expected to spread across the northeastern U.S. while the Midwest remains frigid through the work week.

9. BRAT PACK, 'ROGER RABBIT' ADDED TO NATIONAL FILM REGISTRY

Eighties' pop classics "The Breakfast Club," "The Princess Bride" and "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" are among the 25 movies tapped for preservation this year.

10. ALAN THICKE DEAD AT 69

The genial TV sitcom dad in "Growing Pains" straddled the 1950s father-knows-best version and the enlightened 1980s model.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 22 of 51

40 bowls in 17 days and reasons to watch every single one

By RALPH D. RUSSO, AP College Football Writer

Doing its best to challenge the premise that there can never be enough college football, the bowl system gives fans 40 FBS games from Dec. 17 through Jan. 2 that include 17 teams with 6-6 records and two more that went 5-7.

Too much, you say.

Nonsense.

Every game is special in its own way and for the third straight year we are here with a reason to watch each and every one. And to pick the winners, which may also provide a reason to watch. Strictly for entertainment purposes, of course.

SATURDAY, DEC. 17

New Mexico Bowl in Albuquerque

UTSA (plus 6 ½) vs. New Mexico, 2 p.m. (ESPN)

You can't watch them all if you miss the first one. Duh. ... NEW MEXICO 31-20.

Las Vegas Bowl

San Diego State (plus 4) vs. Houston, 3:30 p.m. (ABC)

Aztecs star Donnel Pumphrey, all 5-foot-9, 180 pounds of him, can break the FBS career rushing record held by Wisconsin's Ron Dayne (6,397) with 108 yards in his last college game — and do it in his hometown ... HOUSTON 28-17.

Camellia Bowl in Montgomery, Alabama

Toledo (minus 2 ½) vs. Appalachian State, 5:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Rockets RB Kareem Hunt is going to run for 1,000 yards for an NFL team at some point in the near future and you will look like a genius when you have him on your fantasy team ... TOLEDO 27-24.

Cure Bowl in Orlando, Florida

UCF (minus 6 ½) vs. Arkansas State, 5:30 p.m. (CBSSN)

ESPN owns the game. Disney owns ESPN. Disney World is in Orlando. Put it all together and chances are good there will be some kind of Disney character appearance. Might not be a big enough game for Mickey. Feels more like a Goofy assignment. ... ARKANSAS STATE 24-17.

New Orleans Bowl

Southern Miss (minus 4) vs. Louisiana-Lafayette, 9 p.m. (ESPN)

The Ragin' Cajuns had gone to — and won — four straight New Orleans Bowls before missing last year's. And it just was not the same without them ... LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE 30-24.

MONDAY, DEC. 19

Miami Beach Bowl

Tulsa (minus 11 ½) vs. Central Michigan, 2:30 p.m. (ESPN)

The Chippewas have pulled off two of the craziest last-play of the game touchdowns in recent years, first at the Bamahas Bowl two years ago and then to beat Oklahoma State this season. Never count them out ... TULSA 42-28.

TUESDAY, DEC. 20

Boca Raton (Florida) Bowl

Memphis (plus 5) vs. Western Kentucky, 7 p.m. (ESPN)

See the American Athletic Conference's next rising-star coach: 35-year-old Mike Norvell of Memphis ... WESTERN KENTUCKY 48-45.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 21

Poinsettia Bowl in San Diego

BYU (minus 9) vs. Wyoming, 9 p.m. (ESPN)

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 23 of 51

Old WAC rivals playing in San Diego, so the ingredients are here for some old-school Holiday Bowl madness ... BYU 27-23.

THURSDAY, DEC. 22

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl in Boise

Idaho (plus 13 ½) vs. Colorado State, 7 p.m. (ESPN)

The other Coach Petrino had a pretty good season, too. Paul Petrino, brother of Bobby, led the Vandals to a bowl for the first time since 2009 ... COLORADO STATE 38-21.

FRIDAY, DEC. 23

Bahamas Bowl in Nassau

Eastern Michigan (plus 4) vs. Old Dominion, 1 p.m. (ESPN)

The Eagles have only one bowl appearance in program history and it came almost 30 years ago. And now they're going to the Bahamas. Happiest. Team. Ever. ... OLD DOMINION 34-28.

Armed Forces Bowl in Fort Worth, Texas

Navy (plus 3 ½) vs. Louisiana Tech, 4:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Potential to be one of the most entertaining bowls if Navy's triple-option can get rolling again without injured QB Will Worth ... LA TECH 35-28.

Dollar General Bowl in Mobile, Alabama

Ohio (plus 4) vs. Troy, 8 p.m. (ESPN)

Ohio's 72-year-old Frank Solich tries to beat a coach half his age — 36-year-old Neal Brown of Troy ... OHIO 27-26.

SATURDAY, DEC. 24

Hawaii Bowl in Honolulu

Middle Tennessee (OFF) vs. Hawaii, 8 p.m. (ESPN)

Jeopardy: This Ole Miss transfer is averaging more yards from scrimmage than Christian McCaffrey, Dalvin Cook and Donnell Pumphrey. Who is I'Tavius Mathers of MTSU? ... MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE 38-28.

MONDAY, DEC. 26

St. Petersburg (Florida) Bowl

Mississippi State (minus 13) vs. Miami University, 11 a.m. (ESPN)

The RedHawks started the season 0-6 and could end it on a seven-game winning streak. Playing an SEC team is not ideal, but, hey, who thought they would have gotten this far? ... MISSISSIPPI STATE 45-21, BEST BET.

Quick Lane Bowl in Detroit

Boston College (plus 1) vs. Maryland, 2:30 p.m. (ESPN2)

Two 6-6 teams with zero combined victories against winning FBS opponents. Well, it's better than waiting in line to return those ugly sweaters you got for Christmas ... MARYLAND 16-12.

Independence Bowl in Shreveport, Louisiana

NC State (minus 4 ½) vs. Vanderbilt, 5 p.m. (ESPN2)

Watch or Commodores All-America LB Zach Cunningham will tackle you. Actually, even if you do watch he might tackle you. He pretty much tackles everyone ... VANDERBILT 24-21.

TUESDAY, DEC. 27

Heart of Dallas Bowl

Army (minus 10 ½) vs. North Texas, Noon (ESPN)

You recorded the regular-season meeting between the Black Knights and Mean Green, but your 6-year-old erased it from the DVR to record a Doc McStuffins marathon before you could watch it. Lucky you.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 24 of 51

They're playing again ... ARMY 24-17.

Military Bowl in Annapolis, Maryland

Wake Forest (minus 13) vs. Temple, 3:30 p.m. (ESPN)

DB-turned-DE Hassan Reddick of Temple leads the nation in tackles for loss (21.5). Wake has the second-worst offense of any bowl team. Watch to see Reddick's draft stock improve ... TEMPLE 24-14.

Holiday Bowl in San Diego

Minnesota (plus 7) vs. Washington State, 7 p.m. (ESPN)

The Golden Gophers threw eight TD passes this season. Cougars QB Luke Falk has thrown at least half that many in a game 12 times in his career ... WASHINGTON STATE 34-21.

Cactus Bowl in Phoenix

Boise State (minus 7) vs. Baylor, 10:15 p.m. (ESPN)

The Bears try to avoid a seven-game losing streak in a game that will essentially bring the Art Briles' era to a close ... BOISE STATE 42-31.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 28

Pinstripe Bowl in New York

Northwestern (plus 5 ½) vs. Pittsburgh, 2 p.m. (ESPN)

Pitt star and cancer survivor James Conner plays his last college game in Yankee Stadium. Pretty cool. ... PITT 38-31.

Russell Athletic Bowl in Orlando, Florida

Miami (minus 3) vs. West Virginia, 5:30 p.m. (ESPN)

The Hurricanes are involved so one day this game could be the subject of an ESPN 30-for-30 ... WEST VIRGINIA 28-24.

Foster Farms Bowl in Santa Clara, California

Indiana (plus 7 ½) vs. Utah, 8:30 p.m. (FOX)

The first game as Indiana head coach for former defensive coordinator Tom Allen ... UTAH 24-20.

Texas Bowl in Houston

Kansas State (plus 2) vs. Texas A&M, 9 p.m. (ESPN)

Get a preview of a Kansas State team that will be a trendy dark horse pick to win the Big 12 next season ... KANSAS STATE 28-23.

THURSDAY, DEC. 29

Birmingham (Alabama) Bowl

South Florida (minus 10 ½) vs. South Carolina, 2 p.m. (ESPN)

Like watching Heisman Trophy winner Lamar Jackson play? Then you will enjoy USF QB Quinton Flowers ... USF 38-31.

Belk Bowl in Charlotte, North Carolina

Virginia Tech (minus 7) vs. Arkansas, 5:30 p.m. (ESPN)

If the game gets boring follow @belkbowl, the most entertaining bowl on Twitter ... VIRGINIA TECH 28-23.

Alamo Bowl in San Antonio, Texas

Oklahoma State (plus 3 ½) vs. Colorado, 9 p.m. (ESPN)

Is this the end of Mike Gundy's mullet? Or the first step toward a Bon Jovi cover band for the Cowboys' coach? ... COLORADO 34-27.

FRIDAY, DEC. 30

Liberty Bowl in Memphis, Tennessee

Georgia (pick'em) vs. TCU, Noon (ESPN)

The Bulldogs (7-5) try to avoid their worst season since 2010, coincidentally the last time they went to the Liberty Bowl — which they lost to finish 6-7 ... GEORGIA 24-20.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 25 of 51

Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas
North Carolina (plus 4) vs. Stanford, 2 p.m. (CBS)
Christian McCaffrey's last game at Stanford and you won't have to stay up late to watch it ... STANFORD 28-27.

Music City Bowl in Nashville, Tennessee
Tennessee (minus 3) vs. Nebraska, 3:30 p.m. (ESPN)
Two fanbases that seem to be in a constant state of existential crisis. And one of them will end what looked not long ago like a promising season with a two-game losing streak ... TENNESSEE 35-28.

Arizona Bowl in Tucson
Air Force (minus 13) vs. South Alabama, 5:30 p.m. (ASN)
Air Force DB Weston Steelhammer is exactly the type of player you would expect a guy named Weston Steelhammer who plays for Air Force to be ... AIR FORCE 35-14.

Orange Bowl in Miami Gardens, Florida
Florida State (plus 7) vs. Michigan, 8 p.m. (ESPN)
It is not a playoff game, but it feels a lot like one ... MICHIGAN 28-20.

SATURDAY, DEC. 31

Citrus Bowl in Orlando, Florida
LSU (minus 3 ½) vs. Louisville, 11 a.m. (ABC)
Lamar Jackson against one of the most talented and athletic defenses in the country is what's for breakfast ... LSU 28-21.

TaxSlayer Bowl in Jacksonville, Florida
Kentucky (plus 5) vs. Georgia Tech, 11 a.m. (ESPN)
This season's bowl most likely to be confused for pre-season NIT basketball in the TV listings ... KENTUCKY 31-24.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Semifinals

Peach Bowl in Atlanta
Alabama (minus 15 ½) vs. Washington, 3 p.m. (ESPN)
You are running out of chances to see Nick Saban yell at Lane Kiffin ... ALABAMA 37-14.

Fiesta Bowl in Glendale, Arizona
Clemson (plus 3 ½) vs. Ohio State, 7 p.m. (ESPN)
Tigers-Buckeyes crowded bar with \$100 cover charge ... CLEMSON 29-26.

MONDAY, JAN. 2

Outback Bowl in Tampa, Florida
Florida (plus 2 ½) vs. Iowa, 1 p.m. (ABC)
If the New Year's Eve party turned into a New Year's Day party, the expected Gators-Hawkeyes punt-fest should help you nap off that hangover ... FLORIDA 21-14.

Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas
Western Michigan (plus 7) vs. Wisconsin, 1 p.m. (ESPN)
So Western Michigan is known as the Broncos and their slogan is Row the Boat? This will all make sense after you see coach P.J. Fleck give his pregame speech ... WISCONSIN 28-23

Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California
Penn State (plus 6 ½) vs. Southern California, 5 p.m. (ESPN)
Every season there is a bowl that is almost certain to send the winner into the following season with an exorbitant amount of hype. This is that bowl ... PENN STATE 31-27.

Sugar Bowl in New Orleans
Oklahoma (minus 4) vs. Auburn, 8:30 p.m. (ESPN)
There was a lot of talk about this being a down year for the SEC. You will be able to hear those "S-E-C!" chants all the back in Norman if an 8-4 team that stumbled into the Sugar Bowl beats the Big 12

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 26 of 51

champion ... AUBURN 34-27.

MONDAY, JAN. 9

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Championship in Tampa, Florida

Alabama vs. Clemson, 8:30 p.m. (ESPN)

The Crimson Tide could become the first FBS team to go 15-0 and stake a claim as the greatest team in college football history ... ALABAMA 38-23.

Record: Last week 9-1 straight; 6-4 vs. points.

Season: 201-86; 126-155-3.

Upset specials: 4-9.

Best bets: 4-9.

Follow Ralph D. Russo at www.Twitter.com/ralphDrussoAP

More AP college football: www.collegefootball.ap.org

China warns Trump ignoring one-China policy could hurt peace

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Any change in U.S. policy favoring formal recognition of Taiwan will “seriously” damage peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and undermine relations between Beijing and Washington, a Chinese government spokesman said Wednesday.

The comments from the Cabinet’s Taiwan Affairs Office follow President-elect Donald Trump’s remarks over the weekend that he didn’t feel “bound by a one-China policy” unless the U.S. could gain benefits from China in trade and other areas.

Under the one-China policy, the U.S. recognizes Beijing as China’s government and maintains only unofficial relations with Taiwan, a former Japanese colony which broke from the Chinese mainland amid civil in 1949.

Spokesman An Fengshan said breaching the one-China principle “will seriously affect peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.”

“The one-China policy is an important political foundation for relations between China and the U.S.,” An told reporters. “If such a foundation is disturbed or undermined, there can be no talk of a healthy and stable development of U.S-China relations.”

Trump broke diplomatic precedent by talking on the phone with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Dec. 2, during which the island’s leader congratulated Trump on his election victory. Then, this past weekend, Trump said he might use America’s recognition of Beijing as leverage for gaining advantages in trade and other areas.

That is placing him perilously close to touching on China’s bottom line that brooks no formal recognition of Taiwan or challenge to its claim to sovereignty over the island. China’s response has thus far been fairly muted, mainly blaming Tsai for placing the call.

The last major crisis over Taiwan came in 1995, when China staged threatening war games and missile tests near the island in response to then-president Lee Teng-hui’s visit to the U.S., which was seen by Beijing as a bid to solidify the island’s de-facto independent status. The move was largely seen as backfiring, with Lee winning the island’s first direct presidential election in 1996.

Washington responded by putting two aircraft carrier battle groups on alert, one of which crossed the Taiwan Strait, although China’s vast strides in military power in the years since would likely complicate such a move in the current era.

The U.S. and China are the world’s two largest economies with bilateral trade in goods and services

reaching nearly \$660 billion last year.

Although the U.S. does not challenge China's claim to sovereignty over Taiwan, Washington remains Taiwan's main source of weapons, with \$14 billion in approved arms sales since 2009, and is bound by law to consider threats to the island's security a matter of "grave concern."

Cosby shows wit, mental agility at court hearing

By MARYCLAIRE DALE and MICHAEL R. SISAk, Associated Press

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (AP) — Bill Cosby's lawyers insist the 79-year-old actor has vision and memory problems that make it difficult for him to help defend himself in his upcoming sexual assault trial.

But the actor seemed mentally fit on Tuesday in a suburban Philadelphia courtroom as he shouted out answers to questions meant for the prosecutor.

Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin Steele was trying to recall where one alleged assault took place, when Cosby helpfully announced that "the Drake (Hotel) is in Chicago."

At another point, Cosby told the judge, who was trying to figure out his age, that he was born in 1937. On July 12th.

Prosecutors at this week's pretrial hearing are trying to show that Cosby, who was once known as "America's Dad" for his top-rated family sitcom, "The Cosby Show," had a history of drugging and molesting young women. He is charged with sexually assaulting one woman in 2004, but prosecutors are hoping to call 13 other accusers to testify at his spring trial.

"The defendant has engaged, over the course of decades, in a signature pattern of non-consensual sexual assaults on young women who were in an unconscious state due to an intoxicant that the defendant administered to them," Steele argued.

Cosby's lawyers want the accusers barred from taking the stand. The defense is expected to attack their credibility when the hearing resumes on Wednesday.

Judge Steven O'Neill must decide whether to permit all or some of the women to testify under a state law that allows prosecutors to call witnesses of alleged prior bad acts. The accusers include onetime aspiring actresses, a cocktail waitress and a flight attendant, and are among 50 women who have come forward with accusations against Cosby since prosecutors reopened the 2004 case last year.

Tuesday's hearing was testy from the start, with the judge twice warning the lawyers to maintain decorum after courtroom shouting matches that centered on the defense team's practice of publicizing the names of the accusers.

Steele clashed with Cosby lawyer Brian McMonagle over the defense's insistence on identifying accusers by name in public documents and a court hearing. Steele suggested that Cosby's lawyers were publicizing them in an attempt to intimidate the women.

McMonagle said many of the women had already gone public with their allegations.

"These are witnesses in a trial. They are not children," he argued.

The judge ultimately ruled that Cosby's lawyers could identify 11 of the women by name since they had already told their stories publicly. He said two of the women have remained out of the spotlight and should not be identified in court.

Later, Steele blew up at the defense over the positioning of a projection screen, saying Cosby's lawyers had it placed so the women's names would be seen by dozens of reporters in the courtroom gallery.

McMonagle said courtroom staff positioned the screen, but he agreed to remove accusers' names from a planned presentation.

The judge said he would be forced to call in sheriff's deputies if the lawyers couldn't behave.

The case began a decade ago when Temple University employee Andrea Constand filed a police complaint against Cosby, her friend and mentor, over an encounter at his home. A prosecutor at the time declined to file charges.

Authorities reopened the case last year after scores of women raised similar accusations and after Cosby's damaging deposition testimony from Constand's lawsuit became public. The trial judge last week said the

deposition was fair game at trial, arming prosecutors with Cosby's testimony about his affairs with young women, his use of quaaludes as a seduction tool and his version of the sexual encounter with Constand.

The judge must walk a fine line in weighing the accusers' testimony, given a 2015 state Supreme Court ruling that threw out a Roman Catholic Church official's child-endangerment conviction because the Philadelphia trial judge let too many priest abuse victims testify about the alleged church cover-up.

The defense has questioned the women's motivation, noting many are clients of celebrity lawyer Gloria Allred, who has suggested Cosby should put up a \$100 million settlement fund for potential sexual assault and defamation claims.

Allred argues that her clients have a duty to testify if the court wants to hear from them. She called the defense's dismissal of their accounts "out of context or just plain wrong."

The Associated Press doesn't typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they have come forward publicly, as Constand has done.

As Aleppo falls, Trump faces test on posture toward Russia

By JOSH LEDERMAN and BRADLEY KLAPPER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Aleppo's fall to Syrian government forces is shaping up as the first major test of President-elect Donald Trump's desire to cooperate with Russia, whose military support has proven pivotal in Syria's civil war. The death and destruction in the city is only renewing Democratic and Republican concern with Trump's possible new path.

Though Trump has been vague about his plans to address this next phase in the nearly six-year-old conflict, he's suggested closer alignment between U.S. and Russian goals could be in order. His selection Tuesday of Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, who has extensive business dealings with Russia and ties to President Vladimir Putin, fueled further speculation that Trump will pursue a rapprochement with Moscow.

Indeed, Trump was already trying to portray Tillerson's connections with Russia as a plus. In talking points circulated on Capitol Hill and obtained by The Associated Press, Trump's transition team said Tillerson would "work closely" with Russia on "defeating radical Islam" but would "easily challenge Russia and other countries when necessary."

"President Putin knows Mr. Tillerson means what he says," the talking points say.

A warmer relationship could alter U.S. policy on nuclear weapons, sanctions, Ukraine and innumerable other issues — but none so clearly or quickly as Syria, where President Bashar Assad's defeat of U.S.-backed rebels in Aleppo is poised to be a turning point. Assad and Russia are expected seize the moment to try to persuade the U.S. to abandon its flailing strategy of trying to prop up the rebels in their battle to oust Assad.

That decision will fall to Trump.

The president-elect has not commented or tweeted about the crisis in Aleppo and widespread fears of humanitarian disaster. Yet his previous comments on the broader conflict suggest he's more than open to a policy shift.

During the campaign, Trump asserted that defeating the Islamic State group in Syria, not Assad, must be the top priority, a position that mirrors Russia's.

"I believe we have to get ISIS. We have to worry about ISIS before we can get too much more involved," Trump said in October, using an acronym for the extremist group.

Prioritizing the fight against IS could put the U.S. in closer alignment with Russia's public position, in a Middle Eastern take on the adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." It's a point Trump appeared to make during the second presidential debate when he noted that he didn't like Assad, but added, "Assad is killing ISIS. Russia is killing ISIS."

And in his first days as the president-elect Trump suggested he might withdraw U.S. support for the various rebel groups that make up Assad's opposition, telling a newspaper that "we have no idea who these people are."

Trump's posture doesn't just buck President Barack Obama's policy, it conflicts with his party's stance, as well.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 29 of 51

Trump's running mate, Vice President-elect Mike Pence, argued during the campaign that the U.S. should strike Assad's forces if needed to prevent devastation in Aleppo. Trump took the remarkable step of contradicting him. "I disagree," Trump said, and Pence quickly backed off the threat of military action.

Both Democratic and Republican critics say Trump's brushstroke analysis of Syria's internal conflicts paints a far rosier picture of Russia's aims than reality — and even endorses some of the propaganda Assad has used to delegitimize his opponents.

"Putin is a thug, a bully and a murderer, and anybody else who describes him as anything else is lying," Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said after word emerged that Trump was picking Tillerson as his chief diplomat.

While Moscow has attacked IS at times, the U.S. and its allies say most Russian airstrikes have targeted rebel-dominated areas where IS isn't active. American officials accuse Assad of a soft approach toward IS, and even of colluding with the group in hopes of marginalizing U.S.-backed rebels.

Though the U.S. under Obama has tried to work diplomatically with Russia, Syria cease-fire deals have repeatedly collapsed, with the U.S. accusing Moscow of failing to use its influence to prevent Assad from violating them. Meanwhile, Russia's military intervention has been successful in helping Assad reclaim the upper hand, making Putin a key player in Syria's future.

So closely aligned are Russia and Syria that it was Russia that negotiated a cease-fire to evacuate the last civilians and opposition fighters from eastern Aleppo, rebels said. The rebels had been squeezed for months into smaller and smaller areas of Aleppo. The city's status as Syria's commercial hub makes its capture a key victory for Assad.

As world leaders debate what to do next, all eyes are on Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20. Robert Ford, the former U.S. ambassador to Syria and a Middle East Institute scholar, said the horrifying images of suffering emanating from Syria would force Trump to outline a more detailed response.

"While the Trump administration may want to avoid getting into the business of regime change, it's still going to have to address what it does about grotesque violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes," said Ford. "Just saying 'we're not interested in regime change' is not a response."

Aligning with Russia would make it harder for the U.S. to corral the rebels' more strident supporters into supporting peace mediation. Assad foes like Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia might become more inclined to give extremists advanced weaponry despite U.S. protestations.

Concerns that Trump may soften U.S. policy toward Russia, currently under tough U.S. sanctions over its actions in Ukraine, burgeoned during the campaign amid signs of Russian hacking of political groups. U.S. intelligence agencies now say the hacking was intended to help Trump win.

Those concerns grew louder still Tuesday when Trump tapped Tillerson for secretary of state despite his history of arguing against sanctions on Russia, which could affect Exxon's joint ventures with Russia's state oil company. In 2013, Putin awarded Tillerson the Order of Friendship in honor of his efforts to improve U.S.-Russia ties.

AP Congressional Correspondent Erica Werner contributed to this report.

Rebels to evacuate Aleppo in surrender deal as fighting ends

By ZEINA KARAM and EDITH M. LEDERER, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian rebels reached a cease-fire deal to evacuate from eastern Aleppo in an effective surrender on Tuesday, as Russia declared all military action had stopped and the Syrian government had assumed control of the former rebel enclave.

The dramatic developments, which appeared to restore the remainder of what was once Syria's largest city to President Bashar Assad's forces after months of heavy fighting and a crippling siege, followed reports of mass killings by government forces closing in on the final few blocks still held by the rebels.

Damascus confirmed the evacuation deal and the U.N. envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, called for immediate access to the former rebel enclave to confirm the end of military operations and to oversee the safe departure of tens of thousands of civilians and opposition fighters. He was at the Security Council

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 30 of 51

where an emergency meeting for Aleppo was underway.

Russia's U.N. ambassador Vitaly Churkin took to the floor near the end of the session at the U.N. Security Council to announce fighting had ended.

"According to the latest information that we received ... military actions in eastern Aleppo are over," Churkin said. "The Syrian government has re-established control over eastern Aleppo."

Minutes earlier, he had announced that "all militants" and members of their families, as well as those wounded in the fighting, were being evacuated through "agreed corridors in directions that they have chosen voluntarily," including the rebel stronghold of Idlib province.

As word spread of the deal, celebrations broke out in the government-controlled western sector of Aleppo, with convoys of cars driving around honking their cars and waving Syrian flags from the windows.

Retaking Aleppo, which has been split between rebel and government control since 2012, would be Assad's biggest victory yet in the civil war. Aleppo, the country's former commercial powerhouse, has long been regarded as a major gateway between Turkey and Syria and the biggest prize in the conflict.

The agreement Tuesday came after world leaders and aid agencies issued dramatic appeals on behalf of trapped residents, and the U.N. human rights office said that pro-government forces reportedly killed 82 civilians as they closed in on the last remaining rebel areas.

That and other reports of mass killings, which could not be independently confirmed, reinforced fears of atrocities in the final hours of the battle for the city.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the emergency meeting he had received "credible reports" of civilians killed by intense bombing and summary executions by pro-government forces.

"To the Assad regime, Russia and Iran —three member states behind the conquest of and carnage in Aleppo — you bear responsibility for these atrocities," said U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power.

In Turkey, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the Russian consulate in Istanbul, chanting against Russia's involvement in the push to retake rebel-held areas of Aleppo.

Several residents and opposition activists in Syria told the AP that government forces carried out summary killings of rebels in neighborhoods captured on Monday, but the Syrian military denied the claim, saying such allegations were "a desperate attempt" to gain international sympathy.

None of the residents witnessed the alleged killings, and the reports came amid deepening chaos in the remaining rebel-held areas. Mohammed Abu Rajab, the administrator of the last remaining clinic in rebel-held parts of the city, said the dead and wounded were being left in the streets.

Bashar al-Ja'afari, Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, denied any mass executions or revenge attacks, but added it was Syria's "constitutional right" to go after "terrorists," a reference to all opposition fighters.

"Aleppo has been liberated from terrorists and those who toyed with terrorism," he said. "Aleppo has returned to the nation."

The U.N. children's agency said in a statement that it had received a report of more than 100 unaccompanied children trapped in a building under fire in eastern Aleppo. UNICEF is concerned over reports of "extrajudicial killings of civilians, including children," said the agency's regional director, Geert Cappalaere.

The U.N. human rights office said it had received reports of pro-government forces killing at least 82 civilians in four neighborhoods of the rapidly-shrinking rebel enclave, including 11 women and 13 children.

Spokesman Rupert Colville, speaking to reporters in Geneva, said the reports described pro-government forces entering homes and killing civilians "on the spot."

A news release by the U.N. human rights office in Geneva said that multiple sources reported dozens of civilians were shot dead Monday by government forces and allied militiamen in the Kallaseh and Bustan al-Qasr neighborhoods of eastern Aleppo.

Rami Abdurrahman of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said hundreds of bodies were still under the rubble.

There were conflicting reports about the timing and route of the rebel withdrawal.

Syria's military media said the gunmen would be evacuated through the Ramouseh crossing and from

there to rebel-controlled areas of northern Idlib province.

"Aleppo will be declared a secure and liberated city within the coming hours," it said on its Telegram channel.

Osama Abu Zayd, a Turkey-based legal adviser for an umbrella group of rebel factions known as the Free Syrian Army, said the cease-fire went into effect Tuesday evening and that the first groups of rebel fighters would begin evacuating later that day.

Yasser al-Youssef, a rebel spokesman, confirmed the deal, and another spokesman, Ahmed Karali, said those leaving the city would head to rural areas in western Aleppo province then head north.

A government win in Aleppo would significantly strengthen Assad's hand but does not end the conflict — significant parts of Syria are still outside government control and huge swaths of the country are a devastated wasteland. More than a quarter of a million people have been killed since the conflict began in 2011 with peaceful protests against the Assad family's four-decade rule.

Associated Press Zeina Karam reported this story from Beirut and AP writer Edith M. Lederer reported from the United Nations. AP press writers Jamey Keaten in Geneva, Sarah El Deeb and Philip Issa in Beirut, and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

The Latest: Trump praises Speaker Ryan at Wisconsin rally

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Latest on President-elect Donald Trump's transition to the White House (all times EST):

8:30 p.m.

President-elect Donald Trump is singing House Speaker Paul Ryan's praises in Wisconsin.

At a rally Tuesday in West Allis, Trump praised the Wisconsin politicians in the room. When Ryan drew boos, Trump said he was "like a fine wine. Every day that goes by I get to appreciate his genius more and more."

Trump and Ryan have not always been so cozy. Ryan disinvited Trump from a rally in the fall, saying he was "sickened" by past profane comments from the presidential candidate. But they started mended fences leading up to Election Day.

Ryan was just one of the speakers who opened for Trump Tuesday. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and Trump's pick for chief of staff, Reince Priebus, also spoke.

7:35 p.m.

President-elect Donald Trump is asking Michigan Republican Party Chairwoman Ronna Romney McDaniel to serve as national party chairwoman, in part as a reward for delivering Michigan for the GOP for the first time in 28 years.

The choice of McDaniel to serve as Republican National Committee chairwoman was confirmed Tuesday night by a person familiar with Trump's decision. The person asked for anonymity because the announcement has not yet been made.

McDaniel is the niece of 2012 GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney. She supported Trump after he won the party's 2016 nomination despite her famous uncle's sharp criticism.

McDaniel would become the second woman to serve as RNC chairwoman, and the first in 40 years.

Trump's decision marks a key victory for outgoing RNC Chairman Reince Priebus, who supported McDaniel for the job.

— Julie Bykowicz

6 p.m.

It looks like the highest-ranking Republican woman in Congress won't be joining the incoming Trump administration and will remain in the House.

Washington state Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers had been considered front-runner to head the Interior

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 32 of 51

Department.

The No. 4 House Republican leader posted on Facebook on Tuesday that she was honored to spend time with President-elect Donald Trump but is "energized more than ever to continue leading in Congress as we think big, reimagine this government and put people back at the center of it."

A source close to McMorris Rodgers said the congresswoman met briefly twice with Trump but was never offered the interior secretary job. The source, who wasn't authorized to publicly discuss McMorris Rodgers' status, said reports that she was offered that job were driven by Trump's transition team.

— Alan Fram

4:15 p.m.

The Energy Department says it won't provide the names of staffers who worked on climate issues to President-elect Donald Trump's transition team, even as it pledges to cooperate with the incoming administration.

Trump's transition team is seeking information about agency operations and personnel, including a list of employees and contractors who attended international meetings on climate change over the past five years.

An Energy Department spokesman said Tuesday that while officials "will be forthcoming with all publicly-available information, we will not be providing any individual names to the transition team."

Spokesman Eben Burnham-Snyder says some of the questions asked by Trump's team left DOE workers "unsettled." He says DOE officials "respect the professional and scientific integrity and independence of our employees at our labs and across our department."

1:53 p.m.

Bill Gates says he and Donald Trump talked big ideas Tuesday in Trump Tower.

The co-founder of Microsoft Corp. told reporters that he and the president-elect had a "good conversation about innovation, how it can help in health, education, the impact of foreign aid and energy," as well as "a wide-ranging conversation about power of innovation."

1:48 p.m.

Donald Trump is expected to be invited to the National Prayer Breakfast in February.

Sens. John Boozman, R-Ark., and Chris Coons, D-Del., are co-chairmen of the breakfast and expected to issue the invitation to Trump on Wednesday. A release about the meeting said they will discuss the long tradition of the breakfast "as an inclusive, positive event focused on prayer."

The event has been held for more than six decades and has often seen as a chance for politicians to pause the debate of the day and gather in fellowship and reflection. But it doesn't always happen that way.

Keynote speaker Ben Carson in 2013 drew attention for complaining about tax laws and offering suggestions for health care changes. Carson was then a neurosurgeon who is now Trump's choice to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

12:40 p.m.

New York City police say they've arrested a teenager who showed up at the Trump Tower security checkpoint with a knife, handcuffs, fireworks and a water pistol.

Authorities say 19-year-old Alexander Wang of upstate Poughquag, New York was arrested at around 6:30 p.m. Monday.

The Manhattan district attorney's office said Tuesday afternoon that he was awaiting arraignment. There was no immediate information on an attorney who could comment on his behalf.

The Secret Service runs the checkpoint. The NYPD has a security detail at the tower.

11:55 a.m.

President-elect Donald Trump is considering major Republican fundraiser Wayne Berman as the U.S. Trade Representative.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 33 of 51

That's according to two people with knowledge of the discussions.

Berman is a senior adviser at the Blackstone Group and was a strong supporter of Florida Sen. Marco Rubio's failed 2016 presidential campaign. He served in the Commerce Department during President George H.W. Bush's administration.

Trump made his opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership pact and other multilateral trade deals a central part of his campaign. He's pledged to negotiate bilateral trade agreements, work that would fall in part to the trade representative.

The people with knowledge of the discussions insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the internal deliberations.

-By Julie Pace and Julie Bykowicz

11:25 a.m.

Brazilian President Michel Temer and President-elect Donald Trump have spoken about a "U.S.-Brazil agenda for economic growth."

That's according to a statement from Temer's office, which said the phone call took place Tuesday. The two planned for their teams to meet on the issue in February.

Temer's office said Brazil wants his country to have more U.S. investment and said that Brazilians will continue investing in the United States.

11:05 a.m.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell says he "look(s) forward" to supporting Donald Trump's nomination of Rex Tillerson for secretary of state.

The Kentucky Republican predicted in a statement Tuesday that Tillerson will "face each problem head on with American interests and security as his top priority." McConnell added that he looks "forward to supporting his nomination."

His positive words could carry considerable sway with Senate Republicans, a few of which have said they have serious concerns about Tillerson's ties with Russia. McConnell on Monday told reporters that "the Russians are not our friends." But he made no mention of the ExxonMobil chief's close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump says he regards Tillerson's Russia ties an asset for a secretary of state.

10:32 a.m.

Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin says he is "humbled" that President-elect Donald Trump considered him to be secretary of energy.

The West Virginian, whose state voted overwhelmingly for Trump last month, said he can best serve the Mountaineer State in the Senate. Manchin is up for re-election in 2018.

Manchin's comments came after reports that former Texas Gov. Rick Perry has been selected to run the Energy Department.

10:04 a.m.

President-elect Donald Trump says he and musician Kanye West talked "life" in Trump Tower.

The two posed for photos after their meeting Tuesday.

Asked why the musician was visiting, Trump said the two were "just friends" and called West a "good man."

The two did not answer questions on whether West would perform at Trump's inauguration in January.

West stood silently next to Trump. Asked why he wasn't speaking, West said: "I just want to take a picture right now."

9:32 a.m.

President-elect Donald Trump has selected former Texas Gov. Rick Perry to lead the Energy Department.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 34 of 51

That's according to two people with knowledge of the decision.

The two-time presidential candidate had been a harsh critic of Trump during the 2016 race, calling him a "cancer to conservatism." He later endorsed the Republican nominee and said he'd be willing to work in a Trump administration.

One of Perry's best-remembered moments from his first White House run was when he couldn't remember in a debate the third of three federal agencies he promised to eliminate if elected. The one he forgot was the Energy Department.

The two people with knowledge of Trump's pick insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose the decision ahead of the official announcement.

-By Ken Thomas and Julie Pace

9:25 a.m.

Kanye West is visiting Trump Tower this morning.

The musician entered the building shortly after 9 a.m. with a large entourage. West was not accompanied by wife Kim Kardashian West.

The 39-year-old recently spent over a week in Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles for stress and exhaustion.

West did not stop to talk to reporters gathered in the lobby.

At a concert in November, West said he didn't vote, but if he had he "would have voted for Trump."

9:21 a.m.

An aide to President Vladimir Putin is praising President-elect Donald Trump's choice of Rex Tillerson to lead the State Department.

Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said Tuesday in remarks reported by the TASS news agency described Tillerson as a "very credible figure" and a "big professional."

The CEO of ExxonMobil has met Putin several times and he received Russia's Order of Friendship in 2013. ExxonMobil works closely with Russian oil giant Rosneft and in 2013 the two companies struck a multi-billion dollar Arctic oil exploration deal.

Russia Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also praised Tillerson's "pragmatism."

8:50 a.m.

Rudy Giuliani says Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson would do a good job as secretary of state.

Giuliani, at one time in the running for the post, says President-elect Donald Trump has chosen someone who has the experience to understand the world.

"I'm okay with the choice," Giuliani told CNN on Tuesday morning. "I think Donald Trump has selected somebody who knows the world and can advise him on the world."

Giuliani says Trump had several solid candidates on his short list, such as former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton. "I thought John Bolton would have been a great secretary of state," he said. Giuliani said he took himself out of the running last month.

8:40 a.m.

Russia's foreign minister says the "pragmatism" of the nominee for the next U.S. secretary of state, ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson, is good basis for future relations.

Sergey Lavrov said Tuesday in the Serbian capital that both President-elect Donald Trump and Tillerson "have not been against our cooperation."

Lavrov says, "we expect that this pragmatism will be a good foundation for building mutually beneficial cooperation" between the U.S. and Russia.

Tillerson has close ties to Russia and President Vladimir Putin, which is certain to draw scrutiny and fuel a potential Senate confirmation fight.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 35 of 51

7:44 a.m.

A top adviser to Donald Trump says the president-elect "hit it off" with his choice for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson.

Reince Priebus said Tuesday that the president-elect chose Tillerson in part because the ExxonMobil CEO is a diplomat who "happens to be able to drill oil."

The Republican National Committee chairman said, "Tillerson had to maintain relationships across the world in many places that aren't the easiest places to have relationships, during many different (presidential) administrations."

Some Republicans and Democrats said they have concerns about Tillerson's longtime business ties to Russia, raising questions about whether he could win Senate confirmation.

Priebus spoke Tuesday on MSNBC's "Morning Joe."

7:00 a.m.

President-elect Donald Trump announced Tuesday he has settled on ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson to be secretary of state.

The real estate mogul said in a predawn statement that Tillerson is "among the most accomplished business leaders and international deal makers in the world."

Trump added that Tillerson's career is "the embodiment of the American dream."

Senate Democrats and some Republicans have said they're concerned about Tillerson's business ties to Russia. The subject is likely to come up during Tillerson's Senate confirmation proceedings.

4:00 a.m.

President Barack Obama is criticizing Trump for saying he'll shun daily intelligence briefings when he takes office.

Appearing Monday evening on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show," Obama said that a president who isn't getting the benefit of such regular briefings from the intelligence community is likely "flying blind" in managing national security issues for the country.

Trump said in a television interview Sunday that he wasn't interested in getting daily intelligence briefings, a practice that's been a fixture for chief executives of both parties for several years.

Obama also said the reason he's ordered a wide-ranging probe into purported Russian hacking against the U.S. election process is to "really just gather all of the threads of the investigation." He says notions of meddling in the campaign "was not a secret" before Election Day, Nov. 8, in the United States.

3:15 a.m.

President-elect Donald Trump has tapped ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson to lead the State Department, dismissing concerns about the businessman's close ties to Russia and bringing a long public audition process to a conclusion.

Two people close to Trump's transition team said Monday night that Trump had selected Tillerson. They insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose the pick ahead of that announcement.

Trump was set to announce his nomination Tuesday morning. The selection could set him up for a potential fight with Congress over confirming Tillerson, who has connections with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Leading Republicans have already expressed anxieties about Tillerson, as they contend with intelligence assessments saying Russia interfered with the U.S. presidential election to help Trump.

Trump's State pick comes from "Exxon system" not Washington

By JEFF HORWITZ and DAVID KOENIG, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Republicans in Washington bashed President Barack Obama's efforts to secure an Iran nuclear deal last year, Exxon Mobil was watching.

The oil giant's European competitors were preparing to enter Iran's oil business — something the company legally could not do with American sanctions still in place stemming from Iran's nuclear program. Exxon

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 36 of 51

hired lobbyists to monitor the fight in Washington, though the company said it never took a position on whether the sanctions were appropriate.

Given Chief Executive Rex Tillerson's position on sanctions in general, it was scarcely needed.

"We always encourage the people who are making those decisions to consider the very broad collateral damage of who are they really harming with sanctions," Tillerson said at Exxon's 2014 shareholder meeting. Generally, "we don't find them to be effective," he said.

Announced Tuesday as Donald Trump's choice for secretary of state, Tillerson has no deep history of diplomatic experience so it's unclear how he'll handle the job if confirmed. But he's not a blank slate.

His work at Exxon has sometimes put him at odds with U.S. policy under Obama — and with key Republican positions on Iranian sanctions and Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Trump has promised his "number one priority" will be to either rigidly enforce or dismantle the Iran nuclear accord and treat the country as "the biggest sponsor of terrorism" worldwide.

But observers of Tillerson's business career say they expect his aversion to sanctions to stay in place.

"He's a product of the Exxon system," said Fadel Gheit, an energy industry analyst for Oppenheimer & Co. Inc. "He believed in a free market. And if you have a contract, you have to meet your obligation."

As part of the Exxon approach, the company adopted a strict policy that it deemed staying out of politics. If a government was stable — regardless whether it was corrupt — Exxon would work with it under strict contractual terms, said Gheit.

"What Rex Tillerson says is 'that's none of my business,'" he said.

That approach was crucial in Tillerson's dealings in Russia, according to an oft-cited history of Exxon by journalist Steve Coll. Over the course of Tillerson's tenure there, Exxon succeeded where many of its rivals failed in working with Russia's government.

Key among the company's choices was avoiding a partnership with Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an oil oligarch who went on to spend a decade in jail after challenging Putin. Tillerson helped Exxon broker a partnership with oil giant Rosneft to "be on the same side of the table" as the government.

After Exxon struggled to work with local government officials, Putin told the company he would clear the way by executive order.

Tillerson said no — on the grounds that Putin didn't have legal authority. Exxon would need laws changed. The demand initially infuriated Putin, according to Coll's reporting — but the project went ahead.

The cordial relations continued after Tillerson ascended to Exxon's top job in 2006. When other oil companies saw relationships sour to the point that executives fled the country, Exxon continued to sign deals in Russia. Tillerson received an honorific — the Order of Friendship — from Putin's government in 2013.

When Exxon Mobil ran into trouble in Russia in 2014, it came from Washington, not Moscow. As punishment for Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for pro-Russian Ukrainian rebels, the U.S. imposed sanctions.

Exxon wasn't initially affected, and Tillerson said he didn't believe Russia would lash out at its American partner.

"I think it's a very valued relationship by both parties," he said at a May 2014 Exxon shareholder meeting.

As the crisis in Crimea deepened, however, the Obama administration extended sanctions to the Russian oil industry, hitting a partnership between Exxon and state-owned Rosneft to drill for oil in the Arctic. The sanctions — which Exxon lobbied against — cost the company as much as \$1 billion, according to financial filings.

Though still bound by the prohibitions, Exxon executives have spoken of a desire to re-engage on the project. Should sanctions be lifted, Exxon and its stockholders would directly benefit — and Tillerson owns around \$240 million in Exxon stock and options. Under federal conflict of interest rules, he will have to sell off his holdings if confirmed as secretary of state.

Exxon has not always abided by America's diplomatic desires. In 2011, the U.S. was trying to resolve a fight between Iraq's central government and a Kurdish regional government over oil money, a dispute that American diplomats saw as threatening Iraq's future as a single country.

Negotiating in secret, Exxon struck a major oil deal directly with the Kurds. American officials were

enraged.

"I had to do what was best for my shareholders," Tillerson told the diplomats in a conference call explaining the company's move.

The approach was emblematic of Exxon's culture and Tillerson's leadership, said CFRA Research analyst Stewart Glickman, noting that Tillerson has effectively managed Exxon's diplomacy as part of his 40-year career. The same skills could be of use as secretary of state, though Tillerson would have to adjust to working for the American public.

"Now," Glickman said, "he's got to be remembering whose hat he's wearing."

Koenig reported from Dallas.

This story corrects the value of Tillerson's Exxon stock and options to \$240 million, not \$300 million.

Kanye West returns to Twitter to talk about Trump meeting

NEW YORK (AP) — Kanye West returned to social media for the first time since his hospitalization to talk about his meeting with Donald Trump.

West wrote on Twitter that he met with Trump Tuesday to "discuss multicultural issues" that included "bullying, supporting teachers, modernizing curriculums, and violence in Chicago."

"I feel it is important to have a direct line of communication with our future President if we truly want change," West wrote. He followed with a post that read "#2024," an apparent reference to a revised plan to run for president in 2024, instead of 2020, when Trump could seek a second term.

Trump said after the Tuesday meeting that he and West were "just friends" and called the musician a "good man." He said they discussed "life." The two did not answer questions about whether West would perform at the Inauguration.

West stood silently next to the president-elect for photos in the lobby of Trump Tower after their meeting. Asked why he wasn't speaking, West said, "I just want to take a picture right now."

He spoke out on Twitter after the meeting.

West entered the building shortly after 9 a.m. with a large entourage. He was not accompanied by wife Kim Kardashian West.

The 39-year-old recently spent over a week in Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles for stress and exhaustion. Days before his hospitalization, he abruptly canceled his U.S. concert tour.

Last month during a concert in San Jose, California, West said he didn't vote for president, but if he had, he would have cast a ballot for Trump. He also praised the president-elect's "method of communication" as "very futuristic" and spoke about his plans to run for that office, saying that he will become "a different kind of president."

Trump also was shown in a video for West's single "Famous," released last year. It also featured Rihanna, former President George W. Bush, Anna Wintour and Bill Cosby.

Oklahoma court tosses abortion law on hospital privileges

By KEN MILLER, Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The Oklahoma Supreme Court on Tuesday threw out a law requiring abortion clinics to have doctors with admitting privileges at nearby hospitals, saying efforts to portray the measure as protecting women's health are a "guise."

The law would require a doctor with admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles be present for any abortion. The court found it violates both the U.S. and Oklahoma Constitutions. The U.S. Supreme Court earlier this year struck down a similar provision in Texas.

"Under the guise of the protection of women's health," Oklahoma Justice Joseph Watt wrote, "(the law) creates an undue burden on a woman's access to abortion, violating protected rights under our federal Constitution," referring specifically to the Texas case.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 38 of 51

Republican Gov. Mary Fallin signed the measure, Senate Bill 1848, into law in 2014, but courts had blocked it from taking effect. Tuesday's ruling overturns a lower court's decision in February that upheld the law.

The New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights challenged the law on behalf of Dr. Larry Burns, a Norman physician who, at the time the lawsuit was filed in October 2014, performed nearly half of Oklahoma's abortions. Burns has said he applied for admitting privileges at hospitals in the Oklahoma City area but was turned down.

Also, at the time, the only other clinic in the state that performed abortions was in Tulsa. However the Trust Women South Wind Women's Center opened in south Oklahoma City in September and Planned Parenthood opened in the northwest Oklahoma City suburb of Warr Acres in November.

"Today's decision is a victory for Oklahoma women and another rebuke to politicians pushing underhanded laws that attack a woman's constitutionally guaranteed right to safe, legal abortion," Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, said in a statement.

Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but previously has said that bill was passed to protect the health and safety of Oklahoma women.

The court also found that the law violates the Oklahoma Constitution's ban on measures containing more than one subject, a practice known as logrolling. The law included "12 separate and unrelated subsections," the court said.

"The sections in SB 1848 are so unrelated and misleading that a legislator voting on this matter could have been left with an unpalatable all-or-nothing choice," according to the ruling.

The court's ruling came the same day that the Oklahoma Board of Health approved new requirements for hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants and public schools to post signs inside public restrooms directing pregnant women where to receive services as part of an effort to reduce abortions in the state. The provision mandating the signs was tucked into a measure the Legislature passed this year that requires the state to develop informational material "for the purpose of achieving an abortion-free society."

Businesses and other organizations estimate they will have to pay \$2.3 million to put up the signs because the Legislature approved no funding for them. The Legislature and the governor must ratify the board's rules for the signs before they are scheduled to go into effect on Jan. 1, 2018, board attorney Donald Maisch said.

In Ohio, Republican Gov. John Kasich on Tuesday signed a 20-week abortion ban while vetoing stricter provisions in a separate measure that would have barred the procedure at the first detectable fetal heartbeat. The so-called heartbeat bill would have prohibited most abortions as early as six weeks into pregnancy.

In Florida, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit late Monday asking a federal judge to block additional parts of a contentious Florida abortion law. The lawsuit contends that the law violates constitutional rights by requiring groups to register with the state and pay a fee if they advise or help women seek abortions. The lawsuit also challenges a provision requiring groups to tell women about alternatives to abortion.

Associated Press reporter Tim Talley in Oklahoma City contributed to this report.

Senate Bill 1848: <http://bit.ly/1fLRQk9>

AP Sources: Trump offers Montana's Zinke interior secretary

By JULIE PACE and KEN THOMAS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump has offered Montana Rep. Ryan Zinke the job of interior secretary, though it's unclear whether the congressman has accepted, two people with knowledge of the offer said Tuesday.

Zinke, 55, is a retired Navy SEAL who was awarded two Bronze Stars for combat missions in Iraq. He was an early supporter of Trump and met with the president-elect Monday at Trump Tower in Manhattan.

He just won re-election to a second term as Montana's only House member, and Republicans had men-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 39 of 51

tioned him as a possible challenger to two-term Democratic Sen. Jon Tester in 2018.

Trump was also said to be considering Washington Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers for the job. She wrote on Facebook Tuesday that it was an "honor" to be invited to meet with Trump.

The people with knowledge of the offer to Zinke insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the transition process publicly.

Zinke, who serves on House Natural Resources and Armed Services committees, describes himself as "a steadfast advocate for Montana veterans and military personnel and families." He advocates greater use of public lands for energy production such as oil and natural gas.

Zinke has prioritized development of oil, gas and other resources on public lands and has advocated for state control of energy development on federal lands, a stance that some environmental groups say threatens national parks. Zinke has voted against efforts to designate new national parks that would diversify the National Park System.

Zinke attracted attention in the 2014 campaign for calling Hillary Clinton "the antichrist."

"Do I really believe that she is the antichrist? That answer would be 'no,'" Zinke said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But I do get a little emotional about Benghazi, and I like the rest of America want answers."

In September 2012, when Clinton was secretary of state, the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans were killed in the eastern city of Benghazi when militants stormed a U.S. diplomatic post and, hours later, fired on a CIA compound nearby. Some Republicans argue the U.S. military held back assets that could have saved lives and believe President Barack Obama and Clinton lied to the public about the nature of the attack.

Before being elected to Congress, Zinke served in the Montana State Senate, where he chaired the Education Committee and focused on advancing technology in the classroom, rural access to education and local control over schools.

Zinke graduated from the University of Oregon, where he played football and earned a degree in geology. He has master's degrees in business finance and global leadership from the University of San Diego.

Interior manages the nation's public lands and minerals and is the steward of 20 percent of the nation's lands, including national parks, national wildlife refuges and other public lands. The department also supplies and manages water in the 17 Western states and upholds federal trust responsibilities to 566 federally recognized Indian tribes and Alaska Natives.

Zinke has raised doubts about climate change as "unsettled science." Yet he's also said in interviews that "something's going on" with the climate and promoted an energy strategy that includes renewable sources such as wind and solar would be prudent.

His home state boasts the largest coal reserves in the nation, although it trails far behind neighboring Wyoming in mining productivity. Zinke was one of many Western Republicans who criticized the Obama administration's imposition of a January moratorium on new coal sales from public lands.

During his re-election campaign, Democrats attempted to label Zinke as a radical conservative who would sell off federal lands to private interests or transfer them to state control. Zinke adamantly denied the charge, which was based on a pledge Democrats alleged he had signed in 2012 stating that Montana's lands were sovereign and not subject to federal control.

Zinke has said he doesn't remember signing the pledge.

He has instead cast himself as a protector of the public's right to access public lands and made a priority in Congress of trying to fix problems with the management of the nation's forests.

During his re-election campaign, he focused largely on national security issues and the need to more thoroughly vet refugees, arguing that terrorism was threatening the homeland and that his more than two decades as a SEAL gave him an advantage on the issue.

Associated Press writers Matthew Daly in Washington and Matthew Brown in Billings, Montana, contributed to this report.

EPA fracking report offers few answers on drinking water

By MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Is hydraulic fracturing — better known as fracking — safe, as the oil and gas industry claims? Or does the controversial drilling technique that has spurred a domestic energy boom contaminate drinking water, as environmental groups and other critics charge?

After six years and more than \$29 million, the Environmental Protection Agency says it doesn't know.

A new report issued Tuesday said fracking poses a risk to drinking water in some circumstances, but a lack of information precludes a definitive statement on how severe the risk is.

"Because of the significant data gaps and uncertainties in the available data, it was not possible to fully characterize the severity of impacts, nor was it possible to calculate or estimate the national frequency of impacts on drinking water resources" from fracking activities, the EPA said in a report that raises more questions than answers.

The report removes a finding from a draft issued last year indicating that fracking has not caused "widespread, systemic" harm to drinking water in the United States. Industry groups had hailed the draft EPA study as proof that fracking is safe, while environmentalists seized on the report's identification of cases where fracking-related activities polluted drinking water.

Fracking involves pumping huge volumes of water, sand and chemicals underground to split open rock formations so oil and gas will flow. The practice has spurred an ongoing energy boom but has raised widespread concerns that it might lead to groundwater contamination, increased air pollution and even earthquakes.

The reactions were reversed on Tuesday. Environmentalists cheered the new report as proof that fracking threatens drinking water, while industry groups complained the Obama administration had yielded to political pressure on its way out the door.

"We are glad EPA resisted oil and gas industry spin, followed the science and delivered the facts," said John Noel, oil and gas campaigns coordinator for Clean Water Action, an advocacy group.

An oil industry spokesman called the report an "absurd" reversal that changes a science-based conclusion to one "based in political ambiguity" just weeks before President Barack Obama leaves office.

"The agency has walked away from nearly a thousand sources of information from ... technical reports and peer-reviewed scientific reports demonstrating that ... hydraulic fracturing does not lead to widespread, systemic impacts to drinking water resources," said Erik Milito of the American Petroleum Institute, an industry lobbying group.

The fracking study makes a mockery of frequent pledges by Obama and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy to follow science as they make decisions, Milito said. "We look forward to working with the new administration to instill fact-based science back into the public policy process," he said of President-elect Donald Trump.

Tom Burke, EPA's science adviser and a deputy assistant administrator, said in an interview that the removal of the phrase about "widespread, systemic" impacts came at the urging of the EPA's Science Advisory Board.

"Data gaps did not allow us to quantify how widespread the impacts are," Burke said.

Environmental groups have claimed that the finding of no widespread harm was inserted into the draft report at the insistence of the White House. Obama supports fracking as part of a wide-ranging energy strategy.

An EPA spokeswoman denied any political pressure.

The final report found specific instances where poorly constructed drilling wells, improper wastewater management or other problems affected drinking water. Impacts generally occurred near drilling sites and ranged from temporary changes in water quality to rendering private drinking wells unusable, the report said.

The number of contamination cases was small compared to the tens of thousands of wells that are fracked nationwide, the EPA said.

Congress ordered the report in 2010, as a surge in fracking fueled a nationwide boom in production of oil and natural gas.

Follow Matthew Daly on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/MatthewDalyWDC>

Residents of Syria's Aleppo share tormented goodbyes online

By SARAH EL DEEB, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — First came the distress calls from doctors in underground shelters and morgues. Then residents under relentless bombardment in the few remaining blocks under rebel control in Aleppo began posting emotional goodbyes on social media and in widely circulated messages.

They wanted to have the final say in the merciless civil war.

"There is a problem with this planet," said Monther Etaky, a 28-year old graphic designer. "This planet doesn't want people to live as free or to live as humans."

The world's view of the Syria conflict has been largely driven by YouTube, Twitter and Facebook— making it one of the world's most documented wars through amateur videos and coverage. This has given the activists a major role in chronicling the war, and in lobbying for the world's response.

Nearly six years into the conflict, they complained the world has been looking the other way.

"Why is this silence? People are being eliminated," tweeted Abdulkafi Alhamdo, an English teacher who has been a vocal critic of President Bashar Assad's government. Then, he wrote: "The last (message). Thanks for Everything. We shared many moments. The last tweets were from an emotional father. Farewell #Aleppo."

Alhamdo later went live on the video-streaming Periscope to say government troops were approaching. "I hope you can remember us," he said.

A local aid worker, who gave only his first name, Omar, sent an emotional recorded message that was widely shared on Whatsapp.

"The government forces are at the end of the street. Forgive us," he said in issuing a tormented apology for failing to protect the rebel enclave, once seen as the jewel of Syria's rebellion.

After four years of holding onto nearly half of what was once Syria's largest city and commercial center, thousands of residents of rebel-held Aleppo had been cornered in a one-square-mile sliver of land for days as Syrian government troops, backed by Russia, resisted calls for a cease-fire, pushing into the territory as rebel defenses crumbled.

Hospitals were knocked out and civil defense vehicles were bombed. Thousands of residents fled to government areas, but thousands more, likely die-hard government opponents, squeezed with the rebels into the ever-shrinking enclave.

Etaky said the fast buckling of rebel defenses shocked him at first.

"But when I turned on my brain and thought about what is happening and the cause of what is happening, I knew," he said.

After months of siege imposed since July the rebels had no more power to go on, he said. With their families trapped in the city with them, many fighters left the front lines to tend to their relatives' safety.

But most importantly, he said, "it was the world silence."

Etaky said that as a witness of the grueling war, he thought he had become numbed by the violence years earlier. Since moving to the rebel-held sector in 2012, he said he had lost about 50 friends.

"When I was saying the last goodbyes, this was the first time I was affected because it was the last time," he said.

He said he was proud of his role in documenting the war. There was no record, he said, of previous Syrian government crackdowns, including in the 1980s in Hama and Aleppo.

"If my son grows up and just explores the internet he can see his father, and what he was documenting and be proud that his father was a hero," Etaky said, choking back tears.

Speaking to the Associated Press shortly after a cease-fire was announced late Tuesday, he added: "It

is quiet in Aleppo right now. And it looks so sad to be saying goodbye to its residents, who will leave it forever.”

Canadian government moves toward legalizing recreational pot

By **ROB GILLIES, Associated Press**

TORONTO (AP) — Canada’s government said Tuesday it would study a federal task force’s recommendation that Canadians over 18 years old be allowed to buy marijuana for recreational purposes and would announce new laws in the spring for legalizing pot.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has long promised to legalize recreational pot use and sales. If the legislation passes, Canada would be the largest developed country to end prohibition of recreational marijuana. In the United States, voters in California, Massachusetts, Maine and Nevada voted Nov. 8 to approve the use of recreational marijuana, joining Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska, where it was previously legalized. Uruguay in South America is the only nation to legalize recreational pot.

The marijuana task force, headed by former Canadian Health Minister Anne McLellan, recommended that adults be allowed to carry up to 30 grams of pot for recreational purpose and grow up to four plants. It also recommended that higher-potency pot be taxed at a higher rate than weaker strains. It also said recreational marijuana should not be sold in the same location as alcohol or tobacco. Under the proposals, alcohol-free cannabis lounges would be allowed.

The panel’s report noted public health experts tend to favor a minimum age of 21 as the brain continues to develop to about 25, but said setting the minimum age too high would preserve the illicit market. It said Canadian youth have higher rates of cannabis use than their peers worldwide.

Trudeau said the government plans to control and regulate the sale of marijuana to keep it out of the hands of kids and to remove a significant source of revenue for criminal organizations and street gangs.

McLellan said task force members travelled to Colorado and Washington and spoke to government officials in Uruguay to hear from those who have enacted policies to legalize pot.

“We are only the second nation to move forward in this way,” McLellan said, urging the Canadian government to use caution.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump’s nomination of Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions to be the next U.S. attorney general has raised fears among supporters of legalized marijuana that the new administration could crack down on weed-tolerant states 20 years after California became the first to legalize medical marijuana.

Colorado now allows adults 21 and over to have up to an ounce of marijuana, without needing a doctor’s recommendation for the drug. Colorado also allows adults to grow up to six plants at home. And Denver has approved a first-in-the-U.S. law allowing people to use marijuana at bars, restaurants and other public spaces.

Arctic’s year of crazy extremes as warming hits overdrive

By **SETH BORENSTEIN, AP Science Writer**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Warming at the top of the world has gone into overdrive, happening twice as fast as the rest of the globe, and extending unnatural heating into fall and winter, according to a new federal report.

In its annual Arctic Report Card, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Tuesday tallied record after record of high temperatures, low sea ice, shrinking ice sheets and glaciers. Study lead author Jeremy Mathis, NOAA’s Arctic research chief, said it shows long-term Arctic warming trends deepening and becoming more obvious, with a disturbing creep into seasons beyond summer, when the Arctic usually rebuilds snow and ice.

Scientists have long said man-made climate change would hit the Arctic fastest. Mathis and others said the data is showing that is what’s now happening.

“Personally, I would have to say that this last year has been the most extreme year for the Arctic that I

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 43 of 51

have ever seen," said Mark Serreze, director of the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado, who wasn't part of the 106-page report. "It's crazy."

NOAA's peer-reviewed report said air temperatures over the Arctic from October 2015 to September 2016 were "by far the highest in the observational record beginning in 1900." The average Arctic air temperature at that time was 3.6 degrees (2 degrees Celsius) warmer than the 1981-2010 average. It's 6.3 degrees (3.5 degrees Celsius) warmer than 1900.

Other extremes the report detailed:

—Ocean temperatures were 9 degrees (5 degrees Celsius) higher than the 30-year average off the coasts of Greenland.

—Arctic sea ice didn't set a record for the annual minimum, but in October and November when sea ice normally starts growing back, it didn't. Sea ice from mid-October through November was the lowest on record. Dartmouth University professor Donald Perovich, author of the chapter on sea ice, said sea ice conditions have sunk from a B-plus grade 11 years ago to a D-minus grade "and that's because I'm an easy grader."

—Snow cover in North America reached a record low for spring, falling below 1.5 million square miles in May for the first time since satellite observations began in 1967.

—Though not a record, Greenland's ice sheet continued to shrink, starting early, on April 10. It was the second earliest start of the Greenland melt season on record.

What's happening is due to both man-made warming and a large El Nino that just ended, Mathis said.

"Not only is it extreme in any number of measures — air temperature, loss of sea ice and on and on — but there are so many things we haven't seen, particularly this extremely warm fall," said study co-author Brendan Kelly, executive director of the Study of Environmental Arctic Change at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

In 1979, Kelly cruised the Bering Straits region with a native hunter who told him dozens of Yupik words for sea ice. One was tagneghneq, for a charcoal grey thick multi-year ice. That ice is pretty much gone, Kelly said.

This is more than an Arctic problem, because the cold air escaping changes weather conditions, such as weakening the jet stream, Mathis said.

"What happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic," Mathis said. "The Lower 48 may have to deal with more extreme weather events in the future."

Follow Seth Borenstein at <http://twitter.com/borenbears> and his work can be found at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/seth-borenstein>

Government to require cars be able to talk to each other

By JOAN LOWY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — All new cars and light trucks would be able to talk wirelessly with each other, with traffic lights and with other roadway infrastructure under a rule the Transportation Department proposed Tuesday. Officials say the technology holds the potential to dramatically reduce traffic deaths and transform driving.

Vehicle-to-vehicle communications, or V2V, enables cars to transmit their locations, speed, direction and other information ten times per second. That lets cars detect, for example, when another vehicle is about to run a red light, is braking hard, changing lanes or coming around a blind turn in time for a driver or automated safety systems to prevent a crash.

The technology has the potential to prevent or mitigate the severity of up to 80 percent of collisions that don't involve alcohol or drugs, officials said.

"V2V will provide 360-degree situational awareness on the road," said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "We are carrying the ball as far as we can to realize the potential of transportation technology to save lives."

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers said it is reviewing the proposal, but sees V2V as complemen-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 44 of 51

tary to automated safety features that are increasingly being added to vehicles.

Automakers and the government have been working together on developing technology for more than a decade. Under the department's proposal, V2V systems would be required to "speak the same language" through standardized messaging.

The Federal Highway Administration plans to separately issue guidance to help transportation planners integrate two-way wireless technology into roadway infrastructure such as traffic lights, stop signs and work zones. Cars could communicate information on road conditions to the infrastructure, which could then be passed along to other vehicles as they come along. Traffic lights would know when to stay green to avoid unnecessary waiting and reduce congestion.

There is a 90-day comment period, and officials said they expect it will be about a year before a final rule is released.

The proposal calls for 50 percent of new vehicles to have the technology within two years after a final rule is issued, and 100 percent of vehicles with four years. It would still take years or even decades after that for the full potential of V2V to be realized. That's because V2V can prevent collisions only among vehicles equipped with the technology.

It takes decades for the entire fleet of vehicles on the road to turn over. But the process of spreading V2V throughout the fleet may go faster if, as expected, devices are developed that enable motorists to add the technology to older vehicles.

Some automakers aren't waiting for the final rule. General Motors has said previously that it plans to include V2V in some 2017 Cadillacs. The 2017 Mercedes E-Class sedans are also equipped with V2V.

V2V's range is up to about 1,000 yards in all directions, even when sight is blocked by buildings or other obstacles. That gives the technology the advantage of being able to detect a potential collision before the driver can see the threat, unlike the sensors and cameras of self-driving cars that sense what's immediately around the vehicle.

Industry and government officials see the two technologies as complementary. Ultimately, self-driving cars that are also equipped with V2V may be the answer to traffic congestion because they'll be able to synchronize their movements so that they can merge seamlessly and safely travel in long, closely packed caravans at higher speeds. That would improve traffic flow and increase highway capacity.

To address cybersecurity, the proposal requires that V2V systems employ a security level of at least 128-bit encryption and comply with benchmarks of the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

To protect privacy, V2V messages are anonymous — they don't contain any information on the driver, owner of the vehicle, make or model, vehicle identification number or license plate. The messages are also of brief duration and not retained, therefore it's not possible to use the messages to determine where a vehicle has been or to search for a particular vehicle among others on the road, said Debra Bezzina, an engineer with the University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute who works on the technology.

One hurdle facing the technology is preservation of its exclusive right to use the 5.9 Ghz radio spectrum that Congress specifically set aside for V2V years ago. Since then, an explosion in the number of wireless devices and skyrocketing demand for ever faster Wi-Fi has led to pressure from technology companies who want permission to use the same spectrum.

The Federal Communications Commission is in the first phase of a three-phase testing program to see if sharing the spectrum with Wi-Fi would interfere with V2V signals.

Spectrum sharing should be allowed "only if it can be proven that no harmful interference occurs," the auto alliance said in a statement. "Any interference could result in a crash, or even worse, an injury or fatality."

Associated Press writer Dee-Ann Durbin in Detroit contributed to this report.

Follow Joan Lowy at http://twitter.com/AP_Joan_Lowy. Her work can be found at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/joan-lowy>

US halts some Saudi arms sales over Yemen deaths concerns

By JOSH LEDERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States is terminating some sales of military arms to Saudi Arabia over concerns about the killing of civilians in Yemen by a Saudi-led coalition, a senior U.S. official said Tuesday, while ramping up support for Saudi's border defenses and other intelligence-sharing.

The decision to pull back planned sales of precision-guided munitions stems from a review ordered by the White House in October following the bombing of a funeral hall in Yemen that killed more than 140 people, thrusting longstanding concerns about civilian casualties into the spotlight. Human rights groups have said the Saudis have targeted houses, hospitals and schools, and have pressured the U.S. to withdraw support for the Saudi coalition, which is fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

In addition to halting the sales of munitions, the Obama administration is curbing some intelligence-sharing with Saudi Arabia that could be used in ways that would lead to civilian casualties, the official said, while declining to provide details. The U.S. also is looking to "refocus" the training it conducts for Saudi Arabia's air force to address U.S. concerns about how the Saudis choose their targets.

The Pentagon, the State Department and other U.S. agencies were involved in the retooling of support for Saudi Arabia, said the official, who wasn't authorized to comment by name and requested anonymity. The official said the decision reflected deep concerns about Saudi targeting methods and the desire to show that U.S. military aid is not a "blank check."

Other U.S. support for Saudi's coalition will continue unimpeded, including refueling of coalition aircraft by the U.S. military. And the U.S. is increasing the amount of information and analysis it shares with Saudi Arabia about threats to the Saudi border, reflecting Saudi concerns about extremists crossing over the border from Yemen to launch attacks inside Saudi Arabia.

Other military sales to Saudi Arabia are expected to continue unimpeded, such as \$3.5 billion worth of Chinook cargo helicopters and equipment that the State Department approved last week. That aid was intended to bolster the kingdom's "homeland defense and deter regional threats," a nod to Saudi concerns about attacks Houthi rebels have launched across the border in Saudi Arabia.

The mixed approach — scaling back support for the Saudis in some areas while increasing it in others — illustrated the complex military relationship between the two countries and Washington's desire not to abandon the Saudis wholesale in Yemen. While the U.S. has been dismayed by the brash way the Saudis have prosecuted the conflict, the Obama administration has sought to keep the pressure on the Houthis, whose failure to abide by previous cease-fire deals has vexed diplomatic efforts to reduce violence.

The Saudis are leading a coalition of mostly Arab countries fighting on behalf of an internationally recognized government in Yemen. The conflict began in March 2015 and has killed roughly 9,000 people, creating a humanitarian crisis and famine conditions in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest nation.

Fueling U.S. concerns about the Shiite Houthis are their ties to Iran, Saudi Arabia's chief rival for regional influence in the Middle East. The U.S. accuses Iran of supplying weapons to the Houthis, with the U.S. Navy saying it has intercepted several boats carrying Iranian weapons suspected of being mid-journey to Yemen. Iran has said it supports the Houthis but has denied arming them.

In October, the U.S. involved itself even further in the conflict when the U.S. military launched missile strikes on Houthi-controlled radar sites, in what the U.S. called self-defense following Houthi missile fire on U.S. Navy ships. Previously, American military strikes in Yemen had been limited to drone strikes against the local al-Qaida affiliate.

Yet some lawmakers and human rights groups have suggested the U.S. could be considered complicit in Saudi war crimes in Yemen because of its support for the coalition, which has included advice on airstrikes.

Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor contributed to this report.

Reach Josh Lederman on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/joshledermanAP>

Democrats to GOP: Run fair investigations of Russian hacking

By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional Democrats prodded Republicans on Tuesday to be aggressive and even-handed as lawmakers prepared to run investigations into U.S. intelligence assertions that Russia intruded into last month's elections to help Donald Trump win the White House.

In a written statement, No. 2 House Democrat Steny Hoyer of Maryland and the top Democrats on six House committees said they wanted a congressional probe of Moscow's interference "that is truly bipartisan, that is comprehensive, that will not be restricted by jurisdictional lines."

The Democrats said the analyses should produce "a complete and full accounting of what happened consistent with safeguarding our national security."

The statement seemed to suggest that Democrats are wary that the planned investigations — by intelligence committees headed by GOP chairmen in both chambers — might not be as tough as needed, for fear of weakening or offending the Republican president-elect.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said Monday they backed investigations by each chamber's intelligence committee into the CIA's finding that Russia interfered with the election.

McConnell declined to say whether he agreed with the CIA assertion that Russian hacking and public release of Democrats' emails during the presidential campaign were designed to aid Trump. But in a noteworthy departure from Trump's rejection of that conclusion, McConnell said the Senate Intelligence Committee would study the issue.

"It's an important subject, and we intend to review it on a bipartisan basis," McConnell said.

Ryan endorsed an ongoing investigation by the House Intelligence Committee into cyberthreats from other countries and extremist groups and condemned "any state-sponsored cyberattacks on our democratic process." He said that examination would continue, with his support.

"Any intervention by Russia is especially problematic because under President (Vladimir) Putin, Russia has been an aggressor that consistently undermines American interests," Ryan said in a written statement.

The remarks by McConnell and Ryan contrasted with Trump's oft-repeated praise of Putin and the president-elect's scoffing at the CIA's findings. Trump on Sunday called the CIA's contention "ridiculous" and blamed the disclosures of the agency's assessment on Democrats who he said were embarrassed over losing last month's election.

McConnell said he has "the highest confidence" in U.S. intelligence agencies. He recounted Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, said Baltic nation leaders are nervous about Moscow and pointedly praised NATO, the alliance that Trump criticized repeatedly during his campaign.

"I think we ought to approach all of these issues on the assumption that the Russians do not wish us well," McConnell said.

Besides embracing an investigation by the Senate's intelligence panel, led by Richard Burr, R-N.C., McConnell also expressed support for a related probe by the Armed Services Committee, chaired by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz. McCain has been calling for such an examination and has long been wary of Russia.

The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., released a letter Monday to National Intelligence Director James Clapper complaining that recent reports of the CIA's conclusion clashed with Clapper's prior statement to the panel that he lacked "good insight" about the connection between Russian hacking of Democratic campaign documents and their release by Wikileaks. Nunes requested a briefing on the subject for this week.

The GOP leaders expressed their views after a weekend in which Trump also said he would not need daily intelligence briefings, a staple of presidents' days for decades and a flouting of a convention common for presidential transitions.

The campaign chairman for defeated Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton urged the Obama administration Monday to reveal what it knows about any Russian efforts to help Trump win. John Podesta,

whose emails were stolen and posted online, said the administration "owes it to the American people" to release details of the intrusions, which included the hacking of Democratic Party files.

Podesta said the Clinton campaign also supports a call by 10 of the 538 members of the Electoral College for Clapper to provide information that intelligence agencies have gathered on the subject.

Associated Press writers Julie Pace and Catherine Lucey contributed to this report.

Wonder Woman dumped as a special UN ambassador after uproar

By MARK KENNEDY, AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The comic book heroine Wonder Woman has been abruptly fired from her honorary ambassador job at the United Nations following protests from both inside and outside the world organization that a white, skimpily dressed American prone to violence wasn't the best role model for girls.

Rheal LeBlanc, head of press and external relations, said Tuesday the appointment of Wonder Woman as an Honorary Ambassador for the Empowerment of Women and Girls would end this week, a move that came less than two months after a splashy ceremony at the U.N., which attracted actresses Lynda Carter, who played Wonder Woman in the 1970s TV series, and Gal Gadot, who has taken on the role in the forthcoming "Wonder Woman" film.

Critics said the appointment was tone deaf at a time when real women are fighting against sexual exploitation and abuse, and that there were plenty of real heroines that could be the face for gender equality. At the time of the appointment, there was no indication it would end so quickly.

"It's ending because it's ending. And it was always meant to end," U.N. spokesman Jeffrey A. Brez told The Associated Press. "The objective was to reach out to Wonder Woman's fans and I think we did a great job of that."

In a statement, DC Entertainment, which owns the Wonder Woman title, said it was "extremely pleased with the awareness that this partnership brought" as well as "elevating the global conversation around the empowerment of women and girls." It added that Wonder Woman, who turned 75 this year, "stands for peace, justice and equality."

Wonder Woman's image was to be used by the U.N. on social media platforms to promote women's empowerment, including on gender-based violence and the fuller participation of women in public life. Defenders of the decision pointed to the character's pioneering, feminist roots and her muscular bravery.

But an online petition, started by U.N. staffers and signed by more than 44,000 people, asked the secretary-general to reconsider the appointment, saying the message the U.N. was "sending to the world with this appointment is extremely disappointing." And during the Oct. 21 ceremony at the U.N., many staffers silently turned their back to the stage, some with their fists in the air.

The Wonder Woman appointment came after many women were dismayed that another man, Antonio Guterres, the former prime minister of Portugal, was chosen to be the next secretary-general, even though more than half the candidates were women.

Several critics took issue with Wonder Woman's skimpy outfit, arguing that the world might not embrace a scantily clad character in a thigh-baring bodysuit with an American flag motif and knee-high boots.

Honorary ambassadors — as opposed to goodwill ambassadors like Nicole Kidman and Anne Hathaway — are fictional characters. The U.N. previously tapped Winnie the Pooh to be an honorary Ambassador of Friendship in 1998 and Tinker Bell as the honorary Ambassador of Green in 2009.

Mark Kennedy on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

France's new PM Cazeneuve seeks to extend state of emergency

PARIS (AP) — In his first speech to parliament, France's new prime minister argued Tuesday for an extension of a year-old state of emergency, saying that's needed to keep France secure through its 2017 presidential election.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 48 of 51

Socialist Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve vowed Tuesday to “protect the French” and continue the fight against terrorism despite the fact that he has only five months before the end of President Francois Hollande’s term.

“Defeat Islamist extremism implies to fight with all our strength for the Republic,” Cazeneuve told lawmakers at the lower house of parliament.

The lower house of parliament is voting Tuesday night on the fifth extension of a state of emergency declared the day after the Paris attacks by Islamic extremists that left 130 people dead on Nov. 13, 2015. The Senate is voting Thursday.

In a very political speech, Cazeneuve warned against “the rise of populism” in Europe and in the United States.

“Following Brexit, the European project itself is at risk of dislocation. It’s urgent, yes, urgent to convince citizens to turn away from false promises,” Cazeneuve said in an implicit reference to far-right National Front leader Marine Le Pen, who is expected to be a serious contender in next year’s presidential election.

Cazeneuve last week replaced former Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who stepped down to seek the French presidency in the nation’s two-part vote in April and May. Valls will first have to win the primary of the Socialist party and its allies next month.

Cazeneuve also vowed to boost France’s economy, fight unemployment and cut public spending. The former French foreign minister also denounced “the horror of the massacres” in the final hours of the battle of Aleppo in Syria.

“Those who perpetrated them will be accountable to the international community,” he said.

Republican looks to overhaul Social Security

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A senior Republican lawmaker wants to overhaul Social Security, the decades-old program that provides benefits to some 60 million retirees and disabled, with a plan to gradually increase the retirement age and slow the growth of benefits for higher-income workers.

Rep. Sam Johnson of Texas, the chairman of the House Ways and Means subcommittee on Social Security, introduced legislation just before the end of the congressional session last week that he said would “permanently save” the program while increasing some benefits for lower-income workers.

About 168 million people work and pay taxes toward the inevitable monthly Social Security benefits, and about 42 million of the beneficiaries are retirees and their families. The trustees who oversee Social Security say it has enough money to pay full benefits until 2034, and then Social Security will collect only enough taxes to pay 79 percent of benefits.

Unless Congress acts, millions of people on fixed incomes would get an automatic 21 percent cut in benefits.

“Americans want, need, and deserve for us to finally come up with a solution to saving this important program,” Johnson said.

Next year, with Donald Trump as president, congressional Republicans plan to try to dismantle many of President Barack Obama’s policies, from the health care law to environmental regulations. Medicare, a program created under another Democrat, Lyndon B. Johnson, is in the crosshairs of Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Trump’s pick for Health and Human Services secretary, Rep. Tom Price.

Ryan and Price favor privatizing the program, arguing that a voucher-system is necessary to ensure Medicare’s long-term solvency.

Conservatives like Johnson, who have pushed their priorities for years under divided government, see an opportunity to tackle Social Security next year.

Johnson’s bill is designed to slow the growth of Social Security costs while boosting some minimum benefits for those who earned lower wages over longer careers. It would also limit the size of benefits for spouses and children of high-income earners, among other changes in how the benefits are calculated. Johnson’s office said the bill would treat all workers fairly by using a proportional formula that looks at all

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 49 of 51

of an individual's earnings over the course of his or her career.

The retirement age would be gradually increased to 69, starting with those who were born in 1968 and would likely retire in the mid-2030s. Currently, the retirement age is 67 for those born in 1960 or later. The legislation would maintain the early retirement age of 62, allowing people to receive reduced benefits at that time. The bill's summary says the new retirement age would better reflect Americans' longer life expectancy.

But it's unclear if his proposal — or any others to revise Social Security — will move. Trump, who enjoyed strong support from working-class Americans, promised during the campaign not to cut Social Security and Medicare. Ryan told CBS' "60 Minutes" earlier this month that he has no plans to change Social Security.

The issue has long been unpopular on Capitol Hill, where many lawmakers from both parties are nervous about changing a program seniors rely on so heavily. President George W. Bush proposed a partial privatization of the program in his second term, but the effort failed in a Republican-led Congress and may have contributed to his party's sweeping losses in the 2006 midterm elections.

Reform still remains unpopular among the general public, as well. A March poll by the Pew Research Center found 7 in 10 Americans said Social Security benefits should not be reduced in any way.

Neither Ryan nor the Republican chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, would endorse Johnson's bill.

AshLee Strong, a spokeswoman for Ryan, said the bill "is one of many Republican ideas put forward to strengthen the program." Lauren Aronson, a spokeswoman for Brady, said he appreciates Johnson's commitment to a thoughtful conversation but also "sees the proposal as one of many ideas" to address the program's challenges.

Ryan has long been one of the most outspoken in his party on the need for entitlement reform, including Social Security. But he has indicated that he's more likely to first focus on Medicare's insolvency, now predicted for 2028.

Democrats immediately rejected Johnson's measure.

"While Speaker Ryan sharpens his knives for Medicare, Chairman Johnson's bill is an alarming sign that Republicans are greedily eying devastating cuts to Americans' Social Security benefits as well," said House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of California.

AP Polling Editor Emily Swanson contributed to this report.

Rowling's 'Tales of Beedle the Bard' sells for \$467,000

LONDON (AP) — A handwritten and hand-illustrated volume of stories given by J.K. Rowling to the editor who launched her career sold at auction Tuesday for 368,750 pounds (\$467,965).

Sotheby's sold one of seven original copies of "The Tales of Beedle the Bard," produced in 2007 to mark publication of the final Harry Potter novel.

It's inscribed to Barry Cunningham, the editor at Bloomsbury who accepted the first Potter book for publication. The dedication reads, "To Barry, the man who thought an overlong novel about a boy wizard in glasses might just sell. THANK YOU."

Rowling was a struggling single mother when "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" was published in 1997. It and six subsequent novels about the boy wizard went on to sell millions of copies and spawn a successful movie franchise.

Sotheby's said the leather-bound book, adorned with semi-precious stones and a silver skull, sold to an anonymous telephone bidder.

Another of the seven copies, produced for a 2007 charity auction, was bought by Amazon for almost 2 million pounds.

The book, a series of fairy tales set in the same magical world as the Harry Potter stories, was published commercially in 2008.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 50 of 51

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 14, the 349th day of 2016. There are 17 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 14, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson vetoed an immigration measure aimed at preventing "undesirables" and anyone born in the "Asiatic Barred Zone" from entering the U.S. (Congress overrode Wilson's veto in Feb. 1917.)

On this date:

In 1799, the first president of the United States, George Washington, died at his Mount Vernon, Virginia, home at age 67.

In 1819, Alabama joined the Union as the 22nd state.

In 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (ROH'-ahl AH'-mun-suhn) and his team became the first men to reach the South Pole, beating out a British expedition led by Robert F. Scott.

In 1918, "Il Trittico," a trio of one-act operas by Giacomo Puccini, premiered at New York's Metropolitan Opera House. (The third opera, "Gianni Schicchi (SKEE'-kee)," featured the aria "O Mio Babbino Caro," which was an instant hit.)

In 1936, the comedy "You Can't Take It With You" by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart opened on Broadway.

In 1946, the United Nations General Assembly voted to establish the U.N.'s headquarters in New York.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States, ruled that Congress was within its authority to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against racial discrimination by private businesses (in this case, a motel that refused to cater to blacks).

In 1972, Apollo 17 astronauts Harrison Schmitt and Eugene Cernan concluded their third and final moonwalk and blasted off for their rendezvous with the command module.

In 1981, Israel annexed the Golan Heights, which it had seized from Syria in 1967.

In 1986, the experimental aircraft Voyager, piloted by Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager, took off from Edwards Air Force Base in California on the first non-stop, non-refueled flight around the world.

In 1996, a freighter lost power on the Mississippi River and barreled into the Riverwalk complex in New Orleans; miraculously, no one was killed.

In 2012, a gunman with a semi-automatic rifle killed 20 first-graders and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, then committed suicide as police arrived; 20-year-old Adam Lanza had also fatally shot his mother at their home before carrying out the attack on the school.

Ten years ago: South Korea's Ban Ki-moon was sworn in as the eighth secretary-general of the United Nations. A British police inquiry concluded that the deaths of Princess Diana and her boyfriend, Dodi Fayed, in a 1997 Paris car crash were a "tragic accident," and that allegations of a murder conspiracy were unfounded. Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun (AH'-meht EHR'-teh-guhn) died in New York at age 83. Actor Mike Evans, who played Lionel Jefferson on "All in the Family" and "The Jeffersons," died in Twentynine Palms, California, at age 57.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, visiting Fort Bragg in North Carolina, saluted troops returning from Iraq, asserting that the nearly nine-year conflict was ending honorably. The House voted 283-136 to approve a massive \$662 billion defense bill (the Senate gave its approval the following day). The NFL renewed its television deals with CBS, Fox and NBC for nine years through the 2022 season. Singer Billie Jo Spears, 73, whose performance of "Blanket on the Ground" went No. 1 on the country charts in 1975, died in Vidor, Texas.

One year ago: Bill Cosby fired back at seven women who were suing him for defamation, accusing them in a federal countersuit of making false accusations of sexual misconduct for financial gain. Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred announced that Pete Rose, serving a lifetime ban for betting on baseball, would continue to be banned from working in the sport. Lillian Vernon, 88, creator of a multimillion dollar catalog

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 163 ~ 51 of 51

business that sold specialized gifts and home goods, died in New York. "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" had its world premiere at Hollywood's TCL Chinese Theater.

Today's Birthdays: Singer-actress Abbe Lane is 85. Actor Hal Williams is 82. Actress-singer Jane Birkin is 70. Pop singer Joyce Vincent-Wilson (Tony Orlando and Dawn) is 70. Entertainment executive Michael Ovitz is 70. Actress Dee Wallace is 68. Rhythm-and-blues singer Ronnie McNeir (The Four Tops) is 67. Rock musician Cliff Williams is 67. Actor-comedian T.K. Carter is 60. Rock singer-musician Mike Scott (The Waterboys) is 58. Singer-musician Peter "Spider" Stacy (The Pogues) is 58. Actress Cynthia Gibb is 53. Actress Nancy Valen (TV: "Baywatch") is 51. Actor Archie Kao is 47. Actress Natascha McElhone is 47. Actress-comedian Michaela Watkins is 45. Actress-comedian Miranda Hart is 44. Rhythm-and-blues singer Brian Dalrymple (Soul For Real) is 41. Actress KaDee Strickland is 41. Actress Tammy Blanchard is 40. Actress Sophie Monk is 37. Actress Vanessa Hudgens is 28. Rock/R&B singer Tori Kelly is 24.

Thought for Today: "You can close your eyes to reality but not to memories." — Stanislaw J. Lec, Polish author (1909-1966).