

Groton Daily Independent

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**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**

**Girls Basketball Score
Groton Area 42
Britton-Hecla 39
No stats available**

Today's Information

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, squash, macaroni salad, pineapple strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.

School Lunch: Chicken drumstick, mashed potatoes, corn, fruit, tea bun.

School Breakfast: French toast sticks, sausage links, fruit, juice, milk.

JHGBB host Redfield/Doland (7th grade at 4 p.m., 8th grade at 5 p.m.)

6:30 p.m.: Boys' Basketball hosts Britton-Hecla (Sugar Babes, Sweet Sensations and Spice Girlz will be performing at halftime of varsity game. They will be having a bake sale starting at 4 p.m. Proceeds go to playground equipment at the Groton Swimming Pool. Featured baker is Ashley Flihs.

7:00 pm: United Methodist Evening Bible Study

Wednesday's Information

FIRST DAY OF WINTER!

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, Prince Edward Island vegetables, frosted brownie, whole wheat bread.

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans, carrots and dip, fruit, Christmas cookie.

School Breakfast: Egg biscuit sandwich, fruit, juice, milk.

End of Second Quarter

2:00 p.m.: Elementary Christmas Concert

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

6:00 pm: United Methodist Confirmation Christmas Party

7 p.m.: St. John's Lutheran Preschool Christmas Program

7:30 pm: United Methodist Evening Bible Study - Christmas - with Pastor Thomas

JOHNSON AGENCY

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Council sets up water tower reserve fund

The city has nearly a million dollar fund balance, so with the \$80,000 left in the contingency fund, the council decided to start a reserve water tower fund. It's truly amazing," said Councilman Mary Fliehs about the funds left over at the end of the year. The council set up the reserve fund and will make the transfer at the end of the year.

There was discussion about a bill submitted by the Groton Dakota Press - it was over \$2,000 and 15 months worth of bills. Finance Officer Anita Lowary said, "I would like to object to that. There are three months in 2015 and those bills are not part of the 2016 budget. I would like to propose that if someone brings in bills over three months old there should be some sort of waiting period to have action on them. It's really tough to keep you on budget when you don't get the bills for over a year." The council approved the bills with no conditions attached.

The rubble site fees were once again discussed. There was consideration of charging a per load fee for commercial tree haulers. It was reported that one company had 109 trips to the rubble site and another had 164 trips to the rubble site. Right now the commercial account is paying \$175 for the year. Any change to the rubble site fees was tabled to the next meeting.

Marcy's Law was discussed in releasing accident information. Conflicting rulings is making Marcy's Law challenging, at best, to interpret.

The council hired Jennie Doeden, Shannon Wiedrick and Tadyn Glover to work at the warming house at the skating pond at the \$8.65 an hour.



Groton Senior Citizens

Groton Seniors met Nov. 14 for their Thanksgiving dinner. Twenty members and two visitors attended. Two get well cards were signed for Hazel McKittrick and Marian Raines. A thank you from the Redfield family for the memorial given to the Rescue Squad in the death of their mother. Seniors were invited to Bob and Ruth Pray's 70th anniversary Dec. 11. Six Seniors went to the living Christmas tree.

Election of officers: President Ruby Donovan, Vice President Eunice McColister, secretary Elda Stange, treasurer Pat Larson. Cards were played, the winners Whist- Jan Raap, Tony Goldade, Grace Albrecht, Canasta - Beulah Hoops, Marilyn Thrones, Pat Larson, Pinochle- Don Dauwin. Door prizes -Marilyn Thorsen, Pat Larson, Ella Johnson. Dinner was served by volunteers. Dec. 12 Groton Seniors had their potluck Christmas dinner- Twenty two members were present. Bingo was played. Dick Donavon won black out. Cards were played after bingo Door prizes- Ruby Donovan, Lorraine Sippel and Elda Stange.



Groton Community Transit invites you to
their

HOLIDAY BAKE SALE

Wednesday, December 21st

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Coffee, cider and Christmas goodies will
be served.

205 East 2nd Ave
Groton, SD 57445

*If you would like to donate baked goods please contact the Groton
Community Transit dispatch office at 605-397-8661. Any and all
donations welcome.*

Sanford
Underground
Research
Facility



Subscribe at: Sanfordlab.org/newsletters

Deep Thoughts

Notes from the underground by Communications Director Constance Walter

Monday, December 19, 2016

Stay focused during holidays

Compiled by Jason Rosdahl, Industrial Hygienist-Safety Specialist

During the holidays, many of us will attend celebrations with family and friends or schedule travel or last minute shopping. These festivities, however, can also bring distractions and stress.

According to the American Psychological Association, stress increases as people prepare for the holiday rush. During this time, people are also more prone to injury because they are not focused on the task at hand, whether at home or on the job.

As the year draws to a close, it's important to take proactive steps to stay focused on personal safety and the safety of others, and keep our "head in the game." Stress can distort perceptions, but by taking the following steps allows us to understand and manage it.



- Awareness: It's easy to let your mind drift while your hands and legs are in "auto pilot" doing the work. No matter the activity, remain aware of your surroundings, stay focused on the task at hand and be precise in your work.
- Be realistic: You can only accomplish so much. Set achievable goals then take small, decisive steps toward those goals.

- Recognize stress trigger events: External stress is often caused by something you feel you can't control, but internal stress is manageable. You can control how you react to stress. If you find yourself becoming distracted, stop and reframe your thoughts.
- Keep things in perspective: Adopt a long-term view to avoid "blowing things out of proportion."

When stress becomes overwhelming, seek help. SDSTA has an employee assistance program (EAP) available to

all employees. Calling this program is both free and anonymous. For more information about Sanford Lab's EAP, contact Eileen Brosnahan, human resources administrator at ebrosnahan@sanfordlab.org or call 888-293-6948.

Safety is for all of us—our co-workers, our families and our friends. You can help keep your holiday happy and safe by choosing to manage your stress and to stay mentally focused.

Have a safe and wonderful holiday season.

Safety performance recipients



Pictured from left: George Vandine, Jerry Hinker, Brian Johnson and Michelle Andresen.



Pictured from left: Brian Johnson, Michele Andresen, John Keefner and Al Stratman.

October: Jerry Hinker, top lander was nominated by George Vandine, Ross Shaft foreman. The driver of a semi tractor-trailer filled with steel took a wrong turn in the Ross yard and Hinker quickly realized the situation was unsafe. He calmly and safely led the driver through an alternate route. He also arranged to have several vehicles moved to make way for the truck. "This situation could have been dangerous," said Vandine. "But Jerry kept his cool, stayed calm and safely resolved this potentially hazardous situation."

November: John Keefner, underground operations engineer, was nominated by David Rynders, radiation safety officer and experiment safety manager. Keefner worked with several Sanford Lab employees to coordinate the removal of the LUX detector. He planned and identified potential risks to people and equipment; briefed his team on the potential hazards and JHA process; conducted rehearsals; and ensured stop work points were understood.

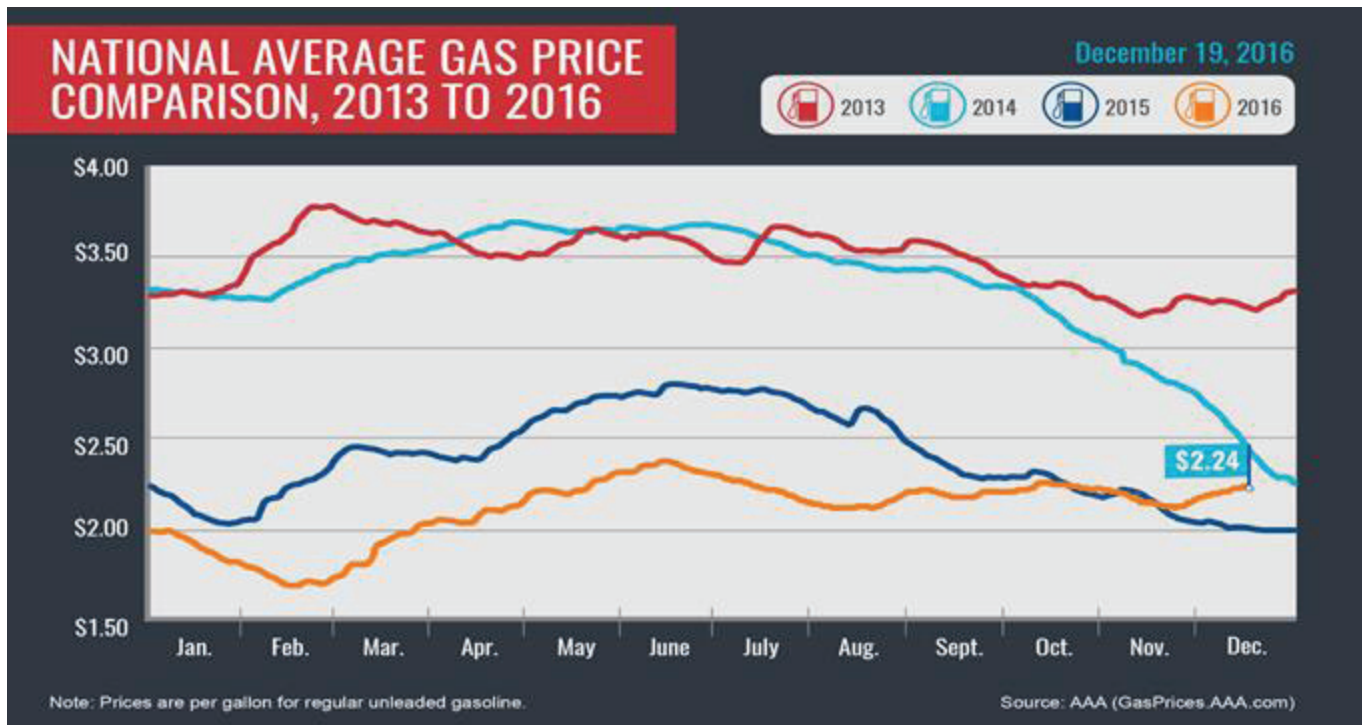
"John is modeling the safety mindset we want at Sanford Lab," said David Rynders. "The safety culture is only as strong as the first line supervisor's commitment. John did a great job and I look forward to working with him in the future."

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National Gas Price Average Is Highest Since October

Dec. 19, 2016 – National pump prices have risen for 20 of the last 21 days, rising a total of 11 cents during this span. The national average price for regular gasoline sits at \$2.24 per gallon, which is the highest mark since October. Today's average is three cents more than one week ago, nine cents more compared to one month ago and 24 cents more than the same date last year. Prices continue to rise due to market expectations of tighter availability following the announcement of an OPEC deal to cut oil production that is scheduled to start in January 2017.



“Our South Dakota average today of \$2.187 per gallon for self-serve regular is 5 cents more than it was one week ago,” said Marilyn Buskohl, spokeswoman for AAA South Dakota. “But we’re still 10 cents lower than we were just two months ago on Oct. 19.”

	Today	Last Week	Change	Today	Change	Last year
Aberdeen	\$2.093	\$2.139	-\$0.046	\$2.19	-\$0.098	\$2.039
Brookings	\$2.222	\$2.467	-\$0.245	\$2.14	\$0.086	\$1.959
Huron	\$2.354	\$2.242	\$0.112	\$2.47	-\$0.113	\$2.224
Mitchell	\$2.221	\$2.317	-\$0.096	\$2.26	-\$0.039	\$1.883
Pierre	\$2.230	\$2.279	-\$0.049	\$2.45	-\$0.216	\$2.135
Rapid City	\$2.105	\$2.044	\$0.061	\$2.16	-\$0.054	\$2.102
Sioux Falls	\$2.124	\$2.073	\$0.051	\$1.90	\$0.222	\$1.783
Vermillion	\$2.142	\$2.042	\$0.100	\$1.94	\$0.203	\$1.799
Watertown	\$2.228	\$2.207	\$0.021	\$2.21	\$0.015	\$1.901
Yankton	\$2.210	\$2.183	\$0.027	\$2.20	\$0.008	\$2.116
South Dakota	\$2.187	\$2.147	\$0.040	\$2.20	-\$0.010	\$2.004

The nation's top five most expensive markets are: Hawaii (\$2.95), California (\$2.67), Alaska (\$2.62), Washington (\$2.59) and the District of Columbia (\$2.54).

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Oil Market Dynamics

Last week, markets continued to react to the OPEC production agreement as Saudi Arabia and Russia made clear their intentions to fully cooperate with the production cut. OPEC and non-OPEC members agreed this month to cut oil production collectively by 1.8 million barrels per day in an effort to rebalance the global oil market. In reaction to the OPEC agreement, U.S. interest in oil production has increased and drillers added 12 new oil rigs in the last week, bringing the total oil-rig count to 510 rigs nationwide, according to Baker Hughes, Inc. At the close of Friday's formal trading session on the NYMEX, WTI was up \$1.00 to settle at \$51.90 per barrel.

Connecting Agriculture

Reflecting on Our Blessings

By Mike Jaspers, South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture

I can hardly believe 2016 is coming to a close. As I reflect on all that has happened this year, I'm reminded how fortunate I am to be able to do things that I love to do.

Like most farms and ranches in South Dakota, ours is a family operation. Through the cow/calf portion of my operation, I work with my extended family where I'm the fifth generation to be involved in agricultural production. On the crop side, part of the operation was established by my wife Robin's family. While we've been able to mold our farm into something unique, the common theme is family.

Robin and our children, Ellie and Alex, enjoy spending time on our farm and often help with various chores and projects that need to be completed. I have many fond memories of growing up on the family farm near Eden, SD. Being able to create similar memories with my wife and children is priceless.

When the year started, I had no idea that I'd have the honor of serving as the secretary for your department of agriculture. When Governor Daugaard called me, it was easy to say 'yes' because I truly believe in the importance of public service. I have enjoyed getting to know the department's staff and the roles we play in serving the agriculture industry in South Dakota. I am looking forward to the year ahead and guiding the staff of the department's five divisions as they continue to promote, protect and preserve South Dakota agriculture for today and tomorrow.

As you gather with friends and family this Christmas, I encourage you to be present and enjoy the people around you. Slow down. Relax. Tell stories. Share one or two of your memories from this year and those you hope to create in 2017. Most importantly, be thankful for all you have.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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Today in Weather History

December 20, 1991: Light freezing drizzle and freezing rain developed over northern South Dakota from Timber Lake to Webster. Numerous car accidents were attributed to slippery conditions. The Aberdeen Police Department reported 24 accidents in Aberdeen, but only one resulted in an injury. Numerous businesses closed and schools were canceled.

December 20, 2008: Arctic air combined with blustery northwest winds brought extreme wind chills to central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota from the late afternoon of the 20th until the afternoon of the 21st. Wind chills of 35 below to 45 below zero were common across the area.

December 20, 1836: A famous "sudden freeze" occurred in central Illinois. A cold front with 70 mph winds swept through around Noon dropping the temperature from 40 degrees to near zero in a matter of minutes. Many settlers froze to death. Folklore told of chickens frozen in their tracks and men frozen to saddles. Ice in streams reportedly froze to six inches in a few hours. Click [HERE](#) for more information from Dr. Heidorn.

December 20, 1977: A "Once in a Lifetime" wind and dust storm struck the south end of the San Joaquin Valley in California. Winds reached 88 mph at Arvin before the anemometer broke and gusts were estimated at 192 mph at Arvin by a U.S. Geological Survey. Meadows Field in Bakersfield recorded sustained 46 mph winds with a gust of 63 mph. The strong winds generated a wall of dust resembling a tidal wave that was 5,000 feet high over Arvin. Blowing sand stripped painted surfaces to bare metal and trapped people in vehicles for several hours. 70% of homes received structural damage in Arvin, Edison and East Bakersfield. 120,000 Kern County customers lost power. Agriculture was impacted as 25 million tons of soil was loosened from grazing lands. Five people died and damages totaled \$34 million dollars.

These strong winds also spread a large fire through the Honda Canyon on Vandenberg Air Force Base in southern California. This fire, which started from a power pole on Tranquillon Ridge being blown over, claimed the lives of Base Commander Colonel Joseph Turner, Fire Chief Billy Bell and Assistant Fire Chief Eugene Cooper. Additionally, severe burns were experienced by Heavy Equipment Operator Clarence McCauley. He later died due to complications from the burns.

1942 - An early cold wave sent the temperature plunging to 3 degrees below zero at Nantucket, MA, and to 11 degrees below zero at Boston MA. (The Weather Channel)


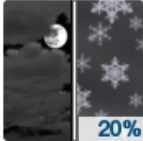





December 20, 1984: Lili, a rare December hurricane, was officially declared a tropical system in the central Atlantic as a well-defined eye type feature was apparent on satellite imagery. The hurricane peaked at sustained 80 mph winds and a pressure of 980 millibars or 28.94 inches of mercury, very respectable Category 1 Hurricane in December.

1988 - Strong southerly winds ahead of a cold front in the central U.S. gusted to 70 mph at Indianapolis IN. The high winds toppled a masonry wall killing a construction worker. Low pressure and a trailing cold front brought rain and snow and high winds to the western U.S. Winds gusted to 90 mph at the Callahan Ranch south of Reno NV. Soda Springs, in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, received 17 inches of snow in less than 24 hours. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Brutal northwest winds ushered bitter cold arctic air into the north central U.S. International Falls, MN, and Warroad, MN, tied for honors as the cold spot in the nation with morning lows of 34 degrees below zero. Minot ND reported a wind chill reading of 81 degrees below zero. Squalls produced more heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Erie PA received 21 inches of snow, including four inches in one hour, to bring their total snow cover to 39 inches, an all-time record for that location. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
						
Patchy Blowing Snow and Breezy then Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow 20%	Partly Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy and Blustery then Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny
High: 34 °F	Low: 20 °F↑	High: 35 °F	Low: 14 °F	High: 28 °F	Low: 15 °F	High: 28 °F

Some Weather Highlights this Week

Today – Tonight:
Mild with Highs mid-30s
Lows in the 20s
Light Precipitation Tonight

Wednesday:
Windy
Highs mid 30s

**Possible Snowstorm Christmas Weekend
(Too Soon to Know Details)**



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 12/20/2016 5:13 AM Central

Published on: 12/20/2016 at 5:19AM

Today will feature mild temperatures with highs in the 30s. A clipper system crossing the region will bring light precipitation tonight, and strong northwesterly winds on Wednesday.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 24.8 F at 10:34 PM

Low Outside Temp: 0.9 F at 12:12 AM

High Gust: 27.0 Mph at 5:57 PM

Snow:

Today's Info

Record High: 60° in 1893

Record Low: -29° in 1916

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 4°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.33

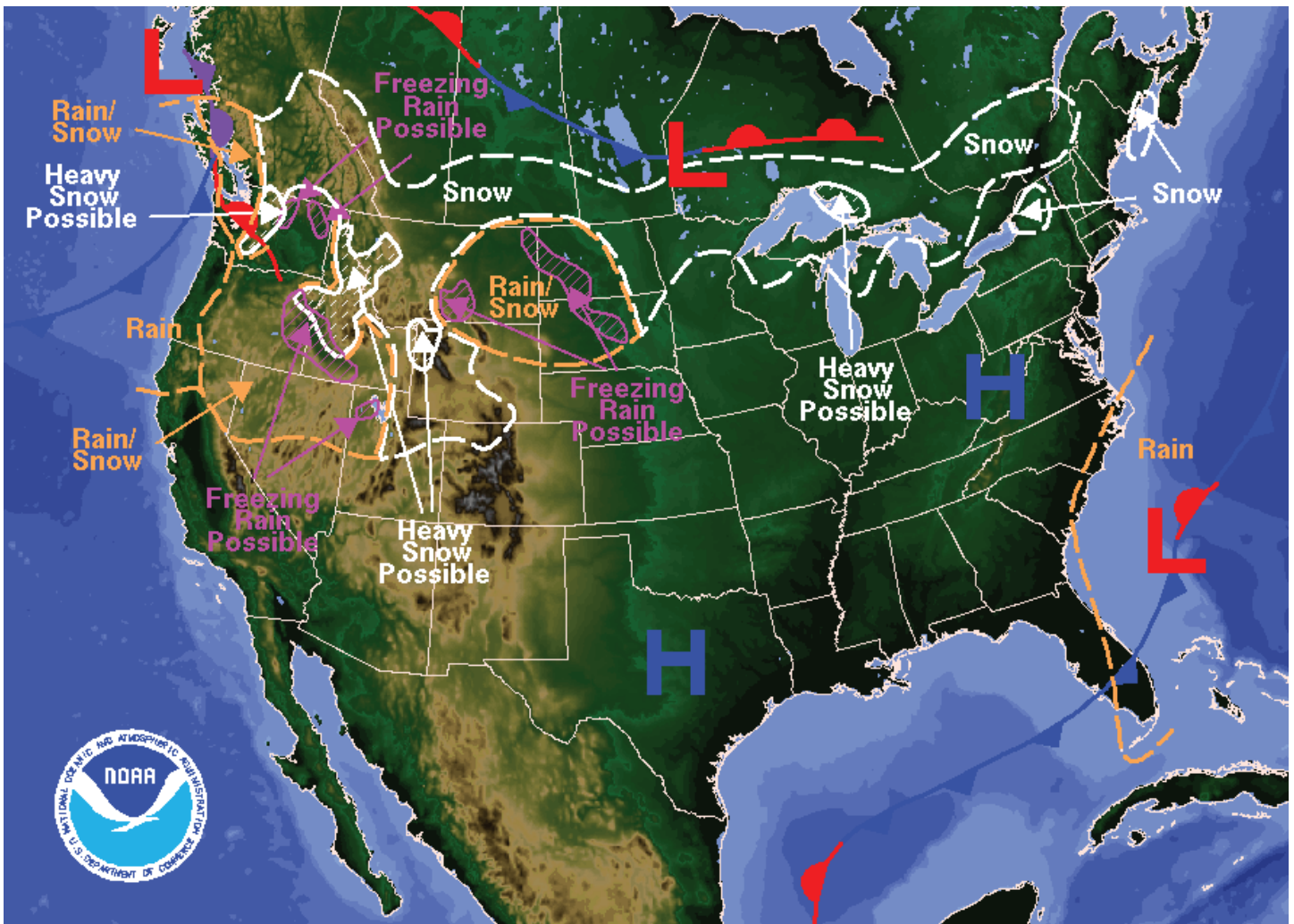
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.88

Average Precip to date: 21.53

Precip Year to Date: 18.22

Sunset Tonight: 4:52 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Tue, Dec 20, 2016, issued 4:58 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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A CHEERFUL GIVER

A lady said to a beggar, "Here's a quarter. You don't deserve it, but it will make me happy to give it to you!"

"Thanks, ma'am," he said. "Why not make it few dollars and really enjoy yourself?"

Giving is an important theme in the Bible. It begins in the heart of God. We read about the abundant gifts He gave His people. It continues in the work of Jesus as He went about healing the sick and feeding the hungry. We see His supreme gift when He gave His life on the cross: the gift of love, life, liberty and eternity with Him. The gifts of God and His Son are priceless – life giving and life sustaining.

Paul reminds us that we are not to "give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully. And God will generously provide all you need and plenty left over to share with others."

The Lord has given us two hands: one for receiving and one for giving. The question is not "What can I spare?" but, "What can I share?"

Prayer: Father, without Your love, grace and mercy, we would have nothing. Often we focus on what we have rather than what You have given us. May we realize that we receive to give. When we give, we show Your love: in Christ's Name. Amen.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:7-9 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

News from the Associated Press

Dem Sioux Falls mayor changing political party affiliation

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls Mayor Mike Huether is changing his political party affiliation amid speculation he's considering a run for statewide office.

The second-term mayor of South Dakota's largest city says he's changing his political registration from Democrat to independent. He says he's been weighing the change for two years.

Huether says he's frustrated with the two-party system, and with his former party's unwillingness to change.

He describes himself as a fiscal conservative and a social libertarian. He says extremes on the left and right are creating an anti-establishment anger.

The mayor announced his decision at a Monday news conference. He did not address his political future, but Northern State University political scientist Jon Schaff tells the Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2hPhWvI>) that people who don't have political ambitions don't call public press conferences.

Information from: Argus Leader, <http://www.argusleader.com>

Yankton man shot by trooper makes first court appearance

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — The suspect in an officer-involved shooting in Yankton earlier this month has been formally charged with attempted murder, aggravated assault against an officer and aggravated eluding.

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan reports (<http://bit.ly/2hmpftN>) that 58-year-old Curtis Adams Sr., of Yankton, made his first court appearance on Monday. He didn't enter a plea. Defense attorney Dan Fox requested a competency evaluation for his client, and Judge Glen Eng ordered one.

Adams was shot by a state Highway Patrol trooper on Dec. 3 after a chase. The trooper hasn't been identified. He's on standard paid administrative leave pending an investigation.

Information from: Yankton Press and Dakotan, <http://www.yankton.net/>

Iowa man accused of striking South Dakota officer arrested

TYNDALL, S.D. (AP) — An Iowa man accused of intentionally injuring a South Dakota police officer in a hit-and-run incident has been arrested after more than four months on the run.

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan reports (<http://bit.ly/2gXpLO3>) that 35-year-old Travis McPeek, of Sioux City, Iowa, was arrested Thursday in Mesa, Arizona, by federal marshals.

McPeek had been wanted on a warrant for felony aggravated assault against law enforcement since the Aug. 6 traffic stop. Authorities allege he struck Tyndall Police Officer Kelly Young with his truck in a convenience store parking lot and fled.

Young was treated at a hospital for broken ribs, a cut on a leg, an injured ankle, and other cuts and bruises.

Information from: Yankton Press and Dakotan, <http://www.yankton.net/>

Trials set for 2 suspects in child killing on reservation

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Trials have been scheduled for a man and woman accused of killing the woman's 5-year-old daughter on the South Dakota side of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

Desarae Makes Him First and Matthew St. Pierre are charged with first-degree murder, assault and child abuse in the October killing.

Court documents show that St. Pierre is scheduled for trial in Aberdeen beginning Feb. 6. Makes Him First is to stand trial beginning April 17.

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Both suspects face life in prison if convicted.

Monday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 88, Northwestern 81
Corsica/Stickney 96, Wessington Springs 19
Elk Point-Jefferson 59, Alcester-Hudson 47
Lennox 80, Canton 73
Madison 60, Beresford 21
Menno 67, Iroquois 39
Sioux Valley 79, Parker 45
Sully Buttes 58, Mobridge-Pollock 46
Warner 69, Potter County 54
Webster 55, Waubay/Summit 54
Stateline Shootout
Belle Fourche 60, Sundance, Wyo. 40
Newcastle, Wyo. 52, Lead-Deadwood 50

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Burke/South Central 28, Stuart, Neb. 21
Corsica/Stickney 43, Wessington Springs 26
DeSmet 62, Dell Rapids St. Mary 24
Florence/Henry 61, Langford 35
Hanson 58, Avon 49
Madison 42, Beresford 30
McCook Central/Montrose 59, Tea Area 23
Menno 68, Iroquois 27
Northwestern 52, Waverly-South Shore 51
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 51, Arlington 43
Ponca, Neb. 54, Vermillion 48

Stateline Shootout

Belle Fourche 49, Sundance, Wyo. 15
Newcastle, Wyo. 41, Lead-Deadwood 23

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

Sisseton vs. Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley, Minn., ppd.

140 years late, Nevada veteran lauded with US Medal of Honor

By MICHELLE RINDELS, Associated Press

A Nevada Army veteran who died without knowing he won the nation's highest medal of bravery received the honor he's been owed for nearly 140 years in a ceremony on Monday.

Nevada Rep. Mark Amodei held an event at his Reno office to present a new Medal of Honor to Jerry Reynolds, the 82-year-old grandson and closest surviving relative of the late Private Robert Smith.

Smith fought in a battle against American Indian tribes in the Dakota Territory on Sept. 9, 1876, when he was 29. Then-President Rutherford B. Hayes approved the Medal of Honor for Smith in 1877 for showing "special bravery in endeavoring to dislodge Indians secreted in a ravine," according to Army records.

But the award never made it to the veteran, who was born in Memphis, Tennessee as Harry Reynolds but used an alias for unknown reasons. His grandson said the medal was delivered to Camp Sheridan in Nebraska Territory, where Smith had previously lived, but someone else signed for the package.

Smith returned to using his birth name after his discharge from the Army, then later moved to Elko,

Nevada. While he talked with his family about his experiences in the so-called Indian Wars, he was better known for his skill driving horses as a teamster than he was for his war heroism, and he died in 1930 without knowing he won the award.

In 2011, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War contacted Jerry Reynolds to let him know about his grandfather's award. Smith had served as a drummer boy in the Civil War before enlisting in the Army in 1872 under the pseudonym.

"It was a total surprise," said Reynolds, who'd also never known about the Robert Smith name.

A document in the soldier's pension file that explains the name discrepancy suggests he used the alias because he didn't want friends in Philadelphia to know where he went.

Jerry Reynolds contacted Amodei's office this summer for help in what turned out to be a five-year journey to get a new medal. Congressional staff worked with the Army's Command Awards and Decorations Branch, which announced on Oct. 14 that it would provide a medal to the family as a symbol of the one that never made it to Smith.

"It's certainly been a great experience," Reynolds said. "They're very protective of the Medal of Honor ... rightfully so."

2 children who died saving others among 21 Carnegie Heroes

By **JOE MANDAK, Associated Press**

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Two children who died saving the lives of even younger children are among 21 people being honored with Carnegie medals for heroism.

The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission, based in Pittsburgh, announced the winners Tuesday.

Natalie Renee Martin, 11, of Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin, led her 9-year-old sister, Jenna, to safety when their house burned on Jan. 26. Natalie went back into the house attempting to rescue two other siblings, 10-year-old Benjamin Martin and 7-year-old Carter Maki, but all three were trapped and died later of complications from smoke inhalation.

Kiera Vera Larsen, 10, was killed Feb. 22 when she pushed 2-year-old Emmah Gusich out of the way when a parked vehicle began rolling down a sloped driveway toward the toddler in El Cajon, California. Kiera was struck and killed by the vehicle.

The commission is named for the late steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who was inspired by stories of heroism during a coal mine disaster that killed 181 people, including a miner and an engineer who died trying to rescue others.

The commission investigates stories of heroism and awards medals and cash several times a year. It has given away \$38.7 million to 9,914 awardees or their families since 1904.

Other winners announced Tuesday, with rescues taking place in the hometown of each winner unless otherwise noted:

— Peter F. Pontzer, 51, of Fairfax, Virginia, and Duncan O.C. Harris, 21, of Buffalo Grove, Illinois, saved a 13-year-old boy from drowning in the Atlantic Ocean at Emerald Isle, North Carolina, in July 2015.

— Ryan R. Rollinger, 39, of Harrisburg, South Dakota, was an assistant principal who saved his principal from further harm after the principal was wounded by a 16-year-old student with a gun at school in September 2015.

— William E. Ramirez, 46, of Pembroke Pines, Florida, who saved a Miami police officer from assault when the driver of a taxi pulled over by the officer opened fire in April 2015.

— Nathan Ryan Reynolds, 35, of Claremont, California, who saved a 75-year-old woman and 9-year-old girl from a car that crashed into a pond in Marina, California, in January 2015.

— R. Wayne Trivette, 67, of Metamora, Ohio, and Timothy A. Holtz II, 35, of Sand Creek, Michigan, who saved an unconscious woman from a burning vehicle after a crash in Jasper, Michigan, in July 2015.

— Clark Whitecalf, 41, of Gallivan, Saskatchewan, who rescued a sleeping woman from a burning house in August 2015.

— Cody Fields, 24, of Silver Spring, Maryland, and Brian Nesbitt, 35, of Germantown, Maryland, who rescued an unconscious man from a burning car in Silver Spring in September 2015.

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— Shei'Londa S. Brooks, 25, of Houston, who helped rescue a man from a crashed, burning vehicle in February.

— Lori Doppelheuer Kearney, 35, of Maysville, Kentucky, who died in an unsuccessful attempt to rescue her three sons when their house burned in October 2015.

— Ivan R. Romero Jr., 39, of Antelope, California, who saved a woman from a burning car hit by a tanker truck in West Sacramento, California, in July 2015.

— Dennis D. Swenson, 67, of Cornucopia, Wisconsin, who died unsuccessfully trying to rescue his 95-year-old mother, Dorothy, when their house burned in May 2015.

— Calvin Bradley Stein, 51, of Madoc, Ontario, who saved a 3-year-old girl from being trampled by runaway ponies at a fairground in Tweed, Ontario, in July.

— Damian Bell, 35, of Pleasant Hill, Iowa, who helped save a man who fell into an icy pond in Indianola, Iowa, in February.

— Joseph Kolanchick, 51, of Albany, New York, who save a man who fell through the ice at Collins Lake in Scotia, New York, while skating in February 2016.

— Joshua Gary Grimmett, 33, of Boise, Idaho, who save an injured woman from drowning in Mores Creek in May.

— Robert M. Shaw Jr., 54, of Wallingford, Connecticut, who saved a man from a burning tanker truck in Meriden, Connecticut, in July 2015.

Online:

<http://carnegiehero.org>

Daum with 20 as S Dakota St tops Drake 83-75 in 1st road win

DESMOINES, Iowa (AP) — Mike Daum scored 20 points and Andre Wallace 19 as South Dakota State won a road game for the first time this season, defeating Drake 83-75 on Monday night.

Daum, Wallace and A.J. Hess were a perfect 8-for-8 at the free throw line in the final 1:15 as South Dakota State (7-7) held off Drake, which had come as close as 69-66 when Nick McGlynn scored with 3:18 to play.

Billy Wampler led the Bulldogs (1-10) with 18 points, his sixth-straight game in double figures, Reed Timmer added 16, McGlynn had 11 and C.J. Rivers 10. Drake made up a 40-26 halftime deficit, made a season-high 10 3-pointers, scored 22 points off turnovers, but made only eight trips to the foul line, making seven free throws.

South Dakota State, thanks to 22 Drake fouls, shot 21-for-25 at the free throw line. Daum, who was 7-for-7, set the school record for consecutive makes with 40.

4 companies chosen to pursue nuclear waste burial test

By REGINA GARCIA CANO, Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Four companies will pursue the possibility of conducting a test to determine whether nuclear waste can be buried far underground, federal energy officials announced Monday, months after two prospective sites in the Dakotas were abandoned over local opposition.

The U.S. Department of Energy said the companies will explore potential sites for the test in South Dakota, Texas and New Mexico. Only one company will eventually carry out the borehole field test, which at no point will involve the use of actual nuclear waste.

California-based AECOM is exploring a field test site in Texas, while RESPEC is pursuing a site in South Dakota, where it is based. New Mexico-based TerranearPMC and Georgia-based ENERCON are looking at sites in New Mexico.

Boreholes are narrow, vertical holes that are drilled into the earth usually to determine the geological characteristics of the rock below. The proposed test is meant to assess whether nuclear waste can be stored in approximately 3-mile-deep holes.

"It is important to note there will be no nuclear waste used as part of this project nor will the site for the

field test be used for future nuclear waste disposal," said Andy Griffith, deputy assistant secretary in the department's Office of Nuclear Energy. Griffith declined to name the communities where the companies are pursuing the sites, but said they will be revealed in the near future.

Waste from commercial reactors in the U.S. now is stored onsite at nuclear power plants. The waste generated from defense activities is kept at a few secure locations.

The federal government for decades has researched possible sites for a permanent disposal site, including at Nevada's Yucca Mountain, but the country still lacks a repository for waste disposal.

The Department of Energy is emphasizing the absence of radioactive material in the project after communities in the Dakotas rebuffed the idea earlier this year over confusion and skepticism. In North Dakota, commissioners in Pierce County voted in March to formally oppose the project. Three months later, organizers abandoned Spink County, South Dakota, as a potential site because of resistance from local officials.

The agency has acknowledged that insufficient initial communication and outreach left the communities with a negative impression of the project. Griffith said the department is taking the lessons learned from the two experiences and is working to better engage prospective communities.

RESPEC CEO Todd Kenner said the department's commitment to not use nuclear waste in the test previously wasn't as "upfront" as it is now. He said the company is pursuing a site in South Dakota's Haakon County and has met with community representatives and business owners.

"There's information out there that leads you to believe something that this project isn't, specifically that nuclear waste will be stored there and this will become a repository, which is not the case," Kenner said. "Hopefully, that dispels a lot of the angst that people had."

The project's contract dictates that after the project is completed, the borehole will be permanently sealed. The land will then be restored.

The company that will eventually conduct the test will be chosen through a multi-phase process. The first phase begins Jan. 3.

Follow Regina Garcia Cano on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/reginagarciaKNO>

Air Force vet Meersman named Pine Ridge Hospital CEO

PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — The Indian Health Service says a new CEO has joined an embattled government-run hospital on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Mark Meersman will be responsible for managing all administrative and health care activities at Pine Ridge Hospital. His appointment was announced Monday.

Meersman retired from the U.S. Air Force as a lieutenant colonel after 23 years of service. He most recently was chief of the Health Benefits Branch in the Air Force Surgeon General's office, where he oversaw health policy and programs for 75 hospitals and clinics.

Meersman says he is looking forward to working with hospital staff to deliver "safe, high-quality health care and an excellent patient experience."

The 45-bed Pine Ridge Hospital has been under intense scrutiny this year after federal health inspectors uncovered severe quality-of-care deficiencies.

Standing Rock considers creating tribal utilities commission

FORT YATES, N.D. (AP) — The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is considering forming a tribal utilities commission to govern infrastructure projects on its land.

Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II told The Bismarck Tribune (<http://bit.ly/2h3hVat>) that the fight over the Dakota Access oil pipeline near the tribe's reservation has shown flaws in federal and state law pertaining to tribal consultation and input on infrastructure projects. Archambault said that's something he feels a tribal utilities commission could rectify.

"I think it's in everyone's interest to have some kind of regulatory authority," he said.

Archambault said the commission would have authority over all utilities infrastructure. He said the creation

of a commission wouldn't rule out the possibility of oil pipelines on the reservation, despite the opposition to the Dakota Access pipeline. Rather, there could be less reluctance to allow their development with more input on potential projects.

Even though the Dakota Access pipeline isn't slated to cross the reservation, Archambault said a tribal utilities commission could give the tribe more weight on the national stage if similar projects arose in the future.

Archambault said the tribe would first need to create a regulatory code before forming a commission. Once written, the new code would need feedback from tribal members for 30 days.

"The process takes time. It's not going to happen overnight," he said.

The tribe is looking to the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota as a model for its proposed commission, Archambault said.

The existence of Rosebud Sioux tribal utilities commission, established 22 years ago, has allowed the South Dakota tribe to be an advocate for utilities consumers within tribal homelands.

Archambault is also talking to the Rosebud Sioux about creating an intertribal utilities commission. The intertribal commission would be continuity of regulation across tribal homelands, making it easier for utilities companies to follow.

Information from: Bismarck Tribune, <http://www.bismarcktribune.com>

Sioux Falls downtown building collapse leaves legal issues

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The parties who have a potential legal claim in the fatal collapse of a building in downtown Sioux Falls have had a final opportunity to inspect the ruins before crews start removing critical pieces of the building.

Lawyers and experts were on hand Friday to inspect the site and draw their own conclusions about what caused the Dec. 2 collapse, which killed a construction worker and trapped a woman three hours, the Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2h3nB4j>) reported.

Hultgren Construction was in the middle of converting the Copper Lounge and neighboring Skelly's Bar into a space for a drug store at the time of the collapse. The building also included apartments.

The various investigations will determine who is responsible, and in turn liable, for damages. Insurance investigators will determine a cause and decide whether it's covered under various policies. They also will also conclude if Hultgren Construction acted recklessly or negligently.

Mark O'Leary, a lawyer representing the construction company, declined to comment on the issue.

Business owners' insurance generally covers damages to the property and covers liability if someone gets injured on the property. But in some cases, property insurance doesn't cover damages caused by construction.

Hultgren Construction had a city-issued permit authorizing the demolition of cosmetic features. Pictures posted to the construction company's social media page show the demolition of what experts believe may have been a load-bearing wall, the newspaper reports.

People who could file claims includes the family of the construction worker who died, Ethan McMahon; the woman injured in the collapse when the floor of her family's apartment fell in; a neighboring bar that was damaged; and nearby businesses that were forced to close at the height of the holiday retail season.

Betsy Ertel, a spokeswoman for the Cincinnati Insurance Cos., which insured the building, said the company was working diligently to gather all information, "so that we can bring it to a close as soon as possible."

Information from: Argus Leader, <http://www.argusleader.com>

1 Dakota Access pipeline suit on hold during related dispute

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press**

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A lawsuit from two Sioux tribes seeking to stop the Dakota Access oil pipeline was put on hold while a separate but related court battle over the project plays out.

Dallas-based pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners is asking U.S. District Judge James Boasberg in Washington, D.C., to rule that the company received proper permission from the Army in July to lay pipe under a Missouri River reservoir in North Dakota — the last remaining chunk of construction for the \$3.8 billion project. The Army earlier this month said more study was needed in light of concerns from the Standing Rock Sioux that the pipeline could threaten cultural sites and drinking water.

Energy Transfer Partners disputes the tribe's claims and says the pipeline is safe. The pipeline would carry North Dakota oil 1,200 miles through the Dakotas and Iowa to a shipping point in Illinois.

The Standing Rock Sioux and the Cheyenne River Sioux are challenging federal pipeline permits at numerous water crossings. The tribes earlier this month said they were willing to put their claims on hold until the fight between ETP and the Army is resolved, and Boasberg in a ruling dated Friday agreed to do so.

One reason for delaying the tribal challenge is to enable the court to focus on the Missouri River crossing dispute, which has stalled the project that was supposed to be done by the end of this year.

"Holding the tribes' claims in abeyance will serve the interests of judicial economy by enabling Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, and the Corps and the court to focus on resolving the (river crossing matter) on an expedited basis," said the joint proposal from the tribes and the Army Corps of Engineers that Boasberg approved.

Boasberg earlier this month gave the government until Jan. 6 to file its opposition to ETP's request. Oral arguments won't be held until at least February.

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

South Dakota's 3 Republican presidential electors back Trump

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's three Republican presidential electors have cast their support for Donald Trump.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Attorney General Marty Jackley and state Republican Party Chairwoman Pam Roberts cast their votes Monday in Pierre.

Electors are gathering in every state Monday to formally elect Donald Trump president even as anti-Trump forces try one last time to deny him the White House. Electors around the country have been inundated with emails, letters and phone calls urging them not to cast their ballots for Trump.

Trump carried South Dakota in the November election. He is poised to win 306 of the 538 electoral votes under the state-by-state distribution of electors.

Roberts substituted for Lt. Gov. Matt Michels, who was chosen as an elector but couldn't attend the meeting because of a scheduling conflict.

Man accused in reservation slaying pleads not guilty

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Colorado man accused of killing a woman on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in September has pleaded not guilty.

Thirty-four-year-old Orlando de Macias is charged with second-degree murder in the Sept. 29 death of 34-year-old Annie Colhoff. Authorities say she was shot in Pine Ridge village.

Villanueva de Macias was arrested in Colorado in November. U.S. Attorney Randolph Seiler says he pleaded not guilty earlier this month.

Villanueva de Macias is scheduled for trial in mid-February. He could face life in prison if convicted.

A Pine Ridge woman accused of helping Villanueva de Macias and concealing information in the case also has pleaded not guilty. Tyler Brewer is to stand trial in early January and faces up to three years in prison if convicted.

The Latest: UN official says monitors to go to Aleppo soon

BEIRUT (AP) — The Latest on the development in the Syrian civil war and the aftermath of the assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey (all times local):

2:15 p.m.

The U.N. humanitarian aid agency says Syria's government has authorized U.N. plans to send about 20 staffers to monitor evacuations of people from rebel-held parts of eastern Aleppo.

Spokesman Jens Laerke of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs told reporters in Geneva on Tuesday that "we stand ready to increase our presence there."

The plan comes after the U.N. Security Council unanimously approved a resolution on Monday urging the quick deployment of monitors.

Laerke said U.N. staffers "will go there as soon as they can." He said OCHA cannot estimate how many people remain in eastern Aleppo after buses shuttled some out on Tuesday.

He said about 90 of OCHA's 100 staffers already in Aleppo are Syrians, and the new deployment would "almost triple" the number of international staffers there.

12:40 p.m.

The spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin says the assassination the previous day of Moscow's ambassador in Turkey plays into the hands of those who want to derail peace talks for Syria.

Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday that Ambassador Andrei Karlov's murder "benefits those who want to drive a wedge between Russia and Turkey" as well as hamper "the normalization of the talks that allow to spur and join (our) efforts for Syrian political settlement."

Peskov lauded President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decision to allow Russian investigators to take part in the probe and described the Russians who arrived in Ankara earlier on Tuesday as "good specialists."

Peskov quoted Putin who had instructed Russian intelligence and foreign ministry officials to review security measures for Russian diplomats abroad but said it's ultimately up to the countries who host diplomats to ensure their safety.

12:30 p.m.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says he hopes that Russia, Iran and Turkey will agree on steps to bring about peaceful settlement in Syria.

Talks involving foreign ministers of Russia, Iran and Turkey were planned for Tuesday in Moscow, even before the Russian ambassador was assassinated in Ankara on Monday evening.

Lavrov said in televised comments at the start of talks with Iran's Mohammad Javad Zarif that Moscow wants Tuesday's talks "to determine the most effective steps that our countries could take to normalize the situation in Syria, bring about an end to violence, ensure the supply of humanitarian aid along with persistent fight on terrorist groups in Syria."

11:45 a.m.

The International Committee of the Red Cross says 10 more buses have arrived to the west Aleppo countryside in northern Syria evacuating residents from the opposition's last foothold in eastern Aleppo.

Ingy Sedky, Damascus spokeswoman for the ICRC, says evacuations would continue throughout the day.

The ICRC says 25,000 people have been bused out of east Aleppo since rebels effectively surrendered the area under an Ankara- and Moscow-brokered deal. It's unclear how many remain.

Meanwhile, Syrian state media say several more buses have arrived to the government-controlled Aleppo countryside after evacuating the sick and wounded from the rebel-besieged Shiite villages of Foua and Kfarya.

The swap evacuations are part of the Aleppo cease-fire deal — Syrian rebels besieging the two villages agreed to allow over 2,000 people to leave from there in exchange for the government allowing civilians and rebels to leave eastern Aleppo.

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Pro-government Al-Ikhbariya TV broadcast live images showing buses arriving from Foua and Kfarya, escorted by International Committee of the Red Cross vehicles, on Tuesday.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah's media arm says eight buses left the two villages earlier in the morning. Hezbollah is fighting alongside President Bashar Assad's forces in Syria.

11:35 a.m.

Russian state television has shown a plane landing at the Ankara airport carrying Russian investigators and foreign ministry employees who are to take part in the probe into the assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey the day before.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told the visiting Turkish foreign minister on Tuesday that the presidents of the two countries have agreed that Russian investigators would take part in the probe.

The state-owned Rossiya 24 television broadcast footage of the plane landing in Ankara. The plane would later in the day repatriate the body of Andrei Karlov who was fatally shot at a photo exhibition on Monday.

The spokesman for the Russian president said earlier in the day that Moscow dispatched 18 people to help the investigation.

11:30 a.m.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says the assassination of the Russian ambassador to Turkey makes Moscow even more determined to press ahead with Syrian talks that will offer "no concessions to the terrorists."

Lavrov is hosting the foreign ministers of Turkey and Iran in Moscow on Tuesday in what was expected to be a major meeting to discuss the Syrian crisis.

Lavrov and the visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Tuesday laid flowers to the portrait of Ambassador Andrei Karlov who was shot dead at an exhibition in Ankara.

The Russian minister said in televised comments that President Vladimir Putin and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan late on Monday "agreed this tragedy makes us more decisive in fighting terrorism and makes our today's meeting even more important."

Lavrov says Moscow is willing to seek agreements that will improve the humanitarian situation in Syria and help political procession but "will not offer any concession to terrorists."

Cavusoglu who told Lavrov at the start of the meeting that the attack happened when he was on his way to Moscow offered his condolences and said that "Turkish people are mourning this loss as much as Russia and the people of Russia."

10:55 a.m.

The International Committee of the Red Cross says it has overseen the evacuation of 25,000 people from eastern Aleppo since the rebels effectively surrendered the Syrian rebel enclave under an Ankara-Moscow-brokered deal.

The figure was provided by Robert Mardini, the ICRC's Mideast regional chief, who posted it on Twitter. Ingy Sedky, the ICRC spokeswoman in Damascus, told the Associated Press that Aleppo "evacuation (are) not over yet" and that there are "still thousands remaining" in eastern Aleppo.

Meanwhile, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah says Syrian army troops are to enter the rebels' last foothold in Aleppo later in the day, marking the return of the entire city to government control.

Hezbollah, which is fighting alongside Syrian President Bashar Assad forces, warned the remaining residents in the rebel enclave to leave "as quickly as possible."

The warning was distributed through Hezbollah's militia's media arm on Tuesday.

9:30 a.m.

The last Syrian rebels and civilians are awaiting evacuation from the remainder of what was once a rebel enclave in eastern Aleppo, a day after the U.N. Security Council approved sending observers to monitor

the exodus.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says that more than 15,000 people, among them 5,000 opposition fighters, have left the enclave since the rebels effectively surrendered the area under an Ankara- and Moscow-brokered deal. It's unclear how many remain.

In Moscow, foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey and Iran are meeting on Tuesday to discuss Syria, but the talks are likely to be overshadowed by the assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey the previous night by an Ankara policeman, who after killing his victim cried out: "Don't forget Aleppo! Don't forget Syria!"

Official: Berlin suspect was asylum-seeker from Pakistan

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and FRANK JORDANS, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The suspect in the truck attack that killed 12 people at a busy Berlin Christmas market came from Pakistan and had applied for asylum in Germany, the country's top security official said Tuesday.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said the suspect, who denies involvement, entered Germany on Dec. 31 last year and arrived in Berlin in February.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel described herself as "shocked, shaken and deeply saddened" after what she said the government must assume was a "terrorist attack." De Maiziere said that as far as officials know, the Islamic State group has not claimed responsibility.

In addition to those killed, nearly 50 people were injured when the truck plowed into the popular Christmas market filled with tourists and locals outside the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church near Berlin's Zoo station late Monday.

"There is still a lot that we don't know about this act with sufficient certainty," Merkel told reporters in Berlin, in her first personal statement following the incident. "But we must, as things stand, assume it was a terrorist attack."

Merkel, who has been criticized for allowing in large numbers of migrants, addressed head-on the possibility that an asylum-seeker was responsible.

"I know that it would be particularly hard for us all to bear if it were confirmed that a person committed this act who asked for protection and asylum in Germany," Merkel said. "This would be particularly sickening for the many, many Germans who work to help refugees every day and for the many people who really need our help and are making an effort to integrate in our country."

Authorities arrested a man about 2 kilometers (1½ miles) from the crash site on suspicion of having been at the wheel of the truck. Footage showed the suspect, his head covered in a white sheet, being pushed into a police car shortly after the attack. Berlin's Tagesspiegel newspaper reported that the man was known to police for minor crimes.

A spokesman for Berlin's office for refugee affairs said police conducted a large-scale search overnight at a large shelter for asylum-seekers at the city's now-defunct Tempelhof airport. Four men in their late 20s were questioned but nobody was arrested, Sascha Langenbach told The Associated Press.

Among the dead was a man in the truck, who succumbed as paramedics treated him, Berlin police spokesman Winfried Wenzel said. Police said later that the man was a Polish national, but didn't give further details of who he was or what happened to him.

The Polish owner of the truck said he feared the vehicle may have been hijacked. Ariel Zurawski said he last spoke with the driver, his cousin, around noon, and the driver told him he was in Berlin and scheduled to unload Tuesday morning. "They must have done something to my driver," he told TVN24.

Germany has not so far experienced any mass-casualty attacks by Islamic extremists, but has been increasingly wary since two attacks by asylum-seekers in the summer that were claimed by the Islamic State group. Five people were wounded in an ax rampage on a train near Wuerzburg and 15 in a bombing outside a bar in Ansbach, both in the southern state of Bavaria. Both attackers were killed.

Those attacks, and two others unrelated to Islamic extremism in the same weeklong period, contributed to tensions in Germany over the arrival last year of 890,000 migrants.

Far-right groups and a nationalist party seized on Monday's attack, blaming Merkel for what had happened. "Under the cloak of helping people Merkel has completely surrendered our domestic security," Frauke

Petry, the co-chairwoman of the Alternative for Germany party, wrote.

Manfred Weber, a member of Merkel's conservative bloc and leader of the European Parliament's biggest political grouping, cautioned against sweeping verdicts but said it was important to ensure that extremists didn't enter the country.

The German government said Merkel spoke Tuesday with President Barack Obama, who expressed his condolences. In Washington, White House National Security Council spokesman Ned Price said the United States was ready to help in the investigation and response.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump said Islamic extremists must be "eradicated from the face of the earth" and pledged to carry out that mission with all "freedom-loving partners."

The attack came less than a month after the U.S. State Department warned that extremist groups including Islamic State and al-Qaida were focusing "on the upcoming holiday season and associated events" in Europe.

The Islamic State group and al-Qaida have both called on followers to use trucks in particular to attack crowds. On July 14, a truck plowed into Bastille Day revelers in the southern French city of Nice, killing 86 people. Islamic State claimed responsibility for that attack, which was carried out by a Tunisian living in France.

Merkel said Monday's attack would not cause Germany to live in fear.

"Even if it's difficult at this hour we will find the strength to live life the way we want to live it in Germany. Free, together and openly," she said

Associated Press writers David Rising and Geir Moulson in Berlin and Angela Charlton in Paris contributed to this report.

China returns US underwater drone seized in South China Sea

By GILLIAN WONG, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Tuesday handed back to the United States an underwater drone it had seized last week in an incident that raised tensions in a relationship that has been tested by President-elect Donald Trump's signals of a tougher policy toward Beijing.

Trump has riled the Chinese leadership by saying he might reconsider U.S. policy toward Taiwan, the self-ruled island the mainland claims as its territory.

The Chinese navy vessel that seized the drone returned it near where it was seized, and it was received by the USS Mustin about 80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of Subic Bay in the Philippines, Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said in a statement. Cook said Washington considered the seizure illegal.

"This incident was inconsistent with both international law and standards of professionalism for conduct between navies at sea," he said, adding that the U.S. has called on China to refrain from "further efforts to impede lawful U.S. activities."

The statement said the U.S. would continue to "fly, sail, and operate in the South China Sea wherever international law allows." Such freedom of navigation missions in which U.S. ships sail near China's artificial islands draw warnings and rebukes from Beijing.

A spokeswoman of China's Foreign Ministry said there was no basis for the Pentagon's assertion that the seizure was unlawful, though she didn't fully explain the position, instead linking it to the U.S.'s military presence in the waters, which Beijing considers provocative.

"We have been pointing out that over a long time, the U.S. has been sending aircraft and vessels to conduct close-in reconnaissance and military surveys in waters facing China, which poses threats to China's sovereignty and security," said Hua Chunying, the spokeswoman.

"That is the root cause of the incident," she said, while calling for the U.S. to stop such activities.

China's defense ministry said in a statement that it handed the drone back after "friendly consultations."

Chinese officials say the drone was removed from the water to ensure the safety of passing ships, but domestic political experts have read the move as a warning to Trump not to test Beijing's resolve over

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Taiwan.

Early this month, Trump broke protocol by speaking with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. He later said he did not feel "bound by a one-China policy" unless the U.S. could gain trade or other benefits from China. Beijing regards any acknowledgement that Taiwan has its own head of state as a grave insult.

"China wants to send a message to the U.S. side about how serious the consequences can be if sensitive issues in China-U.S. relations are handled unilaterally and indiscreetly," said Xiong Zhiyong, an international relations expert at the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing. "The return of the seized drone shows that China hopes the U.S. will not provoke China on these issues and engage in solving issues through consultation."

The incident underscores how Trump will confront as president an increasingly assertive China that wants to extend its reach in the South China Sea, a strategically vital area through which about \$5 trillion in global trade passes each year. Several of China's smaller neighbors have protested China's territorial claims there and are closely watching Trump's handling of the disputed sea.

The seizure of the drone fits into China's broader strategy aimed at shaping the perception that it is in control of the South China Sea and will not back down, said Michael Raska, a military analyst at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

"They use the South China Sea as political, economic and informational means to project power and to influence domestic and external perception that the South China Sea is basically Chinese," Raska said. "This puts the U.S. and China into contending trajectories, but neither side has the strategic interest to escalate beyond these low-level incidents."

The U.S. said the drone was being operated by civilian contractors collecting unclassified scientific data in international waters. A noncombat ship was recovering two drones last Thursday when a Chinese ship approached, launched a small boat and picked up one of them, officials say.

Trump, still a month away from being inaugurated, accused Chinese authorities on Saturday of stealing the drone, and said on Twitter, "We should tell China that we don't want the drone they stole back.- let them keep it!"

Trump has pledged to be more unpredictable on the world stage, billing the approach as a much-needed change from President Barack Obama's deliberative style and public forecasting about U.S. policy.

That is likely to unnerve both allies and adversaries, leaving glaring questions about whether the foreign policy novice is carrying out planned strategies or acting on impulse.

Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor in Washington and news researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed to this report.

Trump blames terrorists for killings in Turkey, Berlin

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Jumping ahead of investigators, President-elect Donald Trump is blaming Islamic terrorism for deadly violence in Turkey and Germany and vowing anew to eradicate their regional and global networks.

Authorities in both countries were still investigating Monday when Trump issued a pair of statements condemning the incidents. The White House had already described the episode in central Berlin, in which a truck rammed into shoppers at a Christmas market, as an apparent terrorist attack.

Trump called the brazen shooting of Russia's ambassador to Turkey as he attended a photo exhibit "a violation of all rules of civilized order." He added that a "radical Islamic terrorist" had assassinated the diplomat, Andrei Karlov.

Turkish authorities identified the gunman as Mevlut Mert Altintas, a member of Ankara's riot police squad, and said he was later killed in a shootout with police. Altintas shouted in Turkish about the Syrian city of Aleppo and also yelled "Allahu akbar," the Arabic phrase for "God is great."

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In Berlin, where at least 12 people were killed, Trump said the Islamic State group "and other Islamist terrorists continually slaughter Christians in their communities and places of worship as part of their global jihad."

He added that these terrorists and their regional and worldwide networks "must be eradicated from the face of the earth" and pledged to carry out that mission with "all freedom-loving partners."

Trump's transition team did not respond to requests to cite the sources for his claims of terrorist involvement.

He later tweeted: "Today there were terror attacks in Turkey, Switzerland and Germany — and it is only getting worse. The civilized world must change thinking!"

In Zurich, police said three people were wounded when a gunman opened fire in the prayer hall of a mosque frequented by Somali immigrants.

Trump vowed during the presidential campaign to go after the Islamic State group, but repeatedly declined to fill in the public on his plan.

His statements came at the end of a day in which he was formally elected president by the Electoral College, clearing the way for his Jan. 20 inauguration. Trump also announced his candidate for secretary of the Army on Monday and held a round of transition meetings.

He was expected to hold additional transition meetings at his Palm Beach, Florida, estate on Tuesday and Wednesday.

His choice of Army veteran and fellow New Yorker Vincent Viola to be Army secretary will put another billionaire in a leading role in the new administration. Viola is a West Point graduate who joins a list of individuals with military backgrounds already bound for the Cabinet. Trump's picks for defense secretary, homeland security secretary, national security adviser and deputy national security adviser are retired military.

Viola was the first member of his family to attend college. He was trained as an Airborne Ranger infantry officer and served in the 101st Airborne Division. A lawyer, he started multiple businesses, became a billionaire and bought the Florida Panthers hockey team for \$250 million in 2013.

Trump has already tapped several wealthy businessmen for jobs, including fast-food executive Andy Puzder to be secretary for the Labor Department, billionaire investor Wilbur Ross for Commerce, financier Steven Mnuchin for Treasury and Goldman Sachs President Gary Cohn as his top economic adviser.

Trump still has numerous other posts to fill, including U.S. trade representative. Among those he met with on Monday at his Mar-a-Lago estate was Robert Lighthizer, a deputy U.S. trade representative in the Reagan administration, Trump's aides said.

Trump is spending the run-up to Christmas with his family.

The president-elect also had dinner Saturday at the Florida club with Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, a surprising development given Trump's harsh criticism of Slim during the presidential election. Slim is a major investor in The New York Times, which is also a frequent Trump target.

Neither did Slim spare Trump, who has criticized Mexicans and vowed to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico to stop illegal immigration.

Representatives for Trump and Slim confirmed the dinner, which was first reported Monday by The Washington Post.

People briefed on the meeting said it was arranged to open a friendly line of communication between the businessmen. The dinner was brokered by former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, who remains close to the president-elect, after Lewandowski quietly visited Slim in Mexico City earlier this month.

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North Carolina's 'bathroom bill' set on fast path to repeal

By TOM FOREMAN Jr., Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina lawmakers appear poised to repeal a controversial law widely derided as the "bathroom bill" because it requires transgender people to use restrooms corresponding with the sex on their birth certificate in many public buildings.

As part of the deal, the Charlotte City Council voted Monday to repeal the local nondiscrimination ordinance that first prompted legislators to pass the state law.

Opposition to the state law, called HB2, cost the state hundreds of jobs, several high-profile sports events and perhaps Gov. Pat McCrory a second term.

The repeal would be a remarkable sign of cooperation for Democratic Gov.-elect Roy Cooper and the GOP-controlled legislature. Just last week, lawmakers called a special session and stripped Cooper of some of his authority when he takes office next month.

The council's move is contingent on North Carolina fully repealing HB2 by Dec. 31.

Charlotte City Councilwoman Claire Green Fallon said that when she walked into a breakfast with legislative leaders Monday, she had no idea the incoming governor and Republican leaders had struck a deal — apparently over the weekend — to dump the contentious law.

McCrory said later Monday that he would call legislators back to the Capitol on Wednesday to repeal HB2, which also excludes sexual orientation and gender identity from antidiscrimination protections. In addition, the measure reaffirms that local governments can't require area businesses to pay a minimum wage higher than North Carolina's statewide minimum, currently set at \$7.25 per hour.

Although Fallon said she was unaware of what was happening at breakfast, Charlotte City Council member Julie Eiselt said some council members received a call from Cooper on Sunday night that there would be a special session to repeal HB2.

Eiselt said the move by the council was a leap of faith but council members felt that, because Cooper was comfortable, they would proceed with the vote. She said she thinks there are enough lawmakers in Raleigh who don't want to see "the continued wreckage that's happening in our state."

Republicans had said the Charlotte ordinance — which ensured transgender people the right to use restrooms corresponding to their gender identity — had to go first before they would consider getting rid of HB2.

Supporters of HB2 were quick to criticize the likelihood that lawmakers would vote for its repeal.

"We're sending the message to our supporters that lawmakers should not now betray people who supported them and compromise common-sense principles like privacy, dignity and freedom from our citizens," said Tami Fitzgerald, executive director of the North Carolina Values Coalition. Repeal also would break faith with social conservatives just weeks after they knocked on thousands of doors to back McCrory's re-election effort, Fitzgerald said.

The legislative affiliate of the Family Research Council sent out a statement asking supporters to call McCrory and ask him not to call the special session and "stand up to out-of-state bullies."

The NCAA, which pulled seven championships out of North Carolina because of HB2, welcomed the news. "We are encouraged by the current discussions in North Carolina and remain committed to hosting future NCAA championships to ensure they promote an inclusive atmosphere for college athletes, coaches, administrators and fans," the organization said in a statement, adding that the relocated championships for 2016-17 will remain in their new cities.

And LGBT advocates held out hope that the General Assembly would follow through, although they also said protection from discrimination transcends politics.

"LGBT rights aren't a bargaining chip. Charlotte shouldn't have had to repeal its ordinance in exchange for HB2 to be repealed," Simone Bell, the Southern Regional Director for Lambda Legal, said in a statement. "LGBT people in North Carolina still need protection from discrimination."

In March, a full repeal of the law appeared highly unlikely. At the time, Republican legislative leaders didn't address McCrory's request to restore the right to sue in state court for employment discrimination, which was one of the bill's original tenets. But they praised him for reaffirming bathroom provisions in the law. It was in September that McCrory and GOP legislative leaders offered a deal to Charlotte saying they

would consider rescinding HB2 if city leaders repealed the ordinance.

Charlotte Mayor Jennifer Roberts basically told McCrory and the lawmakers they would have to move first.

Associated Press writer Jonathan Drew in Raleigh, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

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. TRUCK ATTACK THAT KILLED 12 IN BERLIN 'INTENTIONAL'

German media reports that the suspect who is being interrogated is a Pakistani citizen who entered the country in the last 12 months.

2. SHOTS OUTSIDE U.S. EMBASSY IN TURKEY AFTER RUSSIA ENVOY KILLED

No one is hurt in the incident which occurred hours after a Turkish policeman, condemning Moscow's military role in Syria, fatally shot the ambassador in Ankara.

3. LAST REMAINING REBELS AND CIVILIANS AWAIT ALEPPO EVACUATION

Activists say more than 15,000 people, among them 5,000 opposition fighters, have left the battered enclave since last week.

4. TRUMP EASILY WINS ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTE

The results ensure that the billionaire businessman will become America's 45th president.

5. WHO MIGHT NOT LIVE UP TO HIS INFRASTRUCTURE PROMISES

Some lobbyists are beginning to wonder whether Trump meant what he said when he pledged to generate \$1 trillion in spending to rebuild America's roads, bridges and airports.

6. CHINA RETURNS U.S. UNDERWATER DRONE SEIZED IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

Last week's seizure prompts fresh criticism by Trump, who has riled the Chinese leadership by saying he might reconsider policy toward Taiwan.

7. WHICH LAW NORTH CAROLINA IS SET TO REPEAL

Eight months after state lawmakers passed a bill limiting protections for the LGBT community, there are signs it will be undone.

8. WHERE MH370 CRASH SITE COULD BE

Investigators say the missing plane is unlikely to be found in the area search crews have been combing for two years, and may instead have crashed farther to the north.

9. SMOG CHOKES CHINESE CITIES

It spurs authorities to cancel flights and close some highways in emergency measures to cut down on air pollution.

10. AFTER LOSING PLAYOFF CONTROL, REDSKINS ARE LEFT TO WAIT AND HOPE

Washington needs help to make it back to the postseason, while the Carolina Panthers need the stars to align.

Turkey, Russia vow cooperation after ambassador's killing

By SUZAN FRASER and NATALIYA VASILYEVA, Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Russian investigators worked Tuesday to determine whether the assassination of their ambassador to Turkey was the work of a lone gunman or part of a wider conspiracy as the two countries, which have backed opposing sides in the Syrian war, said they would not let the killing disrupt efforts to repair their relationship.

In a separate attack, a man with a shotgun was detained after he fired into the air outside the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, the Turkish capital. No one was hurt.

Ambassador Andrei Karlov was shot dead Monday by a Turkish policeman who shouted slogans about Aleppo, a Syrian city where Russian bombardments have targeted rebel factions. Authorities identified

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him as a 22-year-old member of Ankara's riot police squad, but did not disclose any motive for the attack.

On Tuesday, the foreign ministers of Russia and Turkey attended a previously scheduled meeting in Moscow, where they said they were committed to advancing peace efforts in Syria.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey and Russia would work together to determine who was behind the "heinous terror attack" against Karlov, who was killed in front of a stunned audience while making remarks at a photo exhibition in Ankara.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was hosting Cavusoglu as well as the foreign minister of Iran for a meeting to discuss the Syrian crisis. Top Turkish, Russian and Iranian defense officials were also meeting. Russia and Iran have backed the government of Bashar Assad, while Turkey has supported rebels fighting Assad.

"Turkey and Russia have shown the world what they can achieve when they cooperate," Cavusoglu said in at the start of the meeting with Lavrov. He was referring to a Turkish- and Russian-brokered peace deal that paved the way for the evacuation of thousands of people from the east of embattled Aleppo.

The presidents of Russia and Turkey, Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, agreed that the killing of the Russian ambassador "makes us more decisive in fighting terrorism and makes today's meeting even more important," Lavrov said.

Both foreign ministers lay flowers in front of a photograph of the ambassador at the Russian Foreign Ministry mansion where talks were taking place. Cavusoglu said a street where the Russian Embassy in Ankara is located would be renamed for Karlov.

Karlov's assailant, identified as Mevlut Mert Altintas, was later killed in a shootout with police.

An Associated Press photographer and others at the art gallery watched in horror as Altintas, who was wearing a dark suit and tie, fired at least eight shots, at one point walking around the ambassador as he lay motionless and shooting him again at close range.

A group of 18 Russian investigators and foreign ministry officials left for Ankara to investigate the killing, Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. The ambassador's body and his family will be brought back to Russia in the same plane that flew in the Russian experts, according to Russia.

Authorities are trying to determine whether Altintas acted alone or if his assault was an organized terror attack, Turkey's Hurriyet newspaper reported.

His actions appeared to be well-planned. Altintas had taken leave from work on medical grounds and booked himself into a hotel near the exhibition center, Hurriyet said.

Turkish police detained three more people connected to Altintas on Tuesday, raising the number of people in custody to seven, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency reported. They include the man's parents, sister, three other relatives and his roommate in Ankara.

The assassination occurred after days of protests by Turks angry over Russia's support for Syrian leader Assad and Russia's role in the bombardment and destruction of parts of Aleppo.

Also Tuesday, Turkish police detained a man who fired shots in front of the U.S. Embassy, which is across the street from the building where the Russian ambassador was killed. It was not immediately known if the two incidents were connected.

The man took out a pump-action shotgun hidden in his coat and fired around eight shots in the air before embassy security guards apparently overpowered him, according to the Anadolu agency.

The U.S. Embassy said its missions in Ankara, Istanbul and the southern city of Adana would be "closed for normal operations on Tuesday."

Authorities increased security outside the Russian Embassy, and the Iranian Embassy was closed on Tuesday as a precaution. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov warned against traveling to Turkey, citing attacks that have hit the country over the past 18 months.

Vasilyeva reported from Moscow. Associated Press writer Christopher Torchia contributed from Johannesburg.

Police: Truck attack that killed 12 in Berlin 'intentional'

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and FRANK JORDANS, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The driver who rammed a truck into a crowded Christmas market in the heart of the German capital, killing at least 12 people and injuring nearly 50, did so intentionally, police said Tuesday. Chancellor Angela Merkel said authorities believe it was a terror attack.

The truck smashed into the popular Christmas market filled with tourists and locals outside the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church near Berlin's Zoo station late Monday.

"Our investigators are working on the assumption that the truck was intentionally driven into the crowd at the Christmas market on Breitscheidplatz," Berlin police said on Twitter.

Merkel said she was "shocked, shaken and deeply saddened."

"There is still a lot that we don't know about this act with sufficient certainty," she told reporters. "But we must, as things stand, assume it was a terrorist attack."

Numerous German media reported that the suspect, who was picked up about 2 kilometers (1½ miles) from the crash site, was a Pakistani citizen.

Footage showed the suspect, his head covered in a white sheet, being pushed into a police car shortly after the attack.

Berlin's public radio station RBB-Inforadio cited security sources saying the man entered Germany on Dec. 31, 2015. News agency dpa, also citing unnamed security sources, said he came to Germany as a refugee in February 2016. Berlin's Tagesspiegel newspaper reported that the man was known to police for minor crimes.

Police declined to comment on the reports, referring questions to federal prosecutors who said they would hold a news conference Tuesday afternoon. But Merkel, who has been criticized for allowing in large numbers of migrants, addressed head-on the possibility that an asylum-seeker was responsible.

"I know that it would be particularly hard for us all to bear if it were confirmed that a person committed this act who asked for protection and asylum in Germany," Merkel said. "This would be particularly sickening for the many, many Germans who work to help refugees every day and for the many people who really need our help and are making an effort to integrate in our country."

A spokesman for Berlin's office for refugee affairs said police conducted a large-scale search overnight at a large shelter for asylum-seekers at the city's now-defunct Tempelhof airport. Four men in their late 20s were questioned but nobody was arrested, Sascha Langenbach told The Associated Press.

Among the dead was a man in the truck, who succumbed as paramedics treated him, Berlin police spokesman Winfried Wenzel said. Police said later that the man was a Polish national, but didn't give further details of who he was or what happened to him.

The Polish owner of the truck said he feared the vehicle may have been hijacked. Ariel Zurawski said he last spoke with the driver, his cousin, around noon, and the driver told him he was in Berlin and scheduled to unload Tuesday morning. "They must have done something to my driver," he told TVN24.

Germany has not so far experienced any mass-casualty attacks by Islamic extremists, but has been increasingly wary since two attacks by asylum-seekers in the summer that were claimed by the Islamic State group. Five people were wounded in an ax rampage on a train near Wuerzburg and 15 in a bombing outside a bar in Ansbach, both in the southern state of Bavaria. Both attackers were killed.

Those attacks, and two others unrelated to Islamic extremism in the same weeklong period, contributed to tensions in Germany over the arrival last year of 890,000 migrants.

Far-right groups and a nationalist party seized on Monday's attack, blaming Merkel.

"Under the cloak of helping people Merkel has completely surrendered our domestic security," Frauke Petry, the co-chairwoman of the Alternative for Germany party, wrote.

Manfred Weber, a member of Merkel's conservative bloc and leader of the European Parliament's biggest political grouping, cautioned against sweeping verdicts but said it was important to ensure that extremists didn't enter the country.

"The state must be able to check every refugee who comes here," he told German public broadcaster ARD.

French Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux expressed his sympathy after the attack.

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"We are all Berliners today," he told Europe-1 radio Tuesday. "In this type of situation, we need unity to face down terrorists, and on this occasion we need European unity. It must be strong, particularly strong."

The White House condemned "what appears to have been a terrorist attack." It came less than a month after the U.S. State Department warned that extremist groups including Islamic State and al-Qaida were focusing "on the upcoming holiday season and associated events" in Europe.

The German government said Merkel spoke Tuesday with President Barack Obama, who expressed his condolences.

The Islamic State group and al-Qaida have both called on followers to use trucks in particular to attack crowds. On July 14, a truck plowed into Bastille Day revelers in the southern French city of Nice, killing 86 people. Islamic State claimed responsibility for that attack, which was carried out by a Tunisian living in France.

Federal prosecutors, who handle terrorism cases, took over the investigation. In Washington, White House National Security Council spokesman Ned Price said the United States was ready to help in the investigation and response.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump Islamic extremists must be "eradicated from the face of the earth" and pledged to carry out that mission with all "freedom-loving partners."

Berlin's mayor, Michael Mueller, planned to hold a news conference on the attack at 1 p.m. (1200 GMT). The archbishop of Berlin, Heiner Koch, said he would hold prayers for the victims at the St. Hedwig Cathedral at noon.

Associated Press writers David Rising and Geir Moulson in Berlin and Angela Charlton in Paris contributed to this report.

Revolt fizzles as Trump easily wins Electoral College vote

By **STEPHEN OHLEMACHER, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — So much for an Electoral College revolt.

Despite weeks of lobbying and a day of protests, President-elect Donald Trump won all but two of the Electoral College votes he claimed on Election Day, ensuring he will become America's 45th president.

There were more protest votes among Democratic electors — five — than there were among Republicans.

All 538 electors met in state capitals across the country Monday to cast their votes. Trump's polarizing victory in November and the fact that Democrat Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by more than 2.8 million votes had stirred an intense lobbying effort. But the endeavor produced more noise than results.

With all states reporting, Trump finished with 304 votes and Clinton had 227. It takes 270 Electoral College votes to win the presidency. Texas put Trump over the top, despite two Republican electors casting protest votes.

"We did it!" Trump tweeted Monday evening. "Thank you to all of my great supporters, we just officially won the election (despite all of the distorted and inaccurate media)."

He later issued a statement saying: "With this historic step we can look forward to the bright future ahead. I will work hard to unite our country and be the President of all Americans."

Befitting an election filled with acrimony, thousands of protesters converged on state capitals Monday, urging Republican electors to abandon their party's winning candidate.

More than 200 demonstrators braved freezing temperatures at Pennsylvania's capitol, chanting, "No Trump, no KKK, no fascist USA!" and "No treason, no Trump!"

In Madison, Wisconsin, protesters shouted, cried and sang "Silent Night." In Augusta, Maine, they banged on drums and held signs that said, "Don't let Putin Pick Our President," referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Among the Republican electors in Texas who cast protest votes, one voted for Ohio Gov. John Kasich; the other voted for former Texas Rep. Ron Paul.

Clinton lost four electors in Washington state — three voted for former Secretary of State Colin Powell

and one voted for Native American tribal leader Faith Spotted Eagle. She also lost an elector in Hawaii to Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. Clinton beat Sanders in the Democratic primaries.

Several Democratic electors in other states tried to vote for protest candidates but they either changed their votes to Clinton or were replaced.

The Electoral College has 538 members, with the number allocated to each state based on how many representatives it has in the House plus one for each senator. The District of Columbia gets three, despite the fact that the home to Congress has no vote in Congress.

There is no constitutional provision or federal law that requires electors to vote for the candidate who won their state — though some states require their electors to vote for the winning candidate.

In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, elector Charlie Buckels reached out to Trump's opponents after the New York businessman got all of the state's eight votes.

"For those of you who wished it had gone another way, I thank you for being here," said Buckels, the state GOP finance chairman. "I thank you for your passion for our country."

A joint session of Congress is scheduled for Jan. 6 to certify the results of the Electoral College vote, with Vice President Joe Biden presiding as president of the Senate. Once the result is certified, Trump will be sworn in on Jan. 20.

Associated Press writers Paul Weber in Austin, Texas; Julie Carr Smyth in Columbus, Ohio; Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin; Erik Schelzig and Jonathan Mattise in Nashville, Tennessee; Kathleen Floody and Alex Sanz in Atlanta; Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Marina Villeneuve in Augusta, Maine; Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington; and Juliet A. Williams in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Online:

AP interactive on election results: <http://interactives.ap.org/2016/road-to-270/>

Follow Stephen Ohlemacher on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/stephenatap>

Truck rams into German Christmas market, killing 12 people

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A truck rammed into a crowded Christmas market in central Berlin on Monday evening, killing 12 people and injuring nearly 50 as it smashed through tables and wooden stands. Police said a suspect believed to be the driver was arrested nearby and a passenger died as paramedics were treating him.

The popular Christmas market outside the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church was filled with a mix of tourists and locals when the large Scania truck hurtled into it. Germany's top security official said initial evidence pointed to an intentional act, and the White House condemned "what appears to have been a terrorist attack."

Police said early Tuesday that 48 people were in hospitals, some of them with serious injuries.

Mike Fox, visiting from Birmingham, England, told The Associated Press that the truck missed him by about three meters (yards). Fox said he helped people who appeared to have broken limbs, and that others were trapped under Christmas stands.

"You do what you can to help who you can, really. It happened so fast that there was nothing we could do to stop it — if we'd tried to stop it we would have been crushed," Fox said.

The truck, which was loaded with steel beams, came to a halt on a sidewalk on one side of the market. It had just rammed a large stand called "Fascination Christmas," tearing off one side and knocking down a large Christmas tree. The three-meter tree lay in the street, red and gold ornamental balls still attached to its limbs and a golden star at the top.

The crash came less than a month after the U.S. State Department called for caution in markets and

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other public places across Europe, saying extremist groups including Islamic State and al-Qaida were focusing "on the upcoming holiday season and associated events."

The Islamic State group and al-Qaida have both called on followers to use trucks in particular to attack crowds. On July 14, a truck plowed into Bastille Day revelers in the southern French city of Nice, killing 86 people. Islamic State claimed responsibility for that attack, which was carried out by a Tunisian living in France.

Following that attack there were calls to block off and better protect high-profile public gatherings. There were no barriers around the Christmas market on Monday.

After the attack, dozens of ambulances lined the streets waiting to evacuate people, and heavily armed police patrolled. Authorities on Twitter urged people to stay away from the area, saying they need to keep the streets clear for rescue vehicles.

Among the dead was a passenger in the truck, who succumbed as paramedics treated him, Berlin police spokesman Winfried Wenzel said. Police said later that the man was a Polish national, but didn't give further details of who he was or what happened to him.

A suspect believed to be the driver was picked up about 2 kilometers (1½ miles) away, near the Victory Column monument. He was being interrogated, Wenzel said. The truck was registered in Poland, and police said it was believed to be stolen from a building site there. They didn't give a specific location.

The Polish owner of the truck said he feared the vehicle, driven by his cousin, may have been hijacked. Ariel Zurawski said he last spoke with the driver around noon, and the driver told him he was in Berlin and scheduled to unload Tuesday morning. "They must have done something to my driver," he told TVN24.

Federal prosecutors, who handle terrorism cases, took over the investigation, according to German Justice Minister Heiko Maas. In Washington, White House National Security Council spokesman Ned Price said the United States was in contact with German officials and ready to help in the investigation and response.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump blamed Islamist terrorists, though it was unclear what that assessment was based on. He said Islamic extremists must be "eradicated from the face of the earth" and pledged to carry out that mission with all "freedom-loving partners."

But German officials said it was too early to call the crash intentional.

"I don't want to use the word 'attack' yet at the moment, although a lot speaks for it," Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere told ARD television. "There is a psychological effect in the whole country of the choice of words here, and we want to be very, very cautious and operate close to the actual investigation results, not with speculation."

Even so, some politicians were pointing fingers. Marcus Pretzell, a prominent member of the anti-migration Alternative for Germany party, lashed out at the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel, saying on Twitter: "When will the German state of law strike back? When will this cursed hypocrisy finally stop? These are Merkel's dead! #Nice #Berlin."

Germany has not experienced any mass-casualty attacks by Islamic extremists, but has been increasingly wary since two attacks by asylum-seekers in the summer that were claimed by the Islamic State group. Five people were wounded in an ax rampage on a train near Wuerzburg and 15 in a bombing outside a bar in Ansbach, both in the southern state of Bavaria. Both attackers were killed.

Those attacks, and two others unrelated to Islamic extremism in the same weeklong period, helped stoke tensions in Germany over the arrival last year of 890,000 migrants.

Associated Press writers David Rising, Geir Moulson and Frank Jordans in Berlin and Lori Hinnant in Paris contributed to this report.

This story was corrected to show the truck owner's name is Zurawski.

IMF board: Lagarde will remain as chief despite conviction

By PAUL WISEMAN and JOHN LEICESTER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Christine Lagarde will remain head of the International Monetary Fund despite her conviction Monday of negligence in a case dating to her tenure as France's finance minister.

The IMF's executive board quickly met after the court's decision and expressed "full confidence" in Lagarde's ability to carry out her duties at the head of the Washington-based international lending agency. In a statement, the board cited her "outstanding leadership" and the respect and trust she has worldwide.

After a weeklong trial, France's Court of Justice of the Republic found Lagarde guilty of one count of negligence but spared her jail time and a criminal record.

The 60-year-old IMF leader had potentially faced a year of imprisonment and a fine for not seeking to block a fraudulent 2008 arbitration award to a politically connected tycoon when she was finance minister.

Lagarde thanked the board for the vote of confidence "in my ability to do my job." She said she would not appeal the French court's decision.

"I am not satisfied with it, but there's a point in time when one must stop, turn the page and move on," she said.

Lagarde, a lawyer, became France's first female finance minister in 2007, overseeing the country's response to the financial crisis that rocked the global economy from 2008. She is also the first woman to head the IMF.

The troubling verdict comes as the IMF is weighing its role in multiple global crises, including a bailout for Greece.

"She is a strong leader," U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew said in a statement after the board's decision. "And we have every confidence in her ability to guide the fund at a critical time for the global economy."

The Court of Justice of the Republic is a special tribunal to hear cases of alleged criminality by ministers in office and is made up of three judges and 12 parliamentarians. It ruled that Lagarde's negligence in her management of a long-running arbitration case involving tycoon Bernard Tapie helped open the door for the fraudulent misappropriation of public funds. Lagarde herself was not accused of fraud.

The case revolves around a 403 million-euro (\$425 million) arbitration award given to Tapie in 2008 over the botched sale of sportswear giant Adidas in the 1990s. Civil courts have since quashed the unusually generous award, declared the arbitration process and deal fraudulent and ordered Tapie to refund the money.

The special court's presiding judge, in reading the verdict, said Lagarde should have asked her aides and others for more information about the "shocking arbitration award," which included a tax-free payment of 45 million euros in damages to Tapie, which the court described as fraudulent.

Had Lagarde contested the award, an appeal against it might have succeeded and would have strengthened the negotiating position of those who were fighting Tapie's demands for compensation over the sale of his majority stake in Adidas, the court ruled.

In deciding not to sentence Lagarde, the court noted that the award to Tapie has since been annulled, sparing damage to the public purse. It also noted that Lagarde was busy at the time with the global economic crisis.

Lagarde's "personality and national and international reputation" also counted in her favor in the decision not to punish her, the court ruled.

Lagarde, who was not present for the verdict, maintained her innocence through the trial. The prosecutor had asked for an acquittal in the case, which began in 2011.

The special court acquitted Lagarde of negligence in her original decision to put the Tapie case to arbitration. But it found her guilty in a subsequent decision not to contest the amount of the arbitration award.

The legal battle between Tapie and Credit Lyonnais over the public bank's sale of his Adidas stake was still unresolved when Lagarde took over at the Finance Ministry in 2007.

Lagarde ordered that the dispute be settled through a private arbitration panel, instead of regular courts — against the advice of her own services. The massive award raised questions about whether Tapie ben-

edited from his political connections, including with then-President Nicolas Sarkozy, Lagarde's boss when she was his finance minister.

Soon after the award, investigators suspected the whole process was rigged in favor of the magnate.

In 2013, Tapie, his lawyer, one of the arbitrators and Lagarde's chief of staff at the ministry, Stephane Richard, now the CEO of the telecom company Orange, were charged with gang-related fraud. Lagarde's Paris home was searched by police. However, that case is separate from Lagarde's legal woes.

Tapie was handed another charge of misappropriation of funds. But in 2015, a court quashed the arbitration deal and ordered Tapie to repay the money. Last June, the top French court ruled that the arbitration was fraudulent.

Associated Press writer Paul Wiseman reported this story in Washington and AP writer John Leicester reported from Paris. AP writers Elaine Ganley in Paris and Marcy Gordon in Washington contributed to this report.

Does a doctor's gender affect your chance of survival?

By LINDSEY TANNER, AP Medical Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — What if your doctor's gender could influence your chance of surviving a visit to the hospital?

A big study of older patients hospitalized for common illnesses raises that provocative possibility — and also lots of questions. Patients who got most of their care from women doctors were more likely to leave the hospital alive than those treated by men.

The differences were small — about 11 percent of patients treated mostly by women died within 30 days of entering the hospital, versus 11.5 percent of those treated by men. But the all-male research team estimated that there would be about 32,000 fewer deaths each year in the U.S. if male physicians performed at the same level as their female peers.

The study didn't probe why there might be these differences in survival. And Dr. Ashish Jha, the lead author, said the study doesn't mean patients should avoid him and all other male physicians.

But he said male doctors could take a cue from women doctors' tendencies that might contribute to better care. According to other research, women doctors are more likely than men to follow treatment guidelines, provide preventive care more often and communicate more with patients.

Jha said that it was important to better understand the reasons behind the differences, and to share that information with all physicians to improve care.

Jha, an internist and Harvard Medical School professor, said he has not spoken to his own patients about the study — yet.

"As a male physician, I have a stake in this," Jha said.

The study was published Monday in JAMA Internal Medicine.

The researchers looked at data involving more than 1.5 million hospitalizations for Medicare patients aged 65 and older between January 2011 and December 2014. Patients' illnesses included pneumonia, heart failure, intestinal bleeding, urinary infections and lung disease.

All were treated by general internists in the hospital. The researchers compared results in patients who got most or all of their care from women internists with those who got most or all of their care from men.

Most patients survived and were sent home within a month of treatment. But in addition to better survival chances, those treated by women doctors were slightly less likely to be re-admitted to the hospital within that first month.

On average, women doctors were in charge of fewer patients and some of their patients weren't as sick as those of male doctors, but the researchers considered those factors and still found a link between doctors' gender and patients' survival differences.

Dr. Lisa Schwartz of the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy & Clinical Practice said the study doesn't prove whether doctors' sex accounted for the results. "To make a stronger case, you'd need informa-

tion on doctors' practices in the study," she said. For example, did women physicians give patients with pneumonia antibiotics sooner than men physicians — treatment that could potentially improve survival chances, she said.

For example, did women doctors give patients with pneumonia antibiotics sooner — treatment that could potentially improve survival chances, she said.

Dartmouth policy analyst Dr. H. Gilbert Welch called the results "intriguing" but preliminary and "not something for patients to act on."

Follow AP Medical Writer Lindsey Tanner at <http://www.twitter.com/LindseyTanner>. Her work can be found at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/lindsey-tanner>

Date set for session to undo North Carolina 'bathroom bill'

By JONATHAN DREW, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina leaders struck a deal Monday to kill the state law widely derided as the "bathroom bill," after it tarnished the state's reputation, cost it scores of jobs and contributed to the Republican governor's narrow loss.

Outgoing Gov. Pat McCrory announced he would call legislators back to the Capitol on Wednesday to repeal the law known as HB2, which excludes sexual orientation and gender identity from antidiscrimination protections. The law also requires transgender people to use restrooms corresponding with the sex on their birth certificate in many public buildings.

Undoing the law would be a step toward mending political divisions that remain raw well after Election Day. Just last week, lawmakers called a special session to strip Democratic Gov.-elect Cooper of some authority before he takes office next month.

The state's Republican leaders confirmed they're open to repealing HB2, but in a sign of lingering acrimony, they accused Cooper of taking too much credit for winning their cooperation.

The passage of HB2 in March thrust North Carolina into a national debate on transgender rights and harmed the state economically. The state missed out on new jobs as companies declined to expand in the state, while cancellations of concerts and conventions exacted a toll. The NBA moved its All-Star game to New Orleans, and in a huge symbolic blow to the college basketball-crazy state, the NCAA and ACC relocated events.

Monday's surprising events began in the morning when the Charlotte City Council voted to undo a local nondiscrimination law enacted in early 2016. That ordinance, Republicans legislators say, challenged social norms and spurred them to pass HB2.

"Senate Leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore assured me that as a result of Charlotte's vote, a special session will be called ... to repeal HB2 in full," Cooper said in a statement Monday morning. He initially said the session would be Tuesday.

McCrory said Democrats used the issue for political gain.

"This sudden reversal with little notice after the gubernatorial election sadly proves this entire issue, originated by the political left, was all about politics and winning the governor's race at the expense of Charlotte and the entire state of North Carolina," said McCrory, a former Charlotte mayor.

Berger and Moore issued a joint statement saying they would take up the repeal if McCrory calls them into session. They said the debate over transgender bathroom access started with Charlotte and was pushed by Cooper as "a political stunt to drive out-of-state money into the governor's race."

Republicans have defended the bathroom provisions as providing privacy and safety by keeping men out of women's restrooms. Opponents call it discriminatory.

The law was also seen as a referendum on McCrory, who became its national face. He lost by about 10,000 votes while fellow Republicans U.S. Sen. Richard Burr and President-elect Donald Trump comfortably won the state. McCrory was the first sitting North Carolina governor elected to a four-year term to lose re-election.

Charlotte City Council member Julie Eiselt said she spoke to Cooper late Sunday night about the city repealing the ordinance to pave the way for getting rid of HB2.

"We needed to know that the governor-elect had confidence that there would be a special session arranged to take a vote on this," Eiselt said.

The council's move is contingent on North Carolina fully repealing HB2 by Dec. 31.

Republicans have said the Charlotte ordinance — which ensured transgender people the right to use restrooms corresponding to their gender identity — had to go first before they would consider getting rid of HB2.

A repeal of the state law could also end protracted legal challenges by the federal Justice Department and transgender residents. Much of that litigation has been delayed while the U.S. Supreme Court hears a separate Virginia case on transgender restroom access.

LGBT advocates were cautiously optimistic that the General Assembly would follow through with any repeal, but they also said antidiscrimination protection is an issue more important than politics.

"LGBT rights aren't a bargaining chip. Charlotte shouldn't have had to repeal its ordinance in exchange for HB2 to be repealed," Simone Bell, the Southern Regional Director for Lambda Legal, said in a statement. "LGBT people in North Carolina still need protection from discrimination."

Associated Press writer Tom Foreman Jr. in Charlotte contributed to this report.

Follow Drew at www.twitter.com/jonldrew

Swiss police: 3 injured in gunman's attack at Zurich mosque

By **FRANZISKA SCHEVEN**, Associated Press

ZURICH (AP) — A gunman dressed in black stormed into the prayer hall of a mosque frequented by Somali immigrants and opened fire, wounding three people before fleeing, a Zurich police spokesman said Monday.

Police, who rushed to the scene in a central neighborhood known for trendy cafes and the city's red-light district, were also investigating a possible connection to the discovery of a corpse at nearby Gessner bridge over the Sihl River, police spokesman Marco Bisa said.

Authorities weren't considering the attack as terrorism, he said. Police also said it was too early to determine whether there might be any link to an incident in Berlin also on Monday, where a truck rammed into a Christmas market, killing at least nine people.

"The unknown person fired several shots and fled from the building," Bisa told reporters near the mosque, which was cordoned off by police. "The shooting took place inside a prayer room with several people in it. Two victims were severely injured."

Bisa said the injured were hospitalized and were aged 30, 35 and 56 years old, but did not specify their nationalities. He said witnesses described the attacker as clad head to foot in black, and was believed to be aged about 30 years old.

At the scene, Abukav Abshirow, a 30-year-old Somali man who works at a Zurich car dealership, said his friend was among the injured. He recalled how they had been celebrating a religious occasion at the center the night before.

"I am under shock," he said. "We've had great times here. The atmosphere was always friendly and happy at the center ... I am very, very sad this happened. We never had problems here before. We spend the weekend here with our children in peace."

"I am waiting to find out what happened, and who is responsible," he said.

Attacks by gunmen are rare in Switzerland. The country was shaken in 2013 by at least two multiple-fatality shootings.

The country has a long-standing tradition for men to keep their military rifles after completing compulsory military service — which partly explains a high rate of gun ownership in the country of about 8.2 million people.

Jamey Keaten contributed from Geneva.

Brain changes seen in pregnancy, may help preparing for baby

By MALCOLM RITTER, AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Pregnancy affects not only a woman's body: It changes parts of her brain too, a new study says.

When researchers compared brain scans of women before and after pregnancy, they spotted some differences in 11 locations. They also found hints that the alterations help women prepare for motherhood.

For example, they might help a mother understand the needs of her infant, Elseline Hoekzema, a study author at Leiden University in the Netherlands, explained via email.

The women were also given memory tests, and they showed no signs of decline.

Hoekzema, a neuroscientist, began working on the study while at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain. She and colleagues present the results in a paper released Monday by the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

The study includes data on 25 Spanish women scanned before and after their first pregnancies, along with 20 women who didn't get pregnant during the study. The brain changes in the pregnancy group emerged from comparisons of those two groups.

The results were consistent: A computer program could tell which women had gotten pregnant just by looking at results of the MRI scans.

And the changes, first documented an average of 10 weeks after giving birth, were mostly still present two years after childbirth. That's based on follow-up with 11 study participants.

Further work showed they're a motherhood thing: No brain changes were seen in first-time fathers.

Based on prior research findings, the researchers think the brain changes happened during pregnancy rather than after childbirth.

What's going on? Hoekzema and colleagues think the differences result from sex hormones that flood the brain of a pregnant woman. In the 11 places, the MRI data indicate reductions in volume of the brain's gray matter, but it's not clear what that means. For example, it could reflect loss of brain cells or a pruning of the places where brain cells communicate, called synapses.

Losing some synapses is not necessarily a bad thing. It happens during a hormonal surge in adolescence, producing more specialized and efficient brain circuits. The researchers suspect that could be happening in the pregnant women.

Some study results hint that such upgrades may prepare a woman for motherhood. One analysis linked brain changes to how strongly a woman felt emotionally attached to her infant. And when women viewed pictures of their babies, several brain regions that reacted the most were ones that showed pregnancy-related change.

In addition, the affected brain areas overlapped with circuitry that's involved in figuring out what another person is thinking and feeling. That's a handy ability for a mother tending to an infant.

The idea of synapses being pruned in pregnancy makes a lot of sense, commented Bruce McEwen of Rockefeller University in New York, who studies hormonal effects on the brain but didn't participate in what he called a terrific study.

"The brain is being shaped all the time," he said, and "sex hormones are part of the whole orchestra of processes that change the brain structurally."

Follow Malcolm Ritter at <http://twitter.com/malcolmritter> His recent work can be found at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/malcolm-ritter>

Fight for a Mosul district shows Iraqis' slow, painful slog

By SUSANNAH GEORGE, Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — The Iraqi troops holding the front in eastern Mosul are perched inside bedrooms and kitchens of homes, on rooftops and in hallways. They haven't pushed forward in days. The water bottles and Styrofoam food containers they've used up pile around them, spilling into the houses' gardens.

Advancing into Mosul has become a painful slog for Iraqi forces. Islamic State group militants have fortified each neighborhood, unlike past battles where they concentrated their defenses in one part of the city. As a result, every advance inflicts relatively high casualties.

Weeks of urban combat have already left some of Iraq's most capable soldiers battered, and only about a quarter of the city has come under their control.

It took up to 10 days for Iraqi troops to move a few hundred meters (yards) and retake the neighborhood of al-Barid, a district of grand, upscale homes where fruit trees grow in the gardens.

There were only a few IS fighters in the neighborhood, but they were able to hold back the much larger Iraqi force because they were faster and more nimble than the slow-moving convoys of hundreds of troops, said Hatem al-Kurdi, one of the residents who remained in the district throughout the fight.

The militants "cut holes in the walls between the homes so they could always be moving from one position to another," al-Kurdi said.

For every few hundred meters of their territory, the IS militants allocate as few as four to five fighters, along with a handful of car bombs, to fight to the death, said Iraqi special forces Maj. Firas Mehdi. It is the same formula of counterattacks and defenses he has seen in every neighborhood he enters, he said.

If Iraq's military continues at the current pace, they may retake Mosul in the coming months, but at significant costs. Current rates of attrition risk further weakening the military, a legacy that could haunt Iraq's security forces for years.

A medic who operates in eastern Mosul said he sees an average of 18 military casualties a day, and his figures would not cover the other main front southeast of Mosul. A hospital official in the nearby city of Irbil corroborated the figure. They spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to disclose military casualty figures to the press.

In al-Barid, the front line now runs in part along a creek that snakes through eastern Mosul. Medhi's troops have hunkered down in defensive positions in the houses, much like those of IS just across the creek — but without the benefit of more than a year of preparation.

His special forces troops climbed through a garden and into a broken window to reach their sniper post on a rooftop overlooking IS fighters. At another position, in a house where two families are sheltering, men filed past dinner cooking on a stove.

The only rounds of fire that broke the silence on a Sunday afternoon visit were unleashed after the men heard the buzz of an IS drone overhead. Over the past few weeks commercial drones carrying small explosives have begun flying over Iraqi positions in Mosul, Mehdi said. The bombs they drop have only caused a few injuries.

"They haven't killed anyone, but they've flattened the tires of our Humvees," he said.

After shooting down one drone Sunday, a soldier yelled out that he could see another.

"That's just an F-16," Mehdi called back, laughing.

On one street corner in al-Barid, the legs of an IS fighter stuck out of an open sewer pipe. His body had been left there for days after the battle. Small children watched as Iraqi soldiers posed for photos next to the corpse.

"It's better this way," Iraqi special forces soldier Omar Zeidan said of the decision not to bury the dead. "This is a lesson for them, it will teach them not to support Daesh."

Iraqi commanders say they've seen months of preparation by IS throughout Mosul's neighborhoods as troops advance from the city's fringes to denser neighborhoods like al-Barid.

"This kind of a fight takes time," said Iraqi special forces Brig. Gen. Yehya al-Azawi. "After each step we need to repair our equipment and reorganize our forces." Supply lines are lengthening and it takes longer to evacuate casualties.

Abbas Yasin, who lived in a tall building in the nearby district of Bab Shams, had a bird's eye view of IS preparations in past months.

He said in late 2015, IS fighters moved onto his roof as a sniper's post as they did in other tall buildings around the city. They forced families to move into buildings along main roads to serve as buffers against advancing forces.

Yasin had planned to stick it out at his home with his family through the Mosul fight. But as it dragged on, food began to run out, water was shut off and he and his family had to flee. One day when the IS fighters on the roof changed positions, he waited until nightfall and bolted across the street to a government-held area.

IS "wanted the army to come deep into the city, so the battle would be waged in the streets, not the villages," the 54-year-old said. "They knew that Mosul was always going to be their last battle."

Beijing denies US claim that China is synthetic drug king

By ERIKA KINETZ and GILLIAN WONG, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — U.S. assertions that China is the top source of the synthetic opioids that have killed thousands of drug users in the U.S. and Canada are unsubstantiated, Chinese officials told the Associated Press.

Both the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy point to China as North America's main source of fentanyl, related drugs and the chemicals used to make them.

Such statements "lack the support of sufficient numbers of actual, confirmed cases," China's National Narcotics Control Commission told DEA's Beijing field office in a fax dated Friday.

In its letter to the DEA, which the commission also sent to AP, Chinese officials urged the U.S. to provide more evidence about China's role as a source country.

It's a point the state-run China Daily newspaper drove home publicly in an article this month stating that made-in-China carfentanil was not the cause of overdose deaths in the U.S.

DEA officials said their casework and investigations consistently lead back to China. DEA data also shows that when China regulates synthetic drugs, U.S. seizures plunge.

"China is not the only source of the problem, but they are the dominant source for fentanyls along with precursor chemicals and pill presses that are being exported from China to the U.S., Canada and Mexico," said Russell Baer, a DEA special agent in Washington.

Beijing is concerned enough about international perceptions of China's role in the opioid trade that after AP published investigations highlighting the easy availability of fentanyls online from Chinese suppliers, the narcotics commission made a rare invitation to a team of AP journalists to discuss the issue at the powerful Ministry of Public Security, a leafy complex just off Tiananmen Square at the historic and political heart of Beijing. They also provided responses, in writing, to AP's questions.

U.S.-China cooperation is essential for mounting an effective global response to an epidemic of opioid abuse that has killed more than 300,000 Americans since 2000. The presence of fentanyl, a prescription painkiller up to 50 times stronger than heroin, and related compounds in the U.S. drug supply began to rise in 2013, after dealers learned they could multiply profits by cutting the potent chemicals into heroin, cocaine and counterfeit prescription pills.

Even as the U.S. Congress considers legislation that would punish opioid source countries, no government agency has produced comprehensive data on seizures of fentanyl-related substances by country of origin.

The national database on drug seizures overseen by DEA does not require reporting by source country and may not accurately reflect seizures of all fentanyl-related compounds. Baer said it didn't even have a "fentanyl" category until around two years ago.

It also takes time for forensic chemists to identify drugs seized from the field, which means fentanyl-related samples may get initially logged incorrectly as other drugs. "In those cases, the field agent may not, and I think it's fair to say usually does not, revise or amend the initial seizure," Baer said. He added

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that DEA is trying to improve its data-collection methods.

The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy declined to comment or to provide data that would back up the U.S. assertions.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said it had data on fentanyl seizures by country of origin only for 2015: Nearly two-thirds of the 61 kilograms (134 pounds) of fentanyl seized last year came from Mexico. The rest, 35 percent, came from China.

DEA officials say Mexican cartels are key bulk suppliers of fentanyl to the U.S., but portray Mexico primarily as a transshipment point. U.S. authorities have tracked shipments of fentanyl precursors from China to Mexico and the U.S., but many appear legitimate and are diverted to the black market upon arrival, Baer said.

Mexican officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to be quoted, said fentanyl and its precursors were coming from China. Only two labs trying to produce fentanyl from scratch have been located in Mexico in recent years, with others apparently taking simpler steps to turn precursors into fentanyl, the officials said.

Mexican authorities did not immediately respond to requests for data on fentanyl and fentanyl precursor seizures by country of origin.

Still, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence indicating that China plays an important role in the fentanyl trade and, despite disagreements about data, Chinese authorities have been proactive in trying to stop their manufacture and export.

It is easy to find Chinese companies online offering to export synthetic opioids, the AP found in investigations published in October and November. In response to that reporting, China's narcotics commission said it was scrutinizing 12 opioid vendors the AP identified, along with other companies that advertise fentanyl analogs. They said they also found three American companies advertising fentanyls, and noted that some vendors use servers based outside of China. China's National Narcotics Laboratory has analyzed 25 fentanyl-related samples since 2012, the vast majority of which were being smuggled by mail to the U.S. or Europe, the commission said.

In some cases, China has enacted faster, more comprehensive changes to its drug control laws than much of the rest of the world.

The commission said China has taken a precedent-setting approach to synthetic drug regulation, controlling dozens of substances that aren't abused domestically. At the same time, Beijing has struggled to get the international community to reciprocate. China has twice asked the United Nations to place the drug ketamine under international control. Ketamine, also known as Special K, is widely abused within China but prized as an essential anesthetic across the developing world by the World Health Organization and others.

"China looks forward to further practical action taken by the U.S. to jointly promote the international control of ketamine," the narcotics commission said in written remarks to AP.

Beijing already regulates fentanyl and 18 related compounds and is considering designating four more: carfentanil, furanyl fentanyl, acryl fentanyl and valeryl fentanyl, the narcotics commission told AP. A formal review began in October, and the process can take up to nine months. In the meantime, the commission said it had warned Chinese vendors and websites that carfentanil, a weapons-grade substance so lethal it has been called a terrorism threat, and other analogs can harm human health and should not be sold.

That message sent a ripple of anxiety across the internet and caused some to start pushing alternative opioids, like U-47700, the AP found in conversations with a dozen companies advertising drugs online. "Friend, fent is illegal in China, it is dangerous for us," wrote one vendor.

Baer said DEA is actively investigating U.S.-based vendors who use dark net markets to sell fentanyl and related compounds, as well as Chinese companies that use U.S. servers to sell carfentanil.

But the extent to which those U.S. companies are merely retailing made-in-China drugs is not clear. Baer said the DEA doesn't believe fentanyl is mass-produced in the U.S., though authorities have uncovered mom-and-pop pill press operations.

One of them was run by a 28-year-old in Utah, who was busted late last month with a pill press, piles of powder and cash, and nearly 100,000 pills laced with suspected fentanyl in his Cottonwood Heights

home. According to the criminal complaint, the young man hired people to accept packages shipped to their homes, which they'd hand over unopened.

The packages came from China.

AP reporters Mark Stevenson in Mexico City, Desmond Butler in Washington and researcher Fu Ting in Shanghai contributed to this report.

Trump picks Florida Panthers owner as Army secretary

By **TIM REYNOLDS, AP Sports Writer**

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Panthers owner Vincent Viola has been nominated by President-elect Donald Trump to serve as Army secretary.

Viola was introduced as the nominee Monday. Trump says Viola, a 1977 West Point graduate, is "living proof of the American dream."

Viola bought the Panthers in 2013 for about \$250 million.

If Viola is approved for the civilian post, ownership of the NHL club would remain in his family. Viola would step down from his roles as chairman and governor of the team, and Doug Cifu would assume those duties. Cifu is currently the vice chairman and alternate governor.

Will Trump live up to his infrastructure promises?

By **JOAN LOWY, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as they maneuver for a share of the \$1 trillion in spending Donald Trump promised to rebuild America's roads, bridges and airports, lobbyists for transportation and utility industries are beginning to wonder whether Trump really meant what he said.

From the day he formally entered the presidential race to the moment he declared victory, Trump pledged to rebuild the nation's aging and inadequate infrastructure. He cited decaying bridges, potholed roads and airports like New York's LaGuardia that he said reminded him of the "Third World."

Trump or his campaign also mentioned schools, hospitals, pipelines, water treatment plants and the electrical grid as part of a job-creation strategy that would make the U.S. "second to none." It was a rare area in which House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats hoped for common ground with the president-elect. The possibility of a major infrastructure spending plan is one of several factors that have fueled the recent run-up in stock prices.

But lately lobbyists have begun to fear that there won't be an infrastructure proposal at all, or at least not the grand plan they'd been led to expect.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell tried to tamp down expectations last week, telling reporters he wants to avoid "a \$1 trillion stimulus." And Reince Priebus, who will be Trump's chief of staff, said in a radio interview that the new administration will focus in its first nine months with other issues like health care and rewriting tax laws. He sidestepped questions about the infrastructure plan.

In a post-election interview with The New York Times, Trump himself seemed to back away, saying infrastructure won't be a "core" part of the first few years of his administration. But he said there will still be "a very large-scale infrastructure bill."

He acknowledged that he didn't realize during the campaign that New Deal-style proposals to put people to work building infrastructure might conflict with his party's small-government philosophy.

"That's not a very Republican thing — I didn't even know that, frankly," he said.

Since the election, Trump has backed away — or at least suggested flexibility — on a range of issues that energized his supporters during the campaign, including his promises to prosecute Hillary Clinton, pull out of the Paris climate change accord and reinstitute waterboarding for detainees.

Trump transition officials didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The mixed signals on infrastructure have lobbyists and lawmakers puzzled.

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"We're worried," said Brian Turmail, a spokesman for the Associated General Contractors of America, which represents more than 26,000 construction companies and 10,500 service providers and suppliers.

"Are we hearing signs that people just don't know what the plan is? Or signs that people don't want any kind of plan?" he said. "We don't know the answer."

Lobbyists have responded by flooding the Trump transition team with briefing memos, lining up meetings and privately pitching their proposals to what they hope will be a more receptive Congress.

Trade associations are urging their local members to seek out their senators and House members while they're home for the holidays. The contractors' association held a news conference in front of a bridge construction project in Little Rock, Arkansas. The American Road and Transportation Builders Association has given members form letters to send their lawmakers, while quietly floating a plan for new transportation fees to provide reliable sources of additional income for the federal Highway Trust Fund.

Leaders of the U.S. Conference of Mayors emphasized their support for an infrastructure program in a recent meeting with Trump and urged him to protect the municipal bond tax exemption, one of the primary ways localities raise money for projects.

The Airports Council International-North America is lobbying to raise the limit on fees airports charge airline passengers. The money goes to renovate or expand terminals and increase the number of gates.

Trump's campaign pitch for infrastructure improvements included few details. A paper circulated after the election recommends using \$167 billion in federal tax credits to generate \$1 trillion in private-sector infrastructure investment over a decade. To offset the cost of the credits, U.S. corporations would be encouraged to bring home profits that they have parked overseas to avoid taxes, in exchange for a lower tax rate. But private investors are typically interested only in projects that create revenue, such as tolls, so that they can recoup their investments.

What states and communities need most is more direct spending, rather than tax credits, to help pay for upkeep and replacement of existing roads, bridges and transit systems, said Bud Wright, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. "Those aren't necessarily projects that lend themselves to generating revenue," he said.

It's also possible tax credits would provide a windfall to investors in existing projects while failing to generate new ones.

"Everybody is putting together their Christmas lists for what they want to see in an infrastructure bill," said Kevin Gluba, executive director of the Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure. "The biggest question: Who is going to pay for it? Many of the ideas floating around are far too pricey to make into law."

AP White House Correspondent Julie Pace 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>

Cities, counties plan immigrant legal aid after Trump's win

By SOPHIA TAREEN and AMY TAXIN, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Major U.S. cities and counties are beefing up legal services for immigrants to help them fight deportation and avoid fraudulent lawyers in the wake of Donald Trump's election and his hard-line immigration enforcement promises.

Tapping local government funds to represent immigrants in federal proceedings provides an early example of the type of pushback the Republican incoming president will receive in Democratic strongholds. Advocates call it a matter of justice and smart economics, but some question whether it's a fair use of taxpayer money.

Chicago has approved a \$1.3 million legal fund. Los Angeles elected officials said Monday they are working with private foundations to set up a \$10 million fund, while some California state lawmakers have proposed spending tens of millions of dollars to provide lawyers to immigrants facing deportation. New

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York is mulling a public-private legal fund, building on New York City's public defender program that's considered a national model.

"We need to be able to stand by people who are fearful," Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, a former White House chief of staff, said after the measure passed the City Council last week.

Trump's pledges to build a border wall and deport the estimated 11 million people living in the country without legal permission have triggered uncertainty in immigrant circles. He has since scaled back the deportee number, but not detailed his platform.

Since his win, a lack of legal representation for immigrants has become a growing concern. It was the top issue raised by a Chicago task force of leaders, including Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin, convened after the election. Los Angeles County supervisor Hilda Solis said she's especially worried about the fate of unaccompanied minors and young immigrants who filed personal information with the federal government to obtain work permits under the Obama administration.

In Los Angeles, officials want the fund set up before Trump becomes president in January. About half the money will come from the city and county and half from private donations.

"We don't know how far the new administration will go when it comes to our nation's immigration policy, but we've all heard the rhetoric, the dangerous rhetoric of the election," said Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. "And we are ready to support people who can't afford or who don't realize they might need a lawyer."

Immigrants aren't guaranteed a lawyer in immigration court and only about 37 percent of those in deportation proceedings have legal representation, according to a September American Immigration Council report.

Democratic state lawmakers in California have proposed legislation that could cost up to \$80 million for immigration attorneys and other legal training. Santa Clara County is looking into the idea and San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee added \$1.5 million to a fund for immigrant legal services.

In Chicago — where an estimated 150,000 people do not have permanent legal status — the money will be divided among two nonprofits. One will focus on poor immigrants facing deportation. The other will employ 200 "community navigators" who will network through churches, schools and community events to find immigrants who are in the country illegally and help them figure out if they have avenues to stay.

"People are nervous," said Esperanza Villalobos, who already does the job in Mexican-heavy Chicago neighborhoods. She reports a surge in immigrants seeking her out since the election.

In Chicago, which has some of the most immigrant-friendly laws in the nation, the debate over the fund had tense moments, highlighting how contentious the issue is outside Democratic strongholds. Chicago set aside money only for one year and is banking on private donations to keep it going.

Three aldermen representing neighborhoods with strong Trump support voted against it, including Nicholas Sposato. He dismissed it as "the legal defense fund for the illegals" and said Chicago should consider the money for other issues. The cash-strapped city diverted the funds from a little-used homeowner rebate program.

"I'm not a hater," Sposato said during the vote at full the council meeting. "Any given day, 1,000 homeless veterans out there. What are we doing for them?"

Another reason cited by local governments for creating the funds is the economy, because immigrants, regardless of legal status, work and pay taxes. In addition, children of immigrants who are deported may end up needing publicly-funded services such as foster care and health care, said Avidah Moussavian, a policy attorney with the National Immigration Law Center in Washington.

"There's the due process issue, but there's actually quantifiable economic impact," she said.

In 2013, New York City tested a program to infuse public defender offices with money for attorneys dedicated to representing detained immigrants. The program has grown from \$500,000 in its initial year to roughly \$6 million. Attorneys have represented more than 1,500 immigrants from 2013 through late last year, the most recent statistics available. About 70 percent of attorneys won their cases, according to the nonprofit Vera Institute of Justice.

In Chicago, another goal is to help immigrants avoid fraudulent services, something 24-year-old Jose

Lopez knows firsthand.

The college student, brought to the country illegally as a child, qualified for a work permit under the Obama administration. Twice he sought out attorneys who advertised on Spanish-language radio stations.

However, the paperwork they filed was unnecessary, his case stalled and he lost nearly \$2,000. He's since obtained the permit and has a graphic design job, but hopes others can avoid his mistakes.

"I had to stall a career. I had to stall school," he said. "I had to stall life."

Taxin reported from Santa Ana, California. Associated Press writer Christopher Weber contributed to this report from Los Angeles.

Follow Sophia Tareen on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/sophiatareen> and Amy Taxin at <https://twitter.com/ataxin>.

Trump Cabinet excites his voters: 'We have to trust him'

By CARLA K. JOHNSON, Associated Press

As each Cabinet announcement draws fresh criticism of the wealth, connections or opinions of Donald Trump's latest appointees, many Americans who voted for him say the president-elect is doing what he promised to do: draining the swamp.

And they're excited.

To them, the idea of a defense secretary nicknamed "Mad Dog" is bliss. They rejoice in an energy secretary who once said he would eliminate the Department of Energy. And while some Trump supporters balk at ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson's close ties with Russia's Vladimir Putin, they say they will trust Trump's judgment about his secretary of state nominee.

These voters, who often echo Trump's own campaign statements, say the affluence of his Cabinet picks is an advantage, not a liability.

"The guys he's putting in there, they don't need to do this. They're independently wealthy," said Trump voter Roger Mansfield, 67, a small business owner in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. "They don't need any more money. The motivation is to make pragmatic, rational business decisions. What could be wrong about that?"

The Associated Press interviewed Trump voters about his Cabinet picks and other postelection revelations, such as a CIA assessment that Russia interfered in the November election on Trump's behalf. Top Republicans in Congress have endorsed investigations into the Russian meddling, but the idea drew jeers from Shay Chamberlain, 37, of Menomonie, Wisconsin.

"That's kind of ridiculous," Chamberlain said. "I tried to influence the elections, you know what I mean? I mean, we all did when we went on Facebook and put silly memes on there and tried to influence our friends to go one way or another."

Some Cabinet choices have been called into question for their lack of experience, their extraordinary wealth and their past relationships with the departments they are to lead. Much of the criticism has come from Democrats, but experts, past government officials and some Republicans have also raised doubts.

John Barnes, a 60-year-old Air Force retiree living in Albuquerque, said he liked that Trump was "hiring outsiders and not local yokel knuckleheads."

In Sandy Hook, Kentucky, Wesley Lewis applauded Trump's decision to nominate three retired generals for top jobs: James "Mad Dog" Mattis to head the Pentagon, John Kelly for the Department of Homeland Security and Michael Flynn as national security adviser.

But Lewis, 67, said he is skeptical about Tillerson, who has opposed sanctions levied on Moscow, and about Trump's hope of improving relations with Russia.

"I don't see that we need to have a buddy-buddy relationship with Russia or China or any of them. We need to remain strong, help where we can," Lewis said. "Being buddies with Russia, that's only going to cause us problems."

On jobs, some Trump voters are celebrating.

"I'm tickled pink, man," said Jimmy McDonald, an assistant bank vice president, from Tazewell County,

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Virginia. Some laid-off miners in Appalachia have been called back to work, some shortly before Trump was elected. One factor was a recent spike in the price of metallurgical coal used to make steel. McDonald credits Trump.

"More coal's being brought out right now since the last 60 days actually," said McDonald, 57. "Trump made that a major focus of his campaign in August, when he started talking about the coal miners, and the coal trains are running, man. And people are excited. It's just a different vibe in the air right now."

But Iraq War veteran and factory worker Rebecca Zbichorski, 28, of Milwaukee, said she's reevaluating Trump's rosy predictions.

"His promising to bring all those jobs back? I think he over spoke on that a little bit. I don't feel confident on that," Zbichorski said. A skit on "Saturday Night Live" mocking an unemployed coal miner eagerly expecting Trump to get him back to work shifted her views, she said.

"Some of those jobs are dying." She was swayed, too, by an Indiana union leader who criticized Trump for raising false hopes by inflating the number of jobs being saved at a Carrier Corp. factory in Indianapolis.

However, Jack Stauffenberg, a 65-year-old coal company superintendent from New Tripoli, Pennsylvania, said that Indiana union leader was off base, explaining that Trump "talks in round numbers."

"Look at the stock market," Stauffenberg said, referring to Wall Street's recent streak of records. "That expresses the optimism of this country right now."

Americans sense that the country is "being righted, and we're kind of getting a new start," he added.

Eileen Barlow, a 56-year-old small business owner in Naperville, Illinois, welcomes charter school advocate Betsy DeVos as education secretary. Barlow favors vouchers for private education.

"I don't like the indoctrination that goes on in the public schools. They teach the theory of evolution as truth," said Barlow, who has an infant grandson. "If people want to send their kids to a Christian school, they should get help with that."

If they had their wishes, some Trump voters would tone him down on Twitter.

Zbichorski thinks Trump will need "more tact and professionalism" when he takes office, and she worries he'll tweet an insult about a leader of another country and escalate international tensions. "Right now, he's just being who he is. No filter," she said.

Chamberlain still wants to see Trump's Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, investigated.

"He kind of almost promised the American people, 'If I'm elected, she'll pay. If I'm elected, I'll hold her accountable.' And then as soon as he won, it was kind of nicey-nice. 'You know I'm not really going to go after her,'" Chamberlain said.

Mansfield said he trusts Trump to act in the country's best interests.

"Do we have any choice? We have to trust him. He's going to be our president. Wishing him to fail would be like getting on an airliner and hoping the two pilots don't know what they're doing," he said. "My gut says he will do the right thing."

Associated Press writers Amy Forliti in Menomonie, Wisconsin, Michael Virtanen in Morgantown, West Virginia, Michael Rubinkam in northeastern Pennsylvania and Russell Contreras in Albuquerque, New Mexico, contributed to this report.

Election questions leave US distrustful, like other nations

By BRADLEY KLAPPER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans' enduring confidence that their elections are unimpeachably fair is teetering. Welcome to what much of the world calls reality, especially Russia's neighbors.

While the United States cites its popular votes and peaceful transitions of power as examples of its democratic vigor, elections results elsewhere can entail a hint or heavy dose of suspicion. Ballots are rigged regularly, level playing fields are rare and bigger powers often meddle in the sovereign political processes of smaller nations.

Russia, accused by the CIA of helping Donald Trump in last month's presidential election, is no stranger

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to accusations of interference with other countries' elections. Nor is the United States.

Whether the full extent of the accusations of Russian interference turns out to be true, they already are damaging the legitimacy of the U.S. democratic process. When many citizens distrust their government, the media and other institutions of American life, doubts about the freeness and fairness of the elections cause consternation.

The outgoing Obama administration is reviewing the evidence of Russian hacking of emails from the Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton's campaign chief John Podesta, and if such activity was designed to tilt the outcome toward Trump. Republican-led investigations are taking place in Congress.

Trump has denounced the claims as partisanship. "Can you imagine if the election results were the opposite and WE tried to play the Russia/CIA card. It would be called conspiracy theory!" he tweeted this past week.

The broader, systemic fear for the U.S. is that what was an anomaly in 2000 could start becoming the norm: elections that don't produce presidents recognized by one and all.

Sixteen years ago, it was the disputed recount and incredibly close contest in Florida between Republican George W. Bush, the eventual winner, and Democrat Al Gore. Now, it is the question of whether Trump, who like Bush didn't receive the majority of votes nationwide, would have prevailed in a race that didn't include daily email revelations from the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks.

Trump may have contributed to the distrust. Before the Nov. 8 vote, he repeatedly suggested the election was "rigged" against him. A Pew Research Center survey shortly before Election Day showed 56 percent of Trump supporters having little to no trust in the fairness of the process. Only 11 percent of Clinton backers felt that way.

While the numbers may appear an anomaly in America, elections are hardly beyond reproach in much of the world.

Most of the world's governments include some form of voting on national leaders. But most nations don't qualify as "free," according to the nongovernmental organization Freedom House.

The State Department also chronicles the shortcomings of countries in its annual reports, detailing which governments and leaders restrict freedom of expression, the press and open dissent before and during elections. Africa, Asia and the Middle East score particularly poorly, and the world's most populous nation, China, remains a one-party state. Yet even some of Europe's established democracies are appearing increasingly flawed.

Some fault may reside in foreign interference. In France, Germany and the Netherlands, officials are preoccupied with what they see as Russian moves to influence their elections through support for nationalist and populist parties, and efforts to delegitimize governments that haven't done Moscow's bidding.

German officials charge Russia with engineering hacks of Germany's parliament. Elsewhere, the perceived meddling has come in the form of false news stories designed to sway voter sentiments. It was only 12 years ago that Ukraine's eventual president became disfigured after he mysteriously ingested a lethal poison while campaigning against a pro-Moscow candidate.

Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe live with the memories of Soviet-manipulated votes ushering in communist dictatorships.

For them, cyberattacks may be only the newest weapon.

Russia denies that it interferes or plays favorites in foreign elections.

The United States has a dodgy record itself.

Its Cold War history includes cases when it ensured the victory of pro-capitalist and pro-democracy parties against communists, as in Italy after World War II. In other instances, Washington's response to unfavorable results was coup d'etat, as in Iran and Guatemala in the 1950s or Chile two decades later.

These days, the U.S. stresses level playing fields in foreign elections, a message that less-than-free governments often conflate with interference.

Washington says it remains strictly impartial as other nations make their democratic choices.

Yet top U.S. officials still play favorites, meeting opposition figures in some countries but not others. In rare cases they even take sides, as when President Barack Obama publicly urged Britain's voters not to

leave the European Union. He failed.

These efforts, however, differ from what Russia is accused of doing because they are out in the open. They do not involve claims of ballot tampering, illegal funding for parties or cyberhacking.

Man wins OK to wear goat horns in driver's license photo

By **MARINA VILLENEUVE, Associated Press**

AUGUSTA, Maine (AP) — An ordained Pagan priest finally has gotten the OK to sport goat horns in his Maine driver's license photo.

Maine resident Phelan Moonsong said that unless he's sleeping or bathing, he always wears his goat horns, which serve as his spiritual antennae and help him educate others about Paganism.

But Moonsong is questioning why he had to appeal his driver license's photo to the state after explaining his religious beliefs to Bureau of Motor Vehicle staff. Plus, he adds, the horns didn't obstruct his face.

The Maine Secretary of State's office said the state was not familiar with his choice of headdress and had asked Moonsong for more information to review the issue. A spokeswoman said the state allowed the goat horns because Moonsong cited their religious purposes and also because they didn't obstruct his face.

Maine motor vehicle staff can hold license photos for review if they have a concern about religious headdress.

Moonsong said after he applied for an updated driver's license in August and explained his religion to a motor vehicles employee, he was told to appeal his photo to the Secretary of State's office.

He said he provided more information to the Secretary of State's office. But when he contacted the Bureau of Motor Vehicles in late November, he said he was told his ID was rejected — which was news to him.

Moonsong then filled out an application for legal assistance from the American Civil Liberties Union, which recently told him it was unable to take his case.

"What I was requesting should have been accepted according to what was written in statute and in guidelines," he said.

It should be no different than a nun wearing a habit, or a Sikh wearing a Turban, Moonsong said.

But, he said, he was happy to receive his new driver's license last week.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 20, the 355th day of 2016. There are 11 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 20, 1946, the Frank Capra film "It's A Wonderful Life," starring James Stewart and Donna Reed, had a preview showing for charity at New York's Globe Theatre, a day before its official world premiere.

On this date:

In 1790, the first successful cotton mill in the United States began operating at Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase was completed as ownership of the territory was formally transferred from France to the United States.

In 1812, German authors Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published the first volume of the first edition of their collection of folk stories, "Children's and Household Tales."

In 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union as all 169 delegates to a special convention in Charleston voted in favor of separation.

In 1864, Confederate forces evacuated Savannah, Georgia, as Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman nearly completed his "March to the Sea."

In 1924, Adolf Hitler was released from prison after serving nine months for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch; during his time behind bars, he'd written his autobiographical screed, "Mein Kampf."

In 1945, the Office of Price Administration announced the end of tire rationing, effective Jan. 1, 1946.

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In 1963, the Berlin Wall was opened for the first time to West Berliners, who were allowed one-day visits to relatives in the Eastern sector for the holidays.

In 1976, Richard J. Daley, the mayor of Chicago since 1955, died in office at age 74.

In 1987, more than 4,300 people were killed when the Dona Paz, a Philippine passenger ship, collided with the tanker Vector off Mindoro island.

In 1989, the United States launched Operation Just Cause, sending troops into Panama to topple the government of Gen. Manuel Noriega.

In 1995, an American Airlines Boeing 757 en route to Cali, Colombia, slammed into a mountain, killing all but four of the 163 people aboard. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, NATO began its peacekeeping mission, taking over from the United Nations.

Ten years ago: Acknowledging deepening frustration over Iraq, President George W. Bush told a news conference he was considering an increase in American forces and warned that the next year would bring more painful U.S. losses. Recently sworn-in Defense Secretary Robert Gates made an unannounced visit to Iraq.

Five years ago: Lori Berenson, an American paroled after 15 years behind bars in Peru for aiding leftist guerrillas, arrived at Newark Liberty International Airport for her first visit home since her arrest in 1995. (After a 17-day visit, Berenson returned to Peru to serve out the rest of her parole; she was expelled from Peru on Dec. 2, 2015 and returned to the U.S.) LSU's Les Miles was selected The Associated Press college football coach of the year. Soccer player Abby Wambach was voted the AP Female Athlete of the Year.

One year ago: A strong showing by a pair of upstart parties in Spain's general election upended the country's traditional two-party system, with the ruling center-right Popular Party winning the most votes but falling far short of a parliamentary majority. Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach of the Philippines was crowned Miss Universe at the pageant in Las Vegas (in a bizarre finale, first-time host Steve Harvey mistakenly identified first-runner up Ariadna Gutierrez Arevalo of Colombia as the winner before correcting himself and apologizing for the error). Tony Award-winning actress Patricia Elliott, 77, died in New York.

Today's Birthdays: Actor John Hillerman is 84. Original Mouseketeer Tommy Cole (TV: "The Mickey Mouse Club") is 75. Rock musician-music producer Bobby Colomby is 72. Rock musician Peter Criss is 71. Psychic/illusionist Uri Geller is 70. Producer Dick Wolf ("Law & Order") is 70. Rock musician Alan Parsons is 68. Actress Jenny Agutter is 64. Actor Michael Badalucco is 62. Actress Blanche Baker is 60. Rock singer Billy Bragg is 59. Rock singer-musician Mike Watt (The Secondmen, Minutemen, FIREHOSE) is 59. Actor Joel Gretsch is 53. Country singer Kris Tyler is 52. Rock singer Chris Robinson is 50. Actress Nicole deBoer is 46. Movie director Todd Phillips is 46. Singer David Cook ("American Idol") is 34. Actor Jonah Hill is 33. Actor Bob Morley is 32. Singer JoJo is 26.

Thought for Today: "Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." — G.K. Chesterton, English poet-essayist (1874-1936).