

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**

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

Thursday's Information

No School

Senior Menu: Baked chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, winter-mix vegetables, banana pudding with bananas, whole wheat bread.

9:00 a.m.: St. John's Lutheran Quilting

MCKIVER COLLISION
Lifetime Warranty on all Collision Work!
13556 400th Ave., Groton SD 57445
Allen McKiver, Owner ~ 605/397-4404

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GDI Christmas Lighting Contest



A tie for first between Rick and Sherry Koehler at at 801 N. 3rd St (above) and Paul and Tina Kosel at 110 N Washington St (below)



Third place was awarded to Terry and Kristin Kenny at 610 N Main St.

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Fourth Place was awarded to Bob and Shirlee Meister at 610 N. 3rd St.



Fifth Place was awarded to Alan and Barbara Bell at 1104 N. 4th St.

GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce

Sign Up for Groton Chamber
Bucks at the Holiday Boxes
Located This week at the
Lori's Pharmacy and
Groton Ford

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Groton Area 52, Britton-Hecla 29

VISITOR: Britton-Hecla ()

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN	
		P	FG	FGA	FG			FGA	OFF	DEF								TOT
2	Hawkins,	*	4	12	0	2	0	0	1	7	8	0	8	0	4	0	3	24:00
3	Meyer,	*	3	9	2	4	0	0	0	3	3	2	8	0	2	0	1	24:00
11	Deutsch,	*	0	4	0	4	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	2	16:00
22	Bush,	*	2	6	0	2	0	1	2	2	4	2	4	1	2	0	1	24:00
33	MacConnell,	*	2	7	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	4	0	1	0	0	24:00
0	Haskins,		2	5	1	2	0	0	0	3	3	1	5	0	2	0	3	24:00
20	Fosness,		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
21	Flanery,		0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	8:00
25	Wade,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
44	James,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0:00
45	Nelson,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
52	Morris,		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									0	5	5				1			
Team Totals			13	46	3	15	0	3	5	23	28	7	29	2	14	0	11	160

Total FG% - 1st: 5/22 0.227 2nd: 8/24 0.333 Game: 0.283 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 2/8 0.250 2nd: 1/7 0.143 Game: 0.200 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 0/0 0.000 2nd: 0/3 0.000 Game: 0.000 (1,0)

HOME: Groton ()

NO	PLAYER	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN	
		P	FG	FGA	FG			FGA	OFF	DEF								TOT
4	Shabazz, Bennett	*	5	16	4	9	0	0	2	3	5	2	14	6	4	0	4	16:00
12	Schuring, Sean	*	1	3	0	2	1	2	0	11	11	3	3	2	5	0	1	16:00
20	Keith, Brandon	*	5	9	3	6	0	0	3	1	4	1	13	1	1	0	2	24:00
40	Johnson, Peyton	*	0	2	0	0	1	2	1	3	4	3	1	1	1	0	0	16:00
42	Shabazz, Seric	*	6	12	4	8	0	0	0	7	7	0	16	2	0	0	3	32:00
3	Sippel, Anthony		1	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	8:00
10	Lane, Marshall		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	8:00
14	Diegel, Treyton		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
22	Guthmiller, Cade		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	8:00
24	Wuestewald, Frankie		1	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	8:00
30	Doeden, Jonny		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	8:00
32	Jones, Austin		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	8:00
34	Thurston, Mitch		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
50	Thorson, Luke		0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									1	2	3				1			
Team Totals			19	51	11	28	3	6	11	30	41	10	52	14	16	0	11	160

Total FG% - 1st: 6/22 0.273 2nd: 13/29 0.448 Game: 0.373 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 3/10 0.300 2nd: 8/18 0.444 Game: 0.393 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 3/6 0.500 2nd: 0/0 0.000 Game: 0.500 (1,0)

Technical Fouls: BrHe (0)
 : groto (0)

OFFICIALS :
 ATTENDANCE : 0

SCORE BY PERIODS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOTAL
<u>Britton-Hecla</u>	10	2	5	12	29
Groton	10	8	14	20	52

Last FG: Britton-Hecla 4th-08:00, Groton 4th-08:00
 Largest lead: Britton-Hecla by 2 2nd-08:00, Groton by 23 4th-08:00
 Score tied: 1 times, Lead changed: 2 times

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Well, we had not heard anything from the city about the Holiday Lighting Contest. They always put an ad in the paper indicating the night the town will be judged and line up the transit bus so people can ride around town to see the lights. Even though the council gave the okay for a Christmas Lighting Contest, nothing was, that we know of, was done. And we hated to have our first Christmas paper since 1986 go without lighting winners.

So after the game on Tuesday, I took my two girls around town to judge the lights. We took pictures of a number of places and then came home to judge the homes. Julianna and Jeslyn easily agreed on third, fourth and fifth place, but first and second place proved to be very challenging. It took over half an hour to come up with a consensus - a tie!

We had the pictures of the two homes side by side on the computer so they could look at them. I was not going to get into the mix of things to break a tie. I wanted them to feel free to make a decision on their own.

So they ended up splitting and thus, we have a tie.

Both girls said it was very stressful trying to come up with a decision. I really didn't want our house in the mix since our girls were doing the judging, but they insisted. It was a good experience for both of them.

And to the many other homes in town who decorated outside, you did great. It's nice to see so much diversity around Groton.

And prizes - well, since the GDI is sponsoring this contest, we'll get trophies for the winners.



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.*

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Special Weather Statement National Weather Service Aberdeen SD 432 AM CST Wed Dec 21 2016

MNZ039-046-SDZ003>011-015>023-033>037-045-048-051-212145-
Traverse-Big Stone-Corson-Campbell-McPherson-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Walworth-Edmunds-Day-
Dewey-Potter-Faulk-Spink-Clark-Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-Stanley-Sully-Hughes-Hyde-Hand-Jones-
Lyman-Buffalo-

Including the cities of...Wheaton...Ortonville...McIntosh... Herreid...Eureka...Aberdeen...Britton...Sisseton...
Mobridge... Ipswich...Webster...Isabel...Gettysburg...Faulkton...Redfield... Clark...Watertown...Milbank...
Hayti...Clear Lake... Mission Ridge...Onida...Pierre...Highmore...Miller...Murdo... Kennebec...Fort Thompson
432 AM CST Wed Dec 21 2016 /332 AM MST Wed Dec 21 2016/

...SIGNIFICANT CHRISTMAS STORM BECOMING MORE LIKELY...

There is better agreement amongst the models that a significant low pressure area will move across the central and northern plains from Saturday night through Monday morning. There are still some track and timing differences which would affect the precipitation type and amounts.

At this time, it appears a low pressure area will develop over northeast Colorado by Sunday morning, strengthening as it moves northeast across Nebraska, eastern South Dakota and into northern Minnesota by Monday afternoon. This track would bring widespread precipitation to central and northeast South Dakota along with west central Minnesota. Mixed precipitation in the form of freezing rain and sleet are expected to the east with snow, possibly heavy across central and north central South Dakota. The precipitation is expected to change to all snow Sunday night and end Monday morning. Any ice or snowfall amounts would be difficult to estimate at this time. Otherwise, strong northwest winds are expected behind the system Sunday night into Monday causing widespread blowing and drifting snow.

Stay tuned for the latest updates on this developing low pressure system for possible watch issuances.

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Today in Weather History

December 21, 1968: A blizzard visited South Dakota and Minnesota on the 21st and 22nd. Snowfall during the snowstorm was generally 1 to 2 inches in the western part of South Dakota, to 5 to 10 inches in Minnesota, with more than 12 inches in an area from Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County to the southeast in Minnesota, and up to 18 inches in east central and southeast South Dakota. The snowfall, on top of an already-existing 10-inch layer of powdery snow, was whipped by 30-50 mph winds, with some winds over 50 mph in Minnesota, that occasionally reduced visibility to near zero, created snow drifts up to 10 feet or more, stopped almost all forms of traffic, blocked many primary highways for most of Sunday the 22nd, and blocked most of the secondary roads as well as some other roads for nearly a week.

Due to good blizzard warnings and the fact that the blizzard occurred late Saturday through Sunday, the highway patrol reported a minimum of accidents and stranded travelers. Most schools were closed and other activities were curtailed. Many utility lines were down. Record December snowfall amounts were recorded for more than 40 locations in Minnesota. Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County received 16 inches of snow from this storm, by far its largest daily snowfall on record for any month of the year. Clear Lake, in Deuel County, measured 18 inches of snow, which also remains the largest daily snowfall on record for any month in that location. Watertown and Bryant received nine inches from this blizzard, while Castlewood reported seven inches.

December 21, 1929: An exceptional storm produced snow from the Middle Rio Grande Valley of Texas to southern Arkansas. The storm produced 26 inches of snow near Hillsboro, Texas, and 24 inches in 24 hours in Clifton.

1892 - Portland, OR, was buried under a record 27.5 inches of snow. (21st-24th) (The Weather Channel)

1929 - An exceptional storm produced snow from the Middle Rio Grande Valley of Texas to southern Arkansas. The storm produced 26 inches of snow at Hillsboro TX, 18 inches at El Dorado AR, and 14 inches at Bossier LA. (21st-22nd) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1964 - A great warm surge from the Pacific Ocean across Oregon and northern California brought torrential rains on a deep snow cover resulting in record floods. (David Ludlum)

1987 - High winds continued along the eastern slopes of the Rockies. During the morning hours winds gusted to 64 mph at Cheyenne WY, and reached 97 mph near Boulder CO. Gale force winds prevailed across the Great Lakes Region. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Seven cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Charleston SC with a reading of 78 degrees. A storm in the northwestern U.S. produced 22 inches of snow at Idaho City ID in two days, and up to two feet of snow at Happy Camp CA. Ski resorts in Idaho reported three to six feet of snow on the ground. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Forty cities in the north central U.S., including thirteen in Iowa, reported record low temperatures for the date. Havre and Jordan, MT, tied for honors as the cold spot in the nation with morning lows of 43 degrees below zero, and the temperature remained close to 40 degrees below zero through the daylight hours. Dickinson ND reported a morning low of 33 degrees below zero and a wind chill reading of 86 degrees below zero. The high for the date of 16 degrees below zero at Sioux Falls SD was December record for that location. (The National Weather Summary)

1998 - Cold air spread into the southern San Joaquin Valley of California. For the next four nights, temperatures in the agricultural portions of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern counties dropped below 28 degrees for several hours at a time. In some locations, temperatures dipped into the teens. The California citrus industry suffered more than \$600 million in damages due to the extreme cold.

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Today



Partly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 36 °F

Tonight



Clear

Low: 14 °F

Thursday



Sunny

High: 34 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 15 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny

High: 29 °F

Friday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 10 °F

Saturday



Partly Sunny

High: 25 °F

Christmas Storm Likely

Today: Warm and Windy



A significant winter storm will impact the Northern Plains and Upper Midwest Christmas Day through Monday.

Precipitation type and amounts are unknown.

Strong winds are certain Sunday night through Monday.

Stay Tuned as the forecast will change.



weather.gov/Aberdeen

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD

National Weather Service Aberdeen

@NWSAberdeen

Updated: 12/21/2016 5:06 AM Central



Published on: 12/21/2016 at 5:12AM

Today will feature above normal temperatures along with increasing west-northwesterly winds. A significant storm system is looking likely starting Saturday night, through Christmas and into Monday morning. This system will bring mixed precipitation in the form of rain, freezing rain, sleet, and snow to most of the Northern Plains. Amounts are still unknown at this time. Stay tuned as the forecast will certainly change.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 37.1 F at 1:46 PM

Low Outside Temp: 18.4 F at 6:45 PM

High Gust: 24.0 Mph at 3:44 AM

Snow:

Today's Info

Record High: 50° in 1979

Record Low: -31° in 1916

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 4°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.34

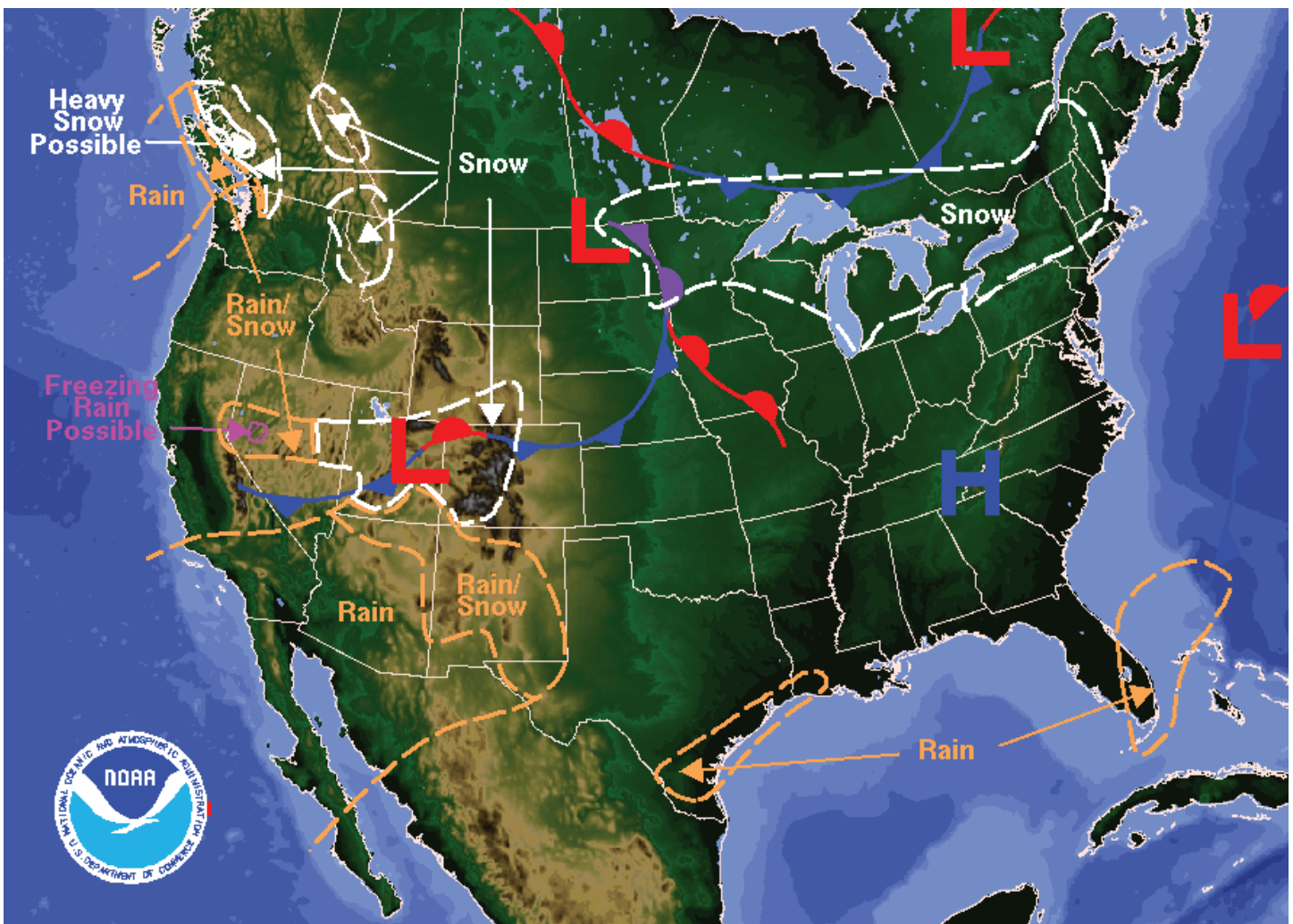
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.88

Average Precip to date: 21.54

Precip Year to Date: 18.22

Sunset Tonight: 4:53 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:11 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Wed, Dec 21, 2016, issued 4:54 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



I HAVE TO GIVE IT UP!

It was the worst game of golf he had ever played. As he missed his putt on the final green, he flew into a terrible tantrum, screaming and swearing and flailing his arms. Beating his putter on the grass, he cried, "I have to give it up!"

"Give up golf?" asked the caddy in disbelief.

"No," snapped the golfer, "my ministry. The church is taking up too much of my time. Those people expect too much of me and always expect me to take care of them."

Pure and simple, time is a special gift. It is a commodity that, once used in one way or another, can never be retrieved. Once gone, it is forever lost.

One expert on time put it this way: "Time is life. It is irreversible and irreplaceable. To waste your time is to waste your life. To master your time is to master your life." Lost time leads to a lost life.

We must always begin each day with God in a time of worship – prayer, Scripture reading, meditating on His Word and recognizing His role in our lives. If we make Him our first priority and focus on Him throughout the day, we can trust Him to direct our paths and bless each moment He gives us.

Prayer: Help me, Lord, to not only do things right, but to do the right things in the right way, at the right time. I surrender my time to You and ask that You help me to use it wisely, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

Scripture: Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

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News from the Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 46, Watertown 45
Aberdeen Christian 73, Sunshine Bible Academy 57
Alcester-Hudson 64, Gayville-Volin 56
Brandon Valley 66, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 47
Bridgewater-Emery 65, Canistota 45
Brookings 35, Huron 33
Chester 73, McCook Central/Montrose 29
Clark/Willow Lake 52, Florence/Henry 40
Colman-Egan 68, Elkton-Lake Benton 42
Dell Rapids 77, Baltic 54
DeSmet 59, Dell Rapids St. Mary 46
Flandreau 68, Castlewood 41
Freeman 67, Howard 39
Groton Area 52, Britton-Hecla 29
Highmore-Harold 57, Kimball/White Lake 46
Ipswich 77, Hitchcock-Tulare 55
James Valley Christian 45, Ethan 38
Langford 57, Eureka/Bowdle 38
Milbank Area 67, Deubrook 32
Oelrichs 73, Hay Springs, Neb. 41
Parkston 60, Avon 45
Rapid City Central 71, Douglas 62
Rapid City Christian 66, Lyman 63
Sioux Falls Lincoln 68, Harrisburg 49
Sioux Falls Washington 68, Yankton 65
Sturgis Brown 71, Spearfish 60
Tea Area 69, Deuel 22
Tiospa Zina Tribal 68, Wilmot 35
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 48, Freeman Academy/Marion 38
Vermillion 53, Tri-Valley 48
Wolsey-Wessington 60, Mitchell Christian 30
Stateline Shootout
Belle Fourche 58, Newcastle, Wyo. 57
Sundance, Wyo. 41, Lead-Deadwood 40

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 81, Watertown 37
Alcester-Hudson 45, Gayville-Volin 35
Chamberlain 44, Kimball/White Lake 40
Dell Rapids 70, Baltic 35
Ethan 67, James Valley Christian 7
Faith 59, Dupree 20
Freeman 61, Howard 49
Hanson 54, Menno 39
Hitchcock-Tulare 54, Ipswich 39

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Huron 51, Brookings 45
Irene-Wakonda 63, Bon Homme 32
Lisbon, N.D. 45, Sisseton 43
Mott-Regent, N.D. 54, Bison 31
Platte-Geddes 72, Gregory 33
Platte-Geddes 71, Gregory 33
Rapid City Central 87, Douglas 33
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 53, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 29
Sioux Falls Lincoln 61, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 42
Sioux Falls Washington 48, Yankton 47
Sunshine Bible Academy 58, Aberdeen Christian 22
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 57, Freeman Academy/Marion 23
Wall 56, Newell 19
Warner 49, Milbank Area 35
Waubay/Summit 37, Leola/Frederick 27
Stateline Shootout
Belle Fourche 60, Newcastle, Wyo. 33
Sundance, Wyo. 41, Lead-Deadwood 27

Native American activist 'shocked' by Electoral College vote

LAKE ANDES, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota activist says she is "totally shocked" that she got a vote for president from the Electoral College this week.

Sixty-eight-year-old Faith Spotted Eagle of Lake Andes received one vote Monday from an elector in Washington state.

Spotted Eagle tells The Daily Republic (<http://bit.ly/2hF8qxb>) her getting the vote is a reflection of "the time that we live in." She thinks she happens "to be a door to concerns that are relevant to everybody, not just Native people."

An enrolled member of the Yankton Sioux Tribe, Spotted Eagle is an opponent of major oil pipeline projects, including the Dakota Access pipeline that has been the subject of protests.

Spotted Eagle says she hopes her fellow South Dakotans will recognize the importance of protecting water sources like the Missouri River.

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

Bridge damaged by pipeline protesters set for inspection

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The North Dakota Transportation Department will inspect a damaged bridge near the main Dakota Access pipeline protest encampment.

The Blackwater Bridge on Highway 1806 has been closed since October, when protesters blocked it with burning vehicles, damaging the structure. It's been the site of several other clashes, including on Nov. 20, when authorities used tear gas, rubber bullets and water sprays on protesters who they say assaulted officers with rocks and burning logs.

The Transportation Department plans to inspect the bridge on Thursday. Results of testing will be sent to a lab. That could take a month to complete.

It's unknown how long repairs might take or how much they'll cost.

Protesters worry about the pipeline's effects on drinking water and on Native American artifacts.

News year: Big charges, teacher pay hike and Black Elk Peak

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A raft of criminal charges in high-profile financial misconduct cases were big news in 2016, but the year's top story may have been a historic sales tax hike to boost South Dakota's lowest-in-the-nation teacher pay.

It almost fell apart in the state House, coming in one vote short. After another try, the half-cent sales tax increase — the first permanent bump since 1969 — scraped through with none to spare and headed to the Senate.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard's package of education measures became law in March. Teachers cheered average pay projected to rise almost 12 percent to nearly \$47,000.

Other notable stories:

BIG BILLS

Daugaard started 2016 without having knowingly met a transgender person. By March, he had met with a group of transgender people and vetoed a bill that would have made South Dakota first in the U.S. to approve a law requiring transgender students to use bathrooms and locker rooms that match their gender at birth.

The bill drew national condemnation. Supporters said it would protect student privacy.

In another high-profile move during the 2016 session, Daugaard signed a bill prohibiting most abortions beyond 19 weeks of pregnancy.

BUILDING COLLAPSE

Construction worker Ethan McMahon, a 24-year-old former Marine, was killed in a December building collapse in downtown Sioux Falls that also trapped a woman for three hours under the debris. McMahon and his brother, who made it out of the wreckage, were working when the 100-year-old building fell down around them.

The trapped woman, 22-year-old Emily Fodness, was able to call her mother and eventually gave directions that helped rescuers find her.

BALLOT BOXING

The shine on a voter-approved government ethics overhaul didn't last long. A group of two dozen GOP lawmakers and others filed a lawsuit, and a state judge put the measure on hold while the challenge proceeds. In jeopardy are major political changes: an ethics commission, public campaign funding and limitations on lobbyist gifts to lawmakers.

The dispute appears likely to spill into the 2017 legislative session.

BIG COURT CASES

Joop Bollen, the man who once ran South Dakota's investment-for-visa program, was charged in March in a long-running and complicated financial misconduct case. Bollen, who has pleaded not guilty, is accused of diverting more than \$1.2 million from an account created to protect the state against costs or liability from South Dakota's EB-5 visa program. Authorities say he put back most of the money.

A tragedy in Platte stretched into this year, with charges filed in March against three people for allegedly aiding in an embezzlement scheme that eventually ended in Scott Westerhuis killing his wife, Nicole, and their children. Authorities believe the couple stole more than \$1 million beforehand.

Dan Guericke, Stephanie Hubers and Stacy Phelps have pleaded not guilty.

Two consultants who helped a Native American tribe plan the nation's first marijuana resort were charged with drug offenses in August, eight months after the Flandreau Santee Sioux destroyed their crop amid fears of a federal raid. Jonathan Hunt, who oversaw the first crop for the tribe, pleaded guilty to a drug conspiracy count. Eric Hagen, the CEO of the Colorado-based consulting firm Monarch America, has pleaded not guilty.

Seth Jeffs, brother of Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints leader Warren Jeffs, was one of 11 people indicted in an alleged multi-million-dollar food stamp fraud scheme. Authorities say Seth Jeffs, who has pleaded not guilty, has led a compound of the faithful in rural Custer County, South Dakota.

BLACK ELK PEAK

A federal board surprised South Dakota by renaming the state's tallest peak after Lakota spiritual leader Black Elk, who died in 1950. The August decision by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names swept aside the old name, Harney Peak, removing the name of a man whose soldiers killed Native Americans.

The board determined that Harney was offensive to area Native Americans. The Oglala Sioux member in his 80s who pushed to rechristen the peak said the decision was a sign of compassion and reconciliation. The change to Black Elk Peak was panned by Republicans Daugaard and U.S. Sen. John Thune.

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

"After you saw what happened with the last election, I think it certainly was a wakeup call for all of America," Huether said. "For those folks who haven't woken up yet, I think it's time."

During the press conference, Huether would not say whether he voted for Republican President-elect Donald Trump, but he did compare his own business-centric approach to running City Hall with Trump's methodology.

The second-term mayor of South Dakota's largest city said he's been weighing the change for two years. Huether said he's frustrated with the two-party system, and with his former party's unwillingness to change.

He described himself as a fiscal conservative and a social libertarian. He said extremes on the left and right create an anti-establishment anger.

"I have no problems being called a moderate," Huether said.

For the last 10 years, Democrats have been losing ground with South Dakota voters, with independent party affiliation becoming more common. Since 2006, the Republican Party has also experienced a drop among registered voters, though that decrease is less severe.

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

Salmon egg collections boom at 1 lake, sag at another

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON**, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Differing rates of recovery for rainbow smelt in two Missouri River reservoirs in the Dakotas since the devastating 2011 flood have resulted in booming salmon egg collections in Lake Sakakawea this year but sagging collections in Lake Oahe.

The collections are important because the eggs are raised into young fish in hatcheries and then stocked into the fisheries, maintaining a healthy population of the popular sport fish that isn't native to the region and doesn't reproduce naturally.

Collections in Lake Sakakawea this year totaled about 2 million eggs — a four-fold increase over 2015, according to Dave Fryda, Missouri River system supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

That's enough eggs to stock about 400,000 young fish in the lake next year. Officials also collected enough to give about 450,000 eggs to South Dakota, where collections in Lake Oahe this year totaled only 388,000, roughly half the long-term average.

The donated eggs "should help us get very close to the number of fish we intend to stock next year ... around 320,000 total," said Will Saylor, fisheries program administrator for South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.

The difference in the collections in the two lakes is largely tied to the amount of smelt, a favorite food of Chinook salmon. More smelt means more salmon from which to collect eggs. Severe flooding along the

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Missouri River five years ago caused by heavy spring snowmelt and rains flushed millions of smelt through the Sakakawea and Oahe dams.

"When prey fish populations crash, they don't come back at the same rate," Saylor said.

In 2014, near-perfect spring water levels and temperatures along with favorable weather on Lake Sakakawea provided pristine conditions for smelt, according to North Dakota Fisheries Chief Greg Power.

"We had a phenomenal year class (of smelt) in 2014, one of the best ever," he said. "Smelt numbers in Oahe aren't near what they are in Sakakawea right now."

Sharing of salmon eggs by wildlife agencies in the Dakotas and Montana is nothing new. Eggs can't be brought in from other areas of the country because of the risk of disease.

"It's a nice deal — give and take," Power said. "We can exchange between the three states pretty easily."

Montana didn't need any eggs from North Dakota this year because collections at the Fort Peck reservoir on the Missouri were at a record level due mainly to a rebounding lake herring population, according to Heath Headley, fisheries biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Power thinks salmon egg collections in Lake Sakakawea will remain prosperous in coming years, as well.

"Salmon anglers are going to have big smiles on their faces the next year or two," he said.

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

Woman pleads not guilty in slaying on Pine Ridge Reservation

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Pine Ridge woman accused of concealing information in a fatal shooting on the Pine Ridge Reservation has pleaded not guilty.

Thirty-year-old Tiffanee Garnier is accused of having knowledge of the slaying of Vincent Brewer III on Oct. 16 and not reporting it to authorities. She allegedly helped his assailants flee the scene.

U.S. Attorney Randolph Seiler says Garnier is set for trial in mid-February. She faces up to three years in prison if convicted.

Garnier also goes by the name Tiffanee Alford.

Lin-Manuel Miranda named AP Entertainer of the year

By MARK KENNEDY, AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Winning a Pulitzer Prize and a clutch of Tony Awards in a single one year would be enough for anyone. Not Lin-Manuel Miranda. Not in 2016.

The "Hamilton" writer-composer picked up those honors and also earned a Golden Globe nomination, won the Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama Inspired by American History, wrote music for a top movie, and inspired a best-selling book, a best-selling album of "Hamilton" covers and a popular PBS documentary.

A new honor came Wednesday when Miranda bested Beyonce, Adele and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, among others, to be named The Associated Press Entertainer of the Year, voted by members of the news cooperative and AP entertainment reporters.

"There's been more than a little good luck in the year itself and the way it's unfolded," Miranda said after being told of the honor. "I continue to try to work on the things I've always wanted to work on and try to say yes to the opportunities that I'd kick myself forever if I didn't jump at them."

Miranda joins the list of previous AP Entertainer of the Year winners who in recent years have included Adele, Taylor Swift, Jennifer Lawrence, Lady Gaga, Tina Fey and Betty White. The animated Disney juggernaut "Frozen" captured the prize in 2014, and "Star Wars" won last year. (By the way, Miranda wrote one of the songs in "The Force Awakens.")

When he hosted "Saturday Night Live" in October, he somewhat tongue-in-cheek acknowledged the rarity of having a theater composer as host, saying: "Most of you watching at home have no idea who I am."

They surely must by now.

Miranda was virtually everywhere in popular culture this year — stage, film, TV, music and politics, while engaging on social media as he went. Like a lyric he wrote for Alexander Hamilton, it seemed at times

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that the non-stop Miranda was working as if he was "running out of time."

Julio D. Diaz, of the Pensacola News Journal, said Miranda "made the whole world sing, dance and think. Coupled with using his prestige to become involved in important sociopolitical issues, there was no greater or more important presence in entertainment in 2016."

Among the things Miranda did this year are asking Congress to help dig Puerto Rico out of its debt crisis, getting an honorary doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, performing at a fundraiser for Hillary Clinton on Broadway, lobbying to stop gun violence in America and teaming up with Jennifer Lopez on the benefit single "Love Make the World Go Round."

He and his musical "Hamilton" won 11 Tony Awards in June, but perhaps his deepest contribution that night was tearfully honoring those killed hours before at an Orlando nightclub with a beautiful sonnet: "Love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love, cannot be killed or swept aside," he said. "Now fill the world with music, love and pride."

He started the year onstage in the Broadway hit "Hamilton" (which in 2015 had won a Grammy and earned Miranda a MacArthur genius grant) and ended it with a Golden Globe nomination for writing the song "How Far I'll Go" from "Moana," which was on top of the box office for three weeks this month, earning \$165 million.

"I've been jumping from thing to thing and what's been thrilling is to see the projects that happen very quickly kind of exploding side-by-side with the projects I've been working on for years," Miranda said.

Though theater fans have long cherished his fluency in both Stephen Sondheim and Tupac, "Hamilton" helped Miranda break into the mainstream in 2016. The groundbreaking, biographical hip-hop show tells the true story of an orphan immigrant from the Caribbean who rises to the highest ranks of American society, told by a young African-American and Latino cast.

The cast went to the White House in March to perform songs from the show for the first family and answer questions from school children. A version of the show opened in Chicago in October and a production is slated to land in California next year and in London soon.

When the gold-winning U.S. women's gymnastics team returned from the Rio Olympics, where do you think they wanted to go? "Hamilton," naturally, which they did in August.

The show's effects were felt across the nation this year, cheered by politicians, stars and rappers alike and even helping shape the debate over the nation's currency (Hamilton stays on the \$10 bill, in part due to Miranda's show.)

But the musical also sparked controversy when the cast delivered a pointed message about diversity to Vice President-elect Mike Pence while he attended a performance in November. President-elect Donald Trump demanded an apology, which did not come.

That kerfuffle was part of a "Hamilton"-heavy fall that included an album of celebrity covers and songs called "The Hamilton Mixtape," as well as a documentary on the show that aired on PBS and attracted more than 3.6 million television viewers.

Erin O'Neill of The Marietta Times said Miranda dominated entertainment news this year but, more importantly, "opened a dialogue about government, the founding of our country and the future of politics in America."

There's more Miranda to come in 2017, including filming Disney's "Mary Poppins Returns" with Emily Blunt (due out Christmas 2018) and an ambitious TV and film adaptation of the fantasy trilogy "The Kingkiller Chronicle."

"I'm back in a planting mode after a harvest," Miranda said, laughing.

Online: <http://www.linmanuel.com>

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

North Carolina lawmakers meeting to consider HB2 repeal

By GARY D. ROBERTSON and JONATHAN DREW, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina's legislature is reconvening to see if enough lawmakers are willing to repeal a 9-month-old law that limited LGBT rights, including which bathrooms transgender people can use in public schools and government buildings.

House and Senate members planned to meet in the capital Wednesday for a special session two days after the Charlotte City Council gutted an ordinance that in March led the Republican-controlled General Assembly to pass House Bill 2, known by some as the "bathroom bill."

For months, the state's Republican leaders had said they were willing to consider repealing the law if Charlotte acted first to undo its expanded antidiscrimination ordinance. But the mayor and most council members, with the support of gay rights groups, had been unwilling to do so in the name of equality.

The Democrat-controlled council didn't act until Monday, two weeks after GOP Gov. Pat McCrory conceded the gubernatorial race to Democrat Roy Cooper.

During the race, Cooper blasted McCrory over the law he signed and its fallout — job losses, canceled concerts and sporting events — contributed to McCrory's narrow defeat. Cooper, the attorney general for the past 16 years, helped broker Charlotte's cooperation in the deal and said during the campaign he wanted HB2 repealed.

Although House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger said earlier this week that they "would take up the repeal of HB2" in a special session, uncertainty over exactly what lawmakers will do remains. The legislature has shown a willingness to go its own way, despite intense outside pressure to scrap the law.

Over the past year, there has been bitter fighting between Democrats and Republicans. Just last week, Republican leaders convened a surprise legislative session and passed two laws designed to bring Cooper's powers in check when he becomes governor Jan. 1.

Cooper expects a full repeal of HB2, his spokeswoman said.

A few lawmakers from both parties interviewed Tuesday said they anticipated a simple measure they would support to repeal the entire bill.

"My hope for the session is that we have a one-day session with one bill and we go home," GOP Rep. Chuck McGrady of Hendersonville said. But McGrady said any lawmaker could offer amendments to retain parts of the law, which could complicate matters.

Some conservative lawmakers — urged on by conservative Christians groups that supported HB2 — are likely to want to keep the law in place.

"I'm not interested in repealing anything," GOP Rep. Jeff Collins of Rocky Mount told The Wilson Times. "I think we did the right thing the first time."

The Charlotte measure approved Monday notes that it won't take effect unless HB2 is repealed in its entirety by Dec. 31. And some sections of the city's expanded nondiscrimination ordinance for LGBT people approved earlier this year that weren't invalidated by HB2 were left intact. Both details could give some lawmakers justification not to repeal the state law Wednesday.

But repealing the bill would require only a handful of GOP support — perhaps 10 members in the Senate or 15 in the House — if all Democrats voted for it. The session that McCrory called is scheduled several days before Christmas, with some legislators out of town.

HB2 is best known for requiring transgender people to use restrooms corresponding to the sex on their birth certificate rather than their gender identity.

It also limits statewide protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in public accommodations and employment, and it reinforced a prohibition on local governments from raising minimum wage. Local governments are also prevented from enacting nondiscrimination measures that would go further than state law.

Discussions about repealing the law increased after decisions by the NCAA and Atlantic Coast Conference to move their championship events out of North Carolina this academic year. The NBA also moved an All-Star Game out of Charlotte.

LGBT groups, which had fought any deal with legislators earlier this year to do away with the Charlotte

ordinance, are now on board if the result is the end of HB2.

"Full and complete repeal of HB2 is the only acceptable outcome," Stephen Peters of Human Rights Campaign said Tuesday in an email.

Follow Robertson at www.twitter.com/garydrobertson and Drew at www.twitter.com/jonldrew .

AP Poll: US election voted top news story of 2016

By DAVID CRARY, AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The turbulent U.S. election, featuring Donald Trump's unexpected victory over Hillary Clinton in the presidential race, was the overwhelming pick for the top news story of 2016, according to The Associated Press' annual poll of U.S. editors and news directors.

The No. 2 story also was a dramatic upset — Britons' vote to leave the European Union. Most of the other stories among the Top 10 reflected a year marked by political upheaval, terror attacks and racial divisions.

Last year, developments related to the Islamic State group were voted as the top story — the far-flung attacks claimed by the group, and the intensifying global effort to crush it.

The first AP top-stories poll was conducted in 1936, when editors chose the abdication of Britain's King Edward VIII.

Here are 2016's top 10 stories, in order:

1. **US ELECTION:** This year's top story traces back to June 2015, when Donald Trump descended an escalator in Trump Tower, his bastion in New York City, to announce he would run for president. Widely viewed as a long shot, with an unconventional campaign featuring raucous rallies and pugnacious tweets, he outlasted 16 Republican rivals. Among the Democrats, Hillary Clinton beat back an unexpectedly strong challenge from Bernie Sanders, and won the popular vote over Trump. But he won key Rust Belt states to get the most electoral votes, and will enter the White House with Republicans maintaining control of both houses of Congress.

2. **BREXIT:** Confounding pollsters and oddsmakers, Britons voted in June to leave the European Union, triggering financial and political upheaval. David Cameron resigned as prime minister soon after the vote, leaving the task of negotiating an exit to a reshaped Conservative government led by Theresa May. Under a tentative timetable, final details of the withdrawal might not be known until the spring of 2019.

3. **BLACKS KILLED BY POLICE:** One day apart, police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, fatally shot Alton Sterling after pinning him to the ground, and a white police officer shot and killed Philando Castile during a traffic stop in a suburb of Minneapolis. Coming after several similar cases in recent years, the killings rekindled debate over policing practices and the Black Lives Matter movement.

4. **PULSE NIGHTCLUB MASSACRE:** The worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history unfolded on Latin Night at the Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando. The gunman, Omar Mateen, killed 49 people over the course of three hours before dying in a shootout with SWAT team members. During the standoff, he pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

5. **WORLDWIDE TERROR ATTACKS:** Across the globe, extremist attacks flared at a relentless pace throughout the year. Among the many high-profile attacks were those that targeted airports in Brussels and Istanbul, a park teeming with families and children in Pakistan, and the seafront boulevard in Nice, France, where 86 people were killed when a truck plowed through a Bastille Day celebration. In Iraq alone, many hundreds of civilians were killed in repeated bombings.

6. **ATTACKS ON POLICE:** Ambushes and targeted attacks on police officers in the U.S. claimed at least 20 lives. The victims included five officers in Dallas working to keep the peace at a protest over the fatal police shootings of black men in Minnesota and Louisiana. Ten days after that attack, a man killed three officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In Iowa, two policemen were fatally shot in separate ambush-style attacks while sitting in their patrol cars.

7. **DEMOCRATIC PARTY EMAIL LEAKS:** Hacked emails, disclosed by WikiLeaks, revealed at-times embarrassing details from Democratic Party operatives in run-up to Election Day, leading to the resignation of Democratic National Committee chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz and other DNC officials. The CIA later

concluded that Russia was behind the DNC hacking in a bid to boost Donald Trump's chances of beating Hillary Clinton.

8. SYRIA: Repeated cease-fire negotiations failed to halt relentless warfare among multiple factions. With Russia's help, the government forces of President Bashar Assad finally seized rebel-held portions of the city of Aleppo, at a huge cost in terms of deaths and destruction.

9. SUPREME COURT: After Justice Antonin Scalia's death in February, President Obama nominated Merrick Garland, chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals, to fill the vacancy. However, majority Republicans in the Senate refused to consider the nomination, opting to leave the seat vacant so it could be filled by the winner of the presidential election. Donald Trump has promised to appoint a conservative in the mold of Scalia.

10. HILLARY CLINTON'S EMAILS: Amid the presidential campaign, the FBI conducted an investigation into Clinton's use of a private computer server to handle emails she sent and received as secretary of state. FBI Director James Comey criticized Clinton for carelessness but said the bureau would not recommend criminal charges.

Stories that did not make the top 10 included Europe's migrant crisis, the death of longtime Cuban leader Fidel Castro, and the spread of the Zika virus across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Investigators seek Tunisian in Berlin market truck attack

By GEIR MOULSON, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Investigators hunted Wednesday for a Tunisian man whose documents were found in the truck that plowed into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people and injuring 48 others, German media reported.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for Monday's attack on the market next to the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in the center of the capital.

Soon after, police arrested a Pakistani man found about a kilometer (0.6 miles) from the market who matched witness descriptions of the truck's driver, but they released him the next day, saying they did not have evidence tying him to the attack.

Several German media outlets reported Wednesday, without identifying their sources, that authorities were searching for a Tunisian man whose identification documents were found in the cab of the truck.

He was named as either Ahmed or Anis A., though he reportedly used various aliases.

Police in Berlin said they had received 508 tips on the attack as of Tuesday night, but there was no immediate word from prosecutors on whether they had any concrete leads. They also did not say if they were looking for more than one suspect.

Spokesmen for the Tunisian Interior Ministry and Foreign Ministry did not have information about the possible suspect and could not immediately confirm whether the Tunisian government had been contacted by German authorities.

The claim of responsibility carried on the IS group's Amaq news agency did not identify the man seen fleeing from the truck, but described him as "a soldier of the Islamic State" who "carried out the attack in response to calls for targeting citizens of the Crusader coalition."

Germany's top prosecutor, Peter Frank, told reporters before the claim that the attack was reminiscent of July's deadly truck rampage in Nice and appeared to follow instructions published by IS.

"We don't know for sure whether it was one or several perpetrators," he said. "We don't know for sure whether he, or they, had support."

Berlin Mayor Michael Mueller said Wednesday it was "good to see that Berliners aren't being intimidated." "I don't think there's any need to be afraid," he told ZDF television. "The police presence has been significantly heightened ... and of course other measures taken to find the perpetrator quickly."

Mueller argued that there are limits to increasing security, given the number of public spaces and events. "It wouldn't be our free and open life any more if we escalated security measures so much that people worry about going anywhere, that there are strict entry checks," he said. "We don't want that. It must be

appropriate and goal-oriented.”

Referring to security measures, he added: “A lot has happened, and more certainly will.”

Frank Jordans contributed to this report.

Delays hamper last evacuations from rebel enclave in Aleppo

By PHILIP ISSA, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Delays hampered the last evacuations of Syrian rebels and civilians from what is left of the opposition’s enclave in Aleppo as its residents waited on Wednesday for the arrival of 20 U.N. observers meant to monitor the final exodus from the city.

Some 3,000 rebel fighters and civilians stood outside in harsh wintry conditions overnight, waiting in vain for to board what may be the last convoy out of the enclave. Activists circulated photos on social media of families huddled around fires amid the sleet and snow. By midday, temperatures in the city hovered around freezing.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict through a network of activists on the ground, said 60 buses were waiting to leave eastern Aleppo on Wednesday with the last of the evacuees — the final step that surrenders the Syrian opposition foothold in the war-torn city to the government.

Rebels and the government traded blame for the delay.

Syrian state media said on Tuesday evening that “differences among terrorist groups” were holding up the evacuations from Aleppo and from two rebel-besieged Shiite villages in the country’s north, Foua and Kfarya. The government calls all armed opposition fighters terrorists.

The rebels are supposed to allow the evacuation of the sick and wounded from the two villages as part of a cease-fire deal reached last week to ensure the evacuation of eastern, rebel-held part of the city of Aleppo.

Ward Furati, spokesman for Aleppo’s Fastaqim rebel faction, said fighters in Aleppo “won’t leave until the security of all the civilians has been fully guaranteed.”

Opposition media activist Ahmad Primo said the government’s side was demanding to complete the evacuations from Foua and Kfarya before it would allow buses out of Aleppo.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which is overseeing the operations, could not be reached for comment. On Tuesday, the ICRC said it has evacuated 25,000 people from the city since operations began last week, but the Observatory says the tally is closer to 17,000.

The Observatory also said 21 buses are still waiting to evacuate the sick and wounded from the rebel-besieged Shiite villages of Foua and Kfarya.

Also Tuesday, the U.N. humanitarian aid agency said Syria’s government authorized U.N. plans to send about 20 staffers to monitor evacuations from eastern Aleppo. It was not immediately unclear if the U.N. monitors would arrive on Tuesday.

Elsewhere in northern Syria, fighting between the Islamic State group on one side, and Turkish forces and Syrian opposition forces on the other, killed three Turkish soldiers, according to the state Anadolu Agency.

The report cited unnamed military sources as saying that 11 Turkish soldiers were also wounded in the fighting for the IS-held town of al-Bab on Wednesday, including one who was reported to be in critical condition. The agency reported intense clashes near a hospital in the town, saying the militants were using it as a shelter and to store arms and ammunition.

Turkey sent ground troops into northern Syria in August to support Turkey-backed Syrian opposition forces in clearing a border area of Islamic State group militants and to curb Kurdish territorial expansion.

At least 24 Turkish soldiers have been killed so far in the operation, entitled Euphrates Shield.

Associated Press writer Suzan Fraser in Ankara 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. GERMANY HUNTS FOR SUSPECT IN CHRISTMAS MARKET ATTACK

The Islamic State group claims responsibility for the truck attack that left 12 dead and 48 injured in Berlin.

2. AT LEAST 29 DIE IN MEXICO FIREWORKS BLAST

Another 72 people are injured in the rolling explosions and fire that tore through the sprawling outdoor marketplace outside Mexico City.

3. WHO BROUGHT TRUMP, THE BUSH WORLD TOGETHER

The Bush family and its Republican allies are finding common cause with the president-elect over his pick to lead the State Department, Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson.

4. NORTH CAROLINA LAWMAKERS TO WEIGH 'BATHROOM BILL' REPEAL

The law is best known for requiring transgender people to use restrooms corresponding to the sex on their birth certificate in many public buildings.

5. LAST ALEPPO EVACUATION FACES DELAYS

A watchdog says 60 buses are waiting to leave east Aleppo with some 3,000 evacuees, in a final step by the rebels to surrender their toehold in the war-torn city to the government.

6. U.S. SCIENTISTS POINT TO NEW CLASS OF DEADLY DRUGS

Officials say the fentanyl-like substances are pouring in primarily from China, but Beijing maintains that assertion has not been substantiated.

7. AT SOARING RATE, NEPALIS SEEKING JOBS ABROAD COME HOME DEAD

Over 5,000 workers from this small country have died working overseas since 2008 — more than the number of U.S. troops killed in the Iraq War, The AP finds.

8. WHERE CRAFTSMEN TAKE ON CHINESE KNOCKOFFS

Souvenir shops in Bethlehem, the biblical town revered as Jesus' birthplace, are trying to stock their shelves almost exclusively with locally made products instead of cheaper imported wares.

9. WHY DEATH SENTENCES DECLINE SHARPLY IN THE U.S.

The growing reluctance of juries to sentence defendants to death is one of several factors contributing to the overall drop in executions.

10. WHICH BUSINESS LOOKS TO DOMINATE IN BRAZIL

Uber sees tremendous potential in Latin America's most populous nation, but pushes to regulate and even ban the company make its future uncertain.

After violence abroad, Trump meeting with security adviser

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump is planning to meet with his incoming national security adviser in the aftermath of a rattling day of violence around the world.

Trump appeared to jump ahead of investigators in blaming Islamic terrorists for deadly incidents Monday in Turkey and Germany and vowing anew to eradicate their regional and global networks. He called the brazen shooting of Russia's ambassador to Turkey "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," Arabic for "God is great."

As for Berlin, where at least 12 people were killed and nearly 50 hurt when a truck plowed through a Christmas market, 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." A man held by German authorities after the violence was later released after a lack of evidence to connect him to the incident.

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Trump's meeting scheduled Wednesday with retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn will come a day after Flynn and several other members of the incoming national security team met with Vice President-elect Mike Pence in Washington. Aides said the meeting was planned before the acts of violence, though they were discussed.

The gathering with Pence included retired Gen. John Kelly, Trump's nominee for head of the Department of Homeland Security; retired Gen. James Mattis, the pick for defense secretary; and Rex Tillerson, the head of Exxon Mobil and the intended nominee for secretary of state.

While Trump has assembled his Cabinet at a quick pace, the process to fill out top White House jobs has been slowed by infighting among advisers. Some of Trump's earliest advisers have expressed concern to the president-elect himself that they are getting boxed out in favor of those more closely aligned with incoming chief of staff Reince Priebus, who has chaired the Republican National Committee.

Among those whose future is still in flux is Corey Lewandowski, Trump's controversial first campaign manager who was fired after clashing with the president-elect's family. On Monday, Lewandowski met with Jared Kushner, Trump's influential son-in-law, and could still be offered a job in the administration, though potentially one that would keep him out of the West Wing — and away from the president.

The president-elect's transition team has said it expects to announce some White House positions in the coming days.

Trump met Tuesday with candidates for his unfilled Cabinet positions, including prospective hires to run the Department of Veterans Affairs, a beleaguered agency that the Republican businessman has vowed to overhaul.

At Mar-a-Lago, Trump's palatial Florida estate, the president-elect met with Luis Quinonez, who runs a company with military and health care ties and is said to be under consideration for VA secretary. He also interviewed Toby Cosgrove, the CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, who was a top contender to replace Eric Shinseki when he resigned from the VA in 2014. Cosgrove later withdrew from consideration.

Trump repeatedly pledged during the campaign to fix the woes at the department and said he would "take care of great veterans." But he also came under scrutiny for being slow in paying out money raised for veterans groups and for suggesting that "strong" veterans don't need treatment for mental health problems.

Others said to be considered for the post include former Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown, Florida Rep. Jeff Miller and Pete Hegseth, an Army veteran and former CEO of Concerned Veterans for America.

Trump is also considering Jovita Carranza, who worked in President George W. Bush's administration, as his choice for U.S. trade representative. She served as deputy administrator of the Small Business Administration under Bush.

With just a handful of Cabinet posts to fill, Trump is facing some criticism for a lack of diversity in his senior team, which currently includes no Hispanics. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials said Tuesday that it was "deeply concerned" at the lack of Hispanics considered for top jobs. Carranza was a member of Trump's Hispanic advisory council during the campaign.

Pence, meanwhile, met in Washington with former Texas state official Susan Combs, who served both as state agriculture commissioner and comptroller. Trump also needs to fill the Agriculture Department slot. Transition officials did not immediately confirm if Combs is up for that post.

Follow Lemire on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/JonLemire>

Deadly Mexico fireworks blast hit market packed for holidays

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN and PETER ORSI, Associated Press

TULTEPEC, Mexico (AP) — The San Pablito fireworks market was especially well stocked for the holidays and bustling with hundreds of shoppers when a powerful chain-reaction explosion ripped through its stalls, killing at least 29 people and leaving dozens more badly burned.

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The third such blast to ravage the market on the northern outskirts of Mexico's capital since 2005 sent up a towering plume of smoke that was lit up by a staccato of bangs and flashes of light. Once the smoke cleared, the open-air bazaar was reduced to a stark expanse of ash, rubble and the charred metal of fireworks stands, casting a pall over the country's Christmas season.

Mexico State health officials said 72 people were being treated for injuries from Tuesday's explosion, including for severe burns, in some cases over 90 percent of their bodies. Ten children were among the hospitalized. Authorities have not yet said what may have caused the explosions which took place in Mexico State, which rings the capital.

Survivor Crescencia Francisco Garcia said she was in the middle of the grid of stalls when the thunderous explosions began. She froze, reflexively looked up at the sky and then took off running through the smoke once she realized everyone was doing so. As she ran she saw people with burns and cuts, and lots of blood.

"Everything was catching fire. Everything was exploding," Francisco said. "The stones were flying, pieces of brick, everything was flying."

Mexico State Gov. Eruviel Avila reported Tuesday night that in addition to the 26 people who perished at the market, three more victims died later in hospitals.

"We are going to identify who is responsible," Avila said.

Sirens wailed and a heavy scent of gunpowder lingered in the air well after the thunderous explosions at the market, which were widely seen in a dramatic video. The smoking, burned out shells of vehicles ringed the perimeter, and first responders and local residents wearing blue masks over their mouths combed through the ash and debris. Firefighters hosed down still-smoldering hotspots.

Tultepec Mayor Armando Portuguez Fuentes said the market was especially well stocked because demand for noisy firecrackers and rockets soars this time of year.

"We are obviously in the high season," Portuguez said. "There was more product than usual because we are a few days away from Christmas, a few days away from New Year's, and those are the days when the products made here are consumed the most."

Cesar Ornelas of Atizapan de Zaragoza was only 10 minutes into shopping with his son and his father when he heard the first explosions. He tried to run, but something knocked him to the ground from behind. He tried several times to get up, unsuccessfully, and ultimately his 15-year-old son Francisco had to drag him out.

"We didn't look back," said Ornelas, who suffered light burns and a large bruise over his left kidney. His white tank top had a fist-size burn on the chest. "We heard how the explosion was kind of going off bit by bit."

Nearly four hours later, he and Francisco limped gingerly out of the market area. Francisco said paramedics told him his leg was likely fractured by flying debris. Ornelas said his 67-year-old father, Ernesto, had run in a different direction and sought refuge in a nearby home. All the father's clothing was burned, and his face and arm were bloodied. An ambulance had spirited him to a hospital, but Ornelas wasn't sure where it was or how serious his injuries were.

"My condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in this accident and my wishes for a quick recovery for the injured," President Enrique Pena Nieto said via Twitter.

A similar fire engulfed the San Pablito Market in 2005, touching off a chain of explosions that leveled hundreds of stalls just ahead of Mexico's Independence Day. A year later a similar incident at the same market also destroyed hundreds of stands.

Portuguez, the Tultepec mayor, said the manufacture and sale of fireworks is a key part of the local economy. He added that it is regulated by law and under the "constant supervision" of the Defense Department, which oversees firearms and explosives.

"This is part of the activity of our town. It is what gives us identity," Portuguez said. "We know it is high-risk, we regret this greatly, but unfortunately many people's livelihoods depend on this activity."

Deadly fireworks explosions have occurred with some regularity in Mexico: In 2002, a blast at a market

in the Gulf coast city of Veracruz killed 29; in 1999, 63 people died when an explosion of illegally stored fireworks destroyed part of the city of Celaya; and in 1988, a fireworks blast in Mexico City's La Merced market killed at least 68.

Associated Press writer Christopher Sherman reported from Tultepec, Mexico, and Peter Orsi reported from Mexico City.

Islamic State group claims Berlin Christmas market attack

By DAVID RISING and FRANK JORDANS, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The Islamic State group claimed responsibility Tuesday for a truck attack on a crowded Berlin Christmas market that German authorities said came right out of the extremist group's playbook, inflicting mass casualties on a soft target fraught with symbolic meaning.

The Monday night attack on the popular market by the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in the heart of former West Berlin left 12 dead and 48 injured — the first mass casualty attack by Islamic extremists carried out on German soil. German security forces were still hunting for the perpetrator after releasing a man from custody for lack of evidence.

The claim of responsibility carried on the Islamic State group's Amaq news agency described the man seen fleeing from the truck as "a soldier of the Islamic State" who "carried out the attack in response to calls for targeting citizens of the Crusader coalition."

Germany is not involved in anti-IS combat operations, but has Tornado jets and a refueling plane stationed in Turkey in support of the coalition fighting militants in Syria, as well as a frigate protecting a French aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean, among other assets.

The claim of responsibility came not long after German prosecutors said they had released a man picked up near the scene of the attack, initially suspected of driving the truck.

The man, a Pakistani citizen who came to Germany last year, was taken into custody based on a description from witnesses of a suspect who jumped out of the truck and fled after the attack.

Even before his release, officials had expressed doubt the man was behind the attack.

"We may still have a dangerous criminal out there," warned Berlin police chief Klaus Kandt, whose office urged people to be "particularly vigilant" and report "suspicious movement" using a special hotline.

Though Germany had not seen any successful mass-casualty Islamic extremist attacks until Monday, attempts and recent attacks in neighboring France and Belgium had made many feel it was inevitable.

"We've all been prepared that something like this could happen, so we were not surprised," said economics student Maximilian Much.

The 24-year-old Berliner said the attack hit home because he'd often visited the Christmas market with his girlfriend, but that he wouldn't let himself be led by emotion.

"I'm not going to change my life style now," he said. "The chances that I get killed in a car or bike accident are bigger."

Germany's top prosecutor, Peter Frank, told reporters the attack on the popular market was reminiscent of July's deadly truck rampage in Nice and appeared to follow instructions published by the Islamic State group.

"There is also the prominent and symbolic target of a Christmas market, and the modus operandi that mirrors at least past calls by jihadi terror organizations," Frank said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman John Kirby said the attack "bears the hallmarks of previous terror attacks," but said U.S. officials didn't have enough information to back up the IS claim of responsibility. "There is no direct evidence of a tie or a link to a terrorist organization," he said.

The man arrested near the scene denied any involvement in the attack. Under German law, prosecutors have until the end of a calendar day following an arrest to seek a formal arrest warrant keeping a suspect in custody.

Prosecutors said they decided to release him after turning up no forensic evidence proving he was in the truck's cab during the rampage, and no witnesses who were able to follow him from the scene to where

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he was picked up.

Among the injured was Inaki Ellakuria, who underwent surgery Tuesday for a broken tibia and fibula on his left leg. He said he knew immediately it was no accident.

"It came fast, too fast to be driving off the road accidentally," the 21-year-old student from Spain tweeted only minutes after the attack. "It has swept me and ran over both of my legs."

Juan Jose Ellakuria told the Associated Press his son also suffered broken bones in his right ankle and instep, as well as damage to his hip.

"He's come out of surgery and he's making good progress," Ellakuria said.

Frank, the German prosecutor, said there were still a lot of unanswered questions.

"We don't know for sure whether it was one or several perpetrators," he said. "We don't know for sure whether he, or they, had support. These investigations aren't concluded yet."

Witnesses saw only one man flee from the truck after it hurtled through the market for 60 to 80 meters (200 to 260 feet) before coming to a stop near the 19th-century church, which was badly damaged in World War II bombing but left standing as a memorial to the destruction of the war.

The head of the Federal Criminal Police Office said authorities had yet to find a pistol that is believed to have been used to kill the Polish truck driver who was supposed to be delivering the steel beams the truck was carrying.

The Polish owner of the truck, Ariel Zurawski, said he last spoke with the driver, his cousin, around noon on Monday and he told him he was in Berlin and scheduled to unload Tuesday morning.

"They must have done something to my driver," he told TVN24.

Flags flew at half-staff on government buildings across the country Tuesday, and in Berlin the national and city flags were projected onto the Brandenburg Gate in tribute to the victims.

Authorities said that in addition to the Polish truck driver, six of the people killed were German but the others have not yet been identified.

Germans have been increasingly wary since two attacks by asylum-seekers last summer were claimed by the Islamic State group. Five people were wounded in an ax rampage on a train near Wuerzburg and 15 were wounded 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 night's attack, blaming Chancellor Angela Merkel for what happened.

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

The attack also raised concerns of a possible backlash.

"No question, the atmosphere in this country will change and become more tense," said Tarik Elsayed, the 22-year-old German-born son of Egyptian parents.

"Of course, as an Arab I will get more hostile looks, it will get only worse now."

But Tarek Elmasoudi, an Egyptian asylum-seeker, said he wasn't afraid of repercussions. "The Germans are very nice and I want to stay here."

Already under pressure for the huge influx of migrants, Merkel addressed head-on the possibility that an asylum-seeker was responsible for the carnage.

"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," she said in a nationally televised statement.

"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."

"Twelve people who were still among us yesterday, who were looking forward to Christmas, who had plans for the holidays, aren't among us anymore," she said. "A gruesome and ultimately incomprehensible act has robbed them of their lives."

Associated Press writers Kirsten Grieshaber, Ciarian Fahey and Geir Moulson in Berlin, Bassem Mroue in Beirut, Aritz Parra in Madrid, Bradley Klapper in Washington and Angela Charlton in Paris contributed to this report.

Volkswagen deal gives some diesel car owners buyback option

By SUDHIN THANAWALA, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Volkswagen reached a deal that will give at least some owners of the remaining 80,000 diesel vehicles caught in the company's emissions cheating scandal the option of a buyback and provide compensation to all of them on top of any repurchase or repairs, U.S. regulators and a federal judge said Tuesday.

The \$1 billion settlement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will give owners of 20,000 3-liter diesel cars the choice of a buyback. The figure does not include additional payments to owners.

Volkswagen believes it can bring the other 60,000 vehicles into compliance with pollution regulations and will not offer a buyback if that's the case, U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer said in San Francisco.

The deal includes \$225 million the German automaker will contribute to an environmental fund to offset the cars' excess pollution, Cynthia Giles of the EPA said in a conference call with reporters.

Additional compensation for car owners will be substantial, according to the judge, but he did not provide a figure and said the sides still had more work to do.

"I am optimistic the parties will resolve the remaining issues," Breyer said, without elaborating on what was left to be done.

The settlement was a major step toward rectifying lawsuits stemming from the global scandal that erupted last year, damaging Volkswagen's reputation and hurting its sales. The company previously reached a nearly \$15 billion deal for 475,000 2-liter diesel cars also programmed to cheat on emissions tests.

Hinrich J. Woebcken, president and CEO of Volkswagen Group of America Inc., said the agreement announced Tuesday was part of Volkswagen's "efforts to make things right" for its customers.

"We are committed to earning back the trust of all our stakeholders and thank our customers and dealers in the United States for their patience as the process moves forward," he said in a statement.

The deal protects the environment "by removing the cars from road and by offsetting harmful emissions that resulted from their cheating," said Giles with the EPA.

It requires the company to buy back or terminate leases on 2009-2012 Volkswagen Touareg and Audi Q7 diesels. The EPA says it's unlikely those can be fixed to meet clean-air standards.

For newer 3-liter vehicles — such as the 2013-2016 Volkswagen Touareg, 2013-2015 Audi Q7, 2013-2016 Porsche Cayenne, and 2014-2016 Audi A6 quattro, A7 quattro, A8, A8L and Q5 — a fix is possible, so buybacks won't be offered.

Giles said the fix should be submitted soon.

The new settlement appears to mirror the terms for the cars with smaller engines. The previous deal gives 2-liter owners the option to have the automaker buy back their vehicle or pay for repairs.

Volkswagen also will pay those owners \$5,100 to \$10,000 each.

The company has agreed to spend up to \$10 billion compensating those consumers. That settlement also includes \$2.7 billion for unspecified environmental mitigation and \$2 billion to promote zero-emissions vehicles.

The settlements emerged out of lawsuits from car owners and the U.S. Department of Justice after the EPA said Volkswagen had fitted many of its cars with software to fool emissions tests.

The software recognized when the cars were being tested on a treadmill and turned on pollution controls. The controls were turned off when the cars returned to the road. The EPA alleged the scheme let the cars spew up to 40 times the allowable limit of nitrogen oxide, which can cause respiratory problems in humans.

The company has reached a separate \$1.2 billion deal with its U.S. dealers and is still facing potentially billions more in fines and penalties and possible criminal charges.

AP Auto Writer Tom Krisher contributed from Detroit.

The Latest: Israeli envoy urges Trump to move embassy

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Latest on President-elect Donald Trump (all times EST):

7:20 p.m.

The Israeli ambassador to the United States is urging the incoming Trump administration to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

Trump and his nominee for U.S. ambassador to Israel have pledged to move the embassy. But previous Republican presidents have made that promise without following through.

Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer says it would be a "great step forward" for peace. He tells a Hanukkah reception at the Israeli embassy in Washington that it would send a "strong message against delegitimization of Israel."

The U.S. and nearly every other country have their embassies in Tel Aviv. Israel considers Jerusalem its capital, but Palestinians claim part of Jerusalem as the capital for a future Palestinian state.

U.S. presidents have repeatedly waived a law requiring the embassy to be moved.

2:40 p.m.

Donald Trump's children may see his move to the White House as a way to raise money for pet causes.

Two recent fundraising pitches featuring the incoming first family were meant to benefit charities. But they also raised the possibility the Trumps are inappropriately selling access.

Eric Trump tried auctioning coffee with his sister, Ivanka, to raise money for a children's hospital. Eric and Donald Trump Jr. are named as part of a fundraiser that offered the chance to rub elbows with their father during Inauguration weekend.

These events are dissolving as quickly as they become public, suggesting the family is learning on the fly what's acceptable.

The Ivanka Trump coffee has been canceled. And on the Inauguration event, Hope Hicks, a Trump spokeswoman, said the sons "are not involved."

Noon:

President-elect Donald Trump is considering Jovita Carranza, who worked in President George W. Bush's administration, as his choice for U.S. trade representative.

Trump is meeting with Carranza at his home in Florida on Tuesday. Carranza served as deputy administrator of the Small Business Administration under Bush.

Trump is also meeting with businessman Luis Quinonez, who runs a company with military and health care ties. Quinonez is said to be under consideration as Veterans Affairs secretary.

With just a handful of Cabinet posts to fill, Trump is facing some criticism for a lack of diversity in his senior team, which currently includes no Hispanics. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials said Tuesday that it was "deeply concerned" at the lack of Hispanics considered for top jobs.

Carranza was a member of Trump's Hispanic advisory council during the campaign.

10:14 a.m.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is rejecting calls for a special Senate investigative committee focused on possible interference in U.S. elections by Russia and other countries.

McConnell says a finding by U.S. intelligence officials that Moscow hacked Democratic emails in a bid to elevate Donald Trump "is a serious issue, but it doesn't require a select committee."

The Republican leader says in an interview with Kentucky Educational Television that he is "very concerned" that "the Russians were messing around in our elections," but said the Senate intelligence committee is able to investigate it.

Senators including Democrat Chuck Schumer of New York and Republican John McCain of Arizona have

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called for a special Senate committee to investigate efforts by Russia, China and Iran to meddle in U.S. elections.

8:40 a.m.

Donald Trump is taking issue with Bill Clinton's criticisms of him.

Clinton told a weekly newspaper in New York state earlier this month that Trump "doesn't know much." Clinton went on to say: "One thing he does know is how to get angry, white men to vote for him." The ex-president also claimed that the president-elect called him after his election victory over Hillary Clinton.

First of all, Trump said in a two-part tweet Tuesday, "Bill Clinton stated that I called him after the election. Wrong, he called me (with a very nice congratulations)."

Trump added that Clinton is the one who "doesn't know much"... especially how to get people, even with an unlimited budget, out to vote in the vital swing states (and more)." The Clinton campaign, Trump says, "focused on the wrong states."

Trump fired off those tweets the morning after he formally won the presidency in Monday's Electoral College tally.

Bill Clinton made his comments to The Record-Review, serving the towns of Bedford and Pound Ridge.

3:10 a.m.

Jumping ahead of investigators, President-elect Donald Trump is blaming Islamic terrorists 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 attacks. 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 says a "radical Islamic terrorist" had assassinated the diplomat, Andrei Karlov.

Newsweek reporter seeks ID of Twitter user after seizure

By CLAUDIA LAUER, Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A Newsweek reporter who has epilepsy said he had a seizure after being sent a message on Twitter intended to trigger such an episode and is seeking information from the social media company to identify the person responsible for the tweet.

The image in question — which included a strobe effect and the words, "You deserve a seizure for your posts" — was apparently sent in response to Kurt Eichenwald's outspoken criticism of President-elect Donald Trump. Eichenwald, who has a home in Texas, said in court documents that the image triggered a seizure.

Eichenwald posted a signed copy of a Dallas County District Court order to Twitter on Tuesday that allows him to depose Twitter executives and orders the company to preserve any information or documents regarding the person who sent the image. Eichenwald wrote that "Twitter agreed to an expedited order," meaning the company won't challenge the request for information. Eichenwald is seeking the information for a potential lawsuit, likely against the person who sent the tweet since court document say he doesn't plan to sue Twitter.

A Twitter representative said via email that the company does not comment on individual accounts or investigations. Guidelines for law enforcement listed on the company's website include a requirement for a court order or subpoena before it releases user information.

The deposition request, filed Monday, said that Twitter suspended the account of @jew_goldstein "upon learning of the assault." The sender had identified him or herself with the alias Ari Goldstein.

The sender "succeeded in his effort to use Twitter as a means of committing assault, causing Petitioner to have a seizure which led to personal injury," Eichenwald's attorneys wrote.

Eichenwald's attorney didn't immediately return a message seeking comment Tuesday. Eichenwald did

not immediately return an email seeking comment.

Eichenwald told ABC's "Good Morning America" that he has received numerous copycat strobe messages from "people who identify themselves as Trump supporters" and that he is reporting each of them to Twitter to ask that their accounts be suspended.

"It is amazing to me that simply because I am a political reporter, simply because I write about Donald Trump that we have become so sick and twisted in this country that people think they have the right and obligation to inflict potentially very serious injury," he said.

Mark Bennett, a Houston criminal defense and free speech attorney, said he believes a lawsuit alleging physical harm from a tweet would be "novel."

"I don't know of a case where someone has been sued or prosecuted for speech online causing physical harm," he said. "It's a tough sell because there's a lot of distance between the speech and the injury."

However, Houston attorney Joe Larsen said Eichenwald doesn't appear to be challenging the speech.

"I don't think it's fair to say (Eichenwald) is saying he was harmed by the form of speech. I don't think he's suing about that. I think the ultimate suit will be one for assault," said Larsen, who is a board member of the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas.

Twitter's transparency report shows more than 2,500 requests for user information were made regarding criminal allegations in the United States in the first six months of this year. The company released some information in 82 percent of those requests, according to the report.

This story has been corrected to remove reference to Ari Goldstein being the name of a character on "Entourage."

FBI sought evidence of intrusions in Hillary Clinton emails

By TOM HAYS, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The FBI was trying to get a look at thousands of Hillary Clinton's emails on disgraced former congressman Anthony Weiner's computer partly to see if anyone had hacked in to steal classified information, according to court documents unsealed Tuesday.

Investigating possible hacking appeared to be a secondary rationale for the email search, which FBI Director James Comey launched in the waning days of the presidential election.

When the FBI asked a magistrate judge in New York to issue a search warrant for Weiner's computer on Oct. 30, an agent spent pages describing concerns it might contain evidence Clinton had mishandled classified information.

The warrant application, made public Tuesday, was filed two days after Comey informed Congress investigators had discovered email correspondence that could be pertinent to his recently closed probe of Clinton's use of a private email server while she was secretary of state.

In the document, the agent wrote that thousands of emails between Clinton and top aide Huma Abedin had been discovered on a laptop used by Weiner, Abedin's estranged husband.

At the time, investigators had yet to look at the content of those emails, but based on previous work in the case the agent wrote they had reason to suspect they might contain classified material, possibly including top-secret information that could cause "grave damage to national security" if disclosed.

"A complete forensic analysis and review," the agent added, "will also allow the FBI to determine if there is any evidence of computer intrusions into the subject laptop, and to determine if classified information was accessed by unauthorized users or transferred to any other unauthorized systems."

A magistrate judge signed off on the search warrant that day.

The FBI hasn't publicly revealed whether it found any evidence of a hacking attempt.

During the presidential campaign, hackers accessed the email accounts of Democratic Party officials and Clinton's campaign chief, John Podesta, and leaked them to the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks.

U.S. intelligence officials have linked the hacking to Russia's intelligence agency and its military intel-

ligence division, although Moscow has denied those accusations.

After getting court consent to delve into the newly discovered emails on Weiner's computer, agents spent several days analyzing them before Comey announced they contained no new evidence of wrongdoing by Clinton.

The surprise restart of the email probe, however, upended the presidential race just days before the election. Clinton supporters have blamed the investigation for her loss to Republican Donald Trump.

Weiner's laptop was initially seized by agents investigating his online relationship with a teenage girl in North Carolina. That inquiry is ongoing.

Los Angeles lawyer E. Randol Schoenberg, who had sued to obtain the court papers, said in a statement he saw "nothing at all in the search warrant application that would give rise to probable cause, nothing that would make anyone suspect that there was anything on the laptop beyond what the FBI had already searched and determined not to be evidence of a crime, nothing to suggest that there would be anything other than routine correspondence between Secretary Clinton and her longtime aide Huma Abedin."

U.S. District Judge P. Kevin Castel ruled Monday the public had a right to see the search warrant application and supporting paperwork. He ordered the redaction of sections of the paperwork related to the investigation into Weiner's online correspondence.

Weiner, who resigned from congress in 2011 after revelations he was sending sexually explicit messages to multiple women, has acknowledged he corresponded with the teenage girl and has apologized for his "terrible judgment."

Obama bans future oil leases in much of Arctic, Atlantic

By KEVIN FREKING, Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — President Barack Obama on Tuesday designated the bulk of U.S.-owned waters in the Arctic Ocean and certain areas in the Atlantic Ocean as indefinitely off limits to future oil and gas leasing.

The move helps put some finishing touches on Obama's environmental legacy while also testing President-elect Donald Trump's promise to unleash the nation's untapped energy reserves.

The White House announced the actions in conjunction with the government of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, which also placed a moratorium on new oil and gas leasing in its Arctic waters, subject to periodic review.

Obama is making use of an arcane provision in a 1953 law to ban offshore leases in the waters permanently. The statute says that "the president of the United States may, from time to time, withdraw from disposition any of the unleased lands of the outer Continental Shelf."

Environmental groups hope the ban, despite relying on executive powers, will be difficult for future presidents to reverse. The White House said it's confident the president's order will withstand legal challenge and said the language of the statute provides no authority for subsequent presidents to undo permanent withdrawals.

The Atlantic waters placed off limits to new oil and gas leasing are 31 canyons stretching off the coast of New England south to Virginia, though some had hoped for a more extensive ban that would have extended further south.

Existing leases aren't affected by the president's executive actions.

The administration cited environmental concerns in both regions to justify the moratorium. Obama also cited the importance of the Chukchi and Beaufort seas in providing subsistence for native Alaskans and the vulnerability of the ecosystem to an oil spill to justify his directive.

Obama also noted the level of fuel production occurring in the Arctic. Obama said just 0.1 percent of offshore crude production came from the Arctic in 2015, and at current oil prices, significant production would not occur in future decades.

"That's why looking forward, we must continue to focus on economic empowerment for Arctic communities beyond this one sector," Obama said.

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Still, industry officials objected to Obama's memorandum, calling it "last minute political rhetoric."

"Instead of building on our nation's position as a global energy leader, today's unilateral mandate could put America back on a path of energy dependence for decades to come," said Dan Naatz of the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

And Alaska Gov. Bill Walker, an independent, said Obama's move marginalized local voices. He said no one is more invested than Alaskans in making sure Arctic habitats are protected.

"To lock it up against any further exploration or development activity is akin to saying that the voices of activists who live in Lower 48 cities have a greater stake than those to whom the Arctic is our front yard and our back yard," he said in a statement.

In issuing a permanent ban, Obama appears to be trying to tie the hands of his successor. Trump has vowed a domestic energy revolution and is filling his Cabinet with nominees deeply opposed to Obama's environmental and climate change actions.

Environmental groups were calling for a permanent ban even before the presidential election, but Trump's victory has provided greater urgency for them and for businesses that rely on tourism and fishing. Trump has said he intends to use all available fuel reserves for energy self-sufficiency — and that it's time to open up offshore drilling.

"This decision will help protect existing lucrative coastal tourism and fishing businesses from offshore drilling, which promises smaller, short-lived returns and threatens coastal livelihoods," said Jacqueline Savitz, a senior vice president at the advocacy group, Oceana.

A key question to be answered is how difficult it will be for future presidents to overturn Obama's decision should they seek to do so.

The American Petroleum Institute pointed to 2008 when President George W. Bush used a simple memorandum to remove previously withdrawn lands and make all Outer Continental Shelf lands available for leasing except marine sanctuaries.

"Fortunately, there is no such thing as a permanent ban," said the institute's Erik Milito.

But White House officials in a conference call with reporters said previous "indefinite withdrawals" remain in place and voiced confidence that Obama's decision will stand.

Advocacy groups were already warning that they were prepared to file suit to protect the ban during future administrations.

"If Donald Trump tries to reverse President Obama's withdrawals, he will find himself in court," said Marissa Knodel of Friends of the Earth.

Frank Knapp, president of the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce in Columbia, said he was "extremely disappointed" in the decision not to extend drilling protections to the entire Atlantic seaboard.

Knapp and his group were among a number of business groups in the southeast who had advocated for banning new drilling leases off their shores, arguing that the environmental impacts would hurt fishing, tourism and other businesses the region relies upon. He'd gone to Washington to meet with Obama administration officials, and believed the entire Atlantic was to be protected.

The decision came as Obama spends the holidays in Hawaii. Some Democratic lawmakers applauded Obama, while some Republicans were highly critical.

"As President-elect Trump nominates fossil fuel allies to his Cabinet, President Obama has instead put the interests of millions of Americans ahead of those of Big Oil with these permanent protections," said Democratic Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts.

"The extremes to which this president will go to appease special interests never ceases to amaze," countered Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, and chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources. "This is not a moral calling; it's an abuse of power."

Associated Press writers Josh Lederman in Washington, Jason Dearen in Gainesville, Florida, and Becky Bohrer in Juneau, Alaska, contributed to this report.

On Twitter, reach Kevin Freking at <https://twitter.com/APkfreking>

Trump hosts candidates for key Veterans Affairs post

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump met Tuesday with candidates for his unfilled Cabinet positions, including prospective hires to run the Department of Veterans Affairs, a beleaguered agency that the Republican businessman has vowed to overhaul.

Vice President-elect Mike Pence met with members of his incoming national security team a day after acts of violence rocked the world.

At Mar-a-Lago, Trump's palatial Florida estate, the president-elect met with Luis Quinonez, who runs a company with military and health care ties and is said to be under consideration for VA secretary. He also interviewed Toby Cosgrove, the CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, who was a top contender to replace Eric Shinseki when he resigned at the VA in 2014. Cosgrove later withdrew from consideration.

Trump repeatedly pledged during the campaign to fix the woes at the department and said he would "take care of great veterans." But he also came under scrutiny for being slow in paying out money raised for veterans groups and for suggesting that "strong" veterans don't need treatment for mental health problems.

Others said to be considered for the post include former Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown, Florida Rep. Jeff Miller and Pete Hegseth, an Army veteran and former CEO of Concerned Veterans for America.

Trump is also considering Jovita Carranza, who worked in President George W. Bush's administration, as his choice for U.S. trade representative. She served as deputy administrator of the Small Business Administration under Bush.

With just a handful of Cabinet posts to fill, Trump is facing some criticism for a lack of diversity in his senior team, which currently includes no Hispanics. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials said Tuesday that it was "deeply concerned" at the lack of Hispanics considered for top jobs. Carranza was a member of Trump's Hispanic advisory council during the campaign.

Pence, meanwhile, met in Washington with former Texas state official Susan Combs, who served both as state agriculture commissioner and comptroller. Trump also needs to fill the Agriculture Cabinet slot. Transition officials did not immediately confirm if Combs is up for that post.

Earlier Tuesday, Trump was back on Twitter after Bill Clinton told a suburban New York City newspaper this month that Trump "doesn't know much. One thing he does know is how to get angry, white men to vote for him."

The Bedford-Pound Ridge Record Review also reported that Clinton claimed that Trump called him after his election victory over Hillary Clinton.

"Wrong, he called me (with a very nice congratulations)," Trump tweeted. The president-elect added that Clinton is the one who "doesn't know much... especially how to get people, even with an unlimited budget, out to vote in the vital swing states (and more)." The Clinton campaign, he said, "focused on the wrong states."

Clinton later responded on Twitter, writing, "Here's one thing @realDonaldTrump and I can agree on — I called him after the election."

The tweets come after a rattling day of violence around the world — with Trump appearing to jump ahead of investigators to blame Islamic terrorists for deadly incidents in Turkey and Germany and vowing anew to eradicate their regional and global networks.

Pence met with retired Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn, the incoming national security adviser; retired Gen. John Kelly, Trump's nominee for head of Homeland Security; retired Gen. James Mattis, the pick for defense secretary; and Rex Tillerson, the head of Exxon Mobil and the intended nominee for secretary of state. Aides said the meeting was planned before the acts of violence, though they would be discussed.

Flynn was also slated to meet with Trump at Mar-a-Lago on Wednesday. The president-elect is planning on staying at his lush Palm Beach resort through the holidays.

Associated Press writers Darlene Superville in Palm Beach and Julie Pace and Laurie Kellman in Washington contributed to this report.

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Wisconsin's Walker asks Trump for more control over refugees

By SCOTT BAUER, Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker asked President-elect Donald Trump in a letter delivered Tuesday to give his state more authority in determining how many refugees can come from countries with ties to terrorism.

Walker also asked for help to allow the state to proceed with drug testing for some food stamp recipients and legalize the hunting of gray wolves.

The requests are among several that Walker, a Republican who challenged Trump for the GOP presidential nomination, makes in the letter. Walker offered few details on what he wanted Trump to do. It also wasn't immediately clear how quickly Trump could move to address his concerns given that some of what Walker wants has been blocked in court or would require law changes.

Walker is drawing attention to issues that play well with conservatives and on which he and President Barack Obama's administration disagree. Walker told The Associated Press that he was "very optimistic" Trump would act quickly on his requests after taking office next month.

Trump's spokesman did not immediately return an email seeking comment Tuesday. Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, of Wisconsin, urged Trump to work with the governor on what he called "common sense reforms to increase flexibility and return authority to Wisconsin."

On the refugee issue, Walker said governors and states should "have a broader role in determining how many refugees and from which countries" are admitted "until we are comfortable with the vetting process that is being utilized to screen these individuals."

"We have no idea how many people may have ties to the Islamic State or to other forms of radical Islamic terrorism or jihadist groups, and I think it's a legitimate public safety concern," Walker said in the interview.

Wisconsin has been accepting refugee resettlements since 1974. Since 2000, more than 16,000 refugees have been resettled in the state from 50 different countries, according to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

One of the leading refugee resettlement agencies operating in the state is Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. It plans to relocate 510 refugees in the state next year, said Mary Flynn, the group's refugee resettlement manager.

Flynn said she is confident in the security screening process that's already in place.

"I also see details in my daily work that I know these security screenings are ongoing and continuous until the person arrives in the United States," she said. And in some cases the monitoring continues after the person is relocated, Flynn said.

Flynn said she wanted to review Walker's letter to Trump before commenting on it in detail.

Walker is also hoping a Trump administration will be more open to drug testing for childless adults who receive food stamps.

Walker sued Obama's administration to permit such drug testing after the Agriculture Department said federal law prohibits such screening. There's also been a Republican push in Congress to allow for it.

Walker also wants to charge higher premiums for childless adults earning less than the federal poverty level of \$11,880 a year if they "purposefully increase their health risks," without saying what that means.

The hunting of gray wolves in Wisconsin is a hot issue, particularly in more rural northern parts of the state. Wolf hunting is not allowed in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota under a 2014 federal judge's ruling that threw out an Obama administration decision to remove gray wolves in the western Great Lakes region from the endangered species list.

Animal protection groups contend wolves must remain protected, but advocates for hunting them say they are increasing in number, becoming more aggressive and are moving south. Walker argues in the letter that Wisconsin successfully managed the wolf population prior to the court ruling and should be allowed to do so again.

Walker said he has spoken several times with Vice President-elect Mike Pence about these requests. Walker has a close relationship with Pence, the governor of Indiana and helped him prepare for his vice presidential debate earlier this year.

Pence was among dozens of governors from mostly GOP states who attempted to block Syrian refugees following the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris, saying there were questions about the federal government's refugee screening process. A federal appeals court blocked Pence's attempt to prevent social service agencies from helping resettle immigrants from certain countries in Indiana. A three-judge panel in October called it "nightmare speculation" that refugees might commit acts of terror.

AP writer Rick Callahan in Indianapolis contributed to this story.

Follow Scott Bauer on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/sbauerAP> and find more of his work at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/scott-bauer>

Russia, Iran, Turkey cast themselves as deal-makers in Syria

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and ZEINA KARAM, Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia, Turkey and Iran cast themselves as the essential deal-makers in Syria on Tuesday, saying at a trilateral meeting in Moscow that their cooperation could pave the way for a future settlement in Syria.

The meeting of foreign and defense ministers of the three nations that previously backed the opposing sides in the nearly six-year conflict reflected a shared interest in brokering a compromise. The talks come a day after the killing of the Russian ambassador in Turkey, but Moscow and Ankara vowed that the attack wouldn't hurt their rapprochement.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said after the talks that the three nations believe their efforts could overcome the "stagnation" in the Syrian peace process.

"The format you see today is the most efficient one," Lavrov said. "It's not an attempt to cast a shadow on the efforts taken by our other partners, it's just stating the facts."

He cited the evacuation of civilians and rebels from Aleppo, brokered by Moscow and Ankara, as proof of the efficiency of the trilateral cooperation. "More than any others, our states are ready to help the settlement with real deeds and not just words," he said.

Lavrov added that it would take one or two days to complete the evacuations.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said 37,500 people had been evacuated from Aleppo, crediting Russia with making it possible.

Cavusoglu said they talked about establishing a cease-fire across the entire territory of Syria, adding that the Islamic State group and al-Qaida's branch in Syria, the Fatah al-Sham Front, would be excluded from the deal.

The three ministers carefully tip-toed around their differences. Lavrov noted the need for all parties to stop sponsoring "terrorists," while Cavusoglu said that policy should also apply to the Hezbollah, a close ally of both Tehran and Damascus.

Zarif replied with a smile that the United Nations Security Council has branded the Islamic State group and Fatah al-Sham Front terrorist organizations, while opinions about other groups may vary.

The ministers said in their statements that the three nations are ready to act as guarantors of a cease-fire deal that would also allow the deliveries of humanitarian assistance and free travel of civilians, inviting other nations which have influence with Syrian groups to help reach the agreement.

The United States was notably absent from the meeting, although Lavrov had a phone call with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry later Tuesday, informing him about the results of the trilateral talks.

The meeting appears to signal that the former rivals may have reached a deal on dividing spheres of influence in Syria that would see Turkey cut support for Assad's foes in exchange for freedom of action in the areas along its border. Turkey's priority is to prevent Syria's Kurds from merging areas under their control.

Sergei Fokin, a Moscow-based military analyst, said that the trilateral meeting marked a significant step toward settling the conflict. "Russia, Iran and Turkey will clearly play a dominant role while the influence of other players, primarily Saudi Arabia, will dwindle," he said, according to the Interfax news agency.

In Aleppo, a fleet of buses entered east Aleppo again Tuesday afternoon to evacuate the remaining rebels and civilians from the city, activists said. Thousands of people have been evacuated over the past week, heading to opposition-held areas further north.

Residents from eastern Aleppo and the Syrian opposition say the evacuation amounts to forced displacement. Months of devastating Syrian and Russian air raids that destroyed buildings, hospitals and schools in the enclave — and reduced much of eastern Aleppo to rubble — left the residents with little choice but to evacuate.

The taking of all of eastern Aleppo would mark Assad's greatest victory since the 2011 uprising against his family's four-decade rule, but the cost has been staggering. Thousands of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands more have been displaced, many of whom may never return.

In western Aleppo, a bomb went off as scores of people were gathered to celebrate the return of Aleppo to government control as well as a Christmas tree-lighting event.

Syrian state TV said there were no injuries from the bomb which went off in a predominantly Christian area near Azizieh square where dozens of Syrians were dancing and waving Syrian flags in celebration. The attack briefly disrupted the party which resumed few minutes later.

The precise number of people seeking evacuation from Aleppo — and who have already left — has never been clear.

Rami Aburrahman, the head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said 17,000 civilians and 5,000 fighters have left; the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has overseen the evacuations, said 25,000 have left; and the Turkish Foreign Ministry's figure is 37,000.

Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, said Monday's killing of Russian Ambassador Andrei Karlov in Ankara was a provocation by those who want to derail peace talks for Syria and "drive a wedge between Russia and Turkey," but added that the two countries should cooperate even more closely.

The development followed a U.N. Security Council resolution that was agreed on Monday night to shore up the number of observers to monitor the exodus.

Karam reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Natalya Vasilyeva in Moscow, Philip Issa in Beirut and Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey contributed to this report.

Berlin truck rampage survivor: 'It ran over both of my legs'

By ARITZ PARRA, Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Inaki Ellakuria, a 21-year-old student from Spain, knew immediately that this was no accident.

"I heard the truck crashing against the first stall," he tweeted Monday, only minutes after the vehicle ran over dozens of shoppers at a Christmas market in Berlin.

"It came fast, too fast to be driving off the road accidentally," he posted.

His next tweet was chilling: "It has swept me and ran over both of my legs."

Ellakuria was one of the 48 injured in a truck attack on the market — and his family is grateful he was not among the 12 killed in Monday night's attack near the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin.

On Tuesday, he underwent surgery at a hospital in Berlin for the broken tibia and fibula on his left leg. He also has broken bones in his right ankle and instep, as well as damage to his hip, but he is recovering

well, according to his relatives.

"He's come out of surgery and he's making good progress," his father Juan Jose Ellakuria said over the phone from Berlin, where his parents had traveled on Tuesday morning from Bilbao in northern Spain. "He suffered a big shock yesterday and today. Even if he's improving, he's still affected."

Ellakuria, who has been studying economics in Berlin on a scholarship, was passing through the area with two friends when the black truck drove at high speed, running over market stalls and visitors in what German authorities have labeled an "act of terrorism."

His two female friends were unhurt and one rang up his family with the news of his injuries.

"It hurts every time I think about it. I didn't think I was going to overcome the pain," Ellakuria wrote in another tweet.

But he was grateful for the kindness of strangers, thanking them online for the help he received from passers-by.

"Those who were not hurt were great with us. Cushions, water, food, blankets, hats, scarfs," he wrote.

Turkey and Russia probe slaying of envoy in Ankara gallery

By SUZAN FRASER and ELENA BECATOROS, Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Investigators from Turkey and Russia hunted for clues Tuesday in the assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey in front of stunned onlookers at a photo exhibition in Ankara.

A team of 18 Russian investigators and foreign ministry officials arrived in Turkey and began inspecting the art gallery where the shooting of Andrei Karlov took place.

Central to the joint Turkish-Russian investigation is whether Mevlut Mert Altintas, a member of Ankara's riot police squad, planned the attack alone.

One senior Turkish government official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release details to the press, said it was unlikely Altintas acted alone.

The official said the killing had all the marks of being "fully professional, not a one-man action."

So far, authorities have detained only people close to the gunman in their investigation: Altintas' parents, sister, three other relatives and his roommate in Ankara.

Independent Turkish security analyst Abdullah Agar said it was "likely that an organization was behind" the assassination.

The analyst said that Altintas' behavior and the manner in which he carried out the attack "gives the impression that he received training that was much more than riot police training."

Agar also said the gunman's words, which he uttered in Arabic, were from a passage frequently cited by Jihadists.

Altintas shouted "Don't forget Aleppo! Don't forget Syria!" in Turkish during the attack, and also yelled "Allahu akbar," the Arabic phrase for "God is great." He continued in Arabic: "We are the descendants of those who supported the Prophet Muhammad, for jihad."

A Turkish Foreign Ministry official said the country's foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, provided U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry information on the assailant during a telephone conversation on Tuesday.

Cavusoglu also told Kerry that both Turkey and Russia "know" that a movement led by U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen was behind the attack, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with government rules.

Turkey has accused Gulen of orchestrating a failed military coup in July aimed at toppling President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and accuses the cleric of wanting to destabilize Turkey. It is pressing the United States to extradite Gulen to Turkey to stand trial for his alleged role in the coup attempt. Gulen has denied the accusations.

Few details about the policeman or the initial investigation have been made public. According to the state-run Anadolu news agency, Altintas took leave from work and on Dec. 14 made a hotel reservation near the art exhibition center. He checked into the hotel on Monday. Following the attack, police searched and later sealed his hotel room, but did not announce whether anything was found there.

On arrival at the art gallery where the photo exhibition was taking place, Altintas was apparently initially

stopped by security, but managed to get through with his weapon by using his police ID. The gun he used to shoot Karlov appeared to be a weapon that is standard issue for Turkey's riot police.

Originally from the western town of Soke, near Turkey's Aegean coast, Altintas had been serving in Ankara's riot police for the past two and a half years. But how or why he became impassioned with the war in Syria was unclear.

Police investigators said the policeman lived in an apartment building in Demetevler, a northern district of Ankara.

Some neighbors described him as a quiet person who kept to himself.

"He seemed to be a quiet and calm person. He was not speaking to us too much," said Halil Karan, a 22-year-old shopkeeper in the area. "We were seeing him in the evenings. He didn't come to his home for a long time though."

Some residents in the area said he mainly lived elsewhere in the capital.

Both Russia and Turkey have vowed that the assassination would not derail efforts to repair bilateral ties. Turkey and Russia have been at odds mainly over their opposing views to the conflict in Syria, with Moscow backing Syrian President Bashar Assad and Ankara supporting rebels fighting to depose him. With Russia's air support, Syrian government forces have pushed the rebels out of their last foothold in Aleppo.

Karlov's assassination came after days of protests by Turks angry over Moscow's support for Assad and Russia's actions in Aleppo.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he and Russian President Vladimir Putin were "in agreement that this was an open provocation" and that a joint investigation was being conducted. The two spoke Monday night.

"Together with Mr. Putin, we have an understanding that our cooperation, especially in Syria, will not be affected by this attack," he said.

Karlov's body was flown home to Moscow on Tuesday afternoon after an emotional ceremony at Ankara Airport attended by Turkish government officials and diplomats. Karlov's wife, Marina Karlova, wept as her husband's flag-draped coffin was carried by a Turkish honor guard. She laid two red carnations on the coffin before it was loaded onto the aircraft.

On Monday evening, 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.

Nataliya Vasilyeva contributed to this report from Moscow.

McConnell rejects calls for select panel on Russian meddling

By **MATTHEW DALY**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is rejecting bipartisan calls for a special committee to investigate Russian interference in the U.S. election, which American intelligence says was aimed in part at helping Republican Donald Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The likely meddling by Russia "is a serious issue, but it doesn't require a select committee," said McConnell, R-Ky. The Senate intelligence committee is able to investigate the matter, he added.

CIA Director John Brennan has said the intelligence community is in agreement that Russia tried to interfere in the U.S. presidential election, although there's no evidence Moscow succeeded in helping Trump win.

"There's no question that the Russians were messing around in our election," McConnell told Kentucky Educational Television on Monday night. "It is a matter of genuine concern and it needs to be investigated."

Still, McConnell said the issue should be investigated in "regular order" by the Senate intelligence panel, which is "fully capable of handling this."

McConnell's comments put him at odds with Arizona Sen. John McCain and other Republicans who have joined with incoming Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer in calling for a special committee to investigate efforts by Russia, China and Iran to interfere in U.S. elections.

A select committee is a high-profile panel created by congressional leaders that taps lawmakers from a variety of committees to focus on a single issue, such as Watergate or the Iran-contra arms deal.

McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Russian interference in the election threatens to "destroy democracy," adding that a select committee is needed to find out exactly what Russia did and what effect it had on the election.

"We need to get to the bottom of this," McCain said. "We need to find out exactly what was done and what the implications of the attacks were, especially if they had an effect on our election."

He said: "There's no doubt they were interfering and no doubt that it was cyberattacks. The question now is how much and what damage and what should the United States of America do? And so far, we have been totally paralyzed."

Trump has called reports of Russian hacking "ridiculous," and his transition team dismissed the CIA assessment, saying it was the work of the same people who claimed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction before the U.S. invaded.

Schumer, D-N.Y., said in a statement that the investigation must be bipartisan.

"We don't want this investigation to be political like the Benghazi investigation," he said. "We don't want it to just be finger pointing at one person or another." Schumer added: "We want to find out what the Russians are doing to our political system and what other foreign governments might do to our political system. And then figure out a way to stop it."

McCain, Schumer and other senators say a select committee is needed to "reconcile contradictory information" and give the issue needed focus.

In the interview with KET's Bill Goodman, McConnell spoke of his surprise at the election's outcome.

"I thought we'd come up short" in the Senate, McConnell said. "And I didn't think President Trump had a chance of winning."

Trump won in part because he was able to connect with rural voters in states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin that had previously voted for Democrats, McConnell said.

"Trump was able to convey — oddly enough a message from a billionaire who lives in Manhattan — a genuine concern for people who felt kind of left off, who felt offended by all the political correctness they see around them," he said.

Testing stem cells in tiniest hearts to fight birth defect

By LAURAN NEERGAARD, AP Medical Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — The 4-month-old on the operating table has a shocking birth defect, nearly half his heart too small or even missing. To save him, surgeons will have to totally reroute how his blood flows, a drastic treatment that doesn't always work.

So this time they are going a step further. In a bold experiment, doctors injected donated stem cells directly into the healthy side of Josue Salinas Salgado's little heart, aiming to boost its pumping power as it compensates for what's missing.

It's one of the first attempts in the U.S. to test if stem cells that seem to help heart attack survivors repair cardiac muscle might help these tiniest heart patients, too.

"We think the young heart is able to be more responsive," said Dr. Sunjay Kaushal, chief of pediatric cardiac surgery at the University of Maryland Medical Center, who is leading the study in partnership with University of Miami researchers.

Kaushal bent over the baby's right ventricle, the part of the heart that will take over for the abnormal left side. The surgeon had repaired as much as possible for now. Next he measured where to place eight shots of precious stem cells.

Then the bustling operating room went silent as Kaushal helped fellow surgeon Dr. Si M. Pham guide tiny needles into the ventricle's muscle.

"We're not saying we're going to cure it," Kaushal said of the birth defect, called hypoplastic left heart syndrome. But, "my whole quest is to see if we can make these little kids do better."

Josue's parents knew there was no guarantee the experimental injections would make a difference.

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But their son had been hospitalized since birth and needed open-heart surgery anyway for a chance to go home. Teary-eyed, they clasped hands and prayed over Josue's crib moments before nurses wheeled him to the operating room.

"We are marching ahead with God," said Josue's father, Hidelberto Salinas Ramos, speaking in Spanish through a hospital interpreter.

Nearly 1,000 babies are born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome in the U.S. each year. It's the most complex cardiac birth defect.

Josue is missing his left ventricle, the main pumping chamber that pushes oxygen-rich blood to the body. Other key structures on his heart's left side are too small or malformed to work.

Always lethal until a few decades ago, this defect now is treated with three open-heart surgeries performed between birth and age 3. Doctors route blood around the abnormal left heart and they convert the right ventricle — which normally would shuttle oxygen-poor blood to the lungs — into the main pumping chamber.

Today, about 65 percent survive at least five years, and many reach adulthood, said Dr. Kristin Burns, a pediatric cardiologist at the National Institutes of Health.

But too many children still die or require a heart transplant because the right ventricle wears out under its increased workload.

That's why doctors are conducting this early-stage study of whether stem cells might help that ventricle work better.

"This is very different than a surgical approach or giving a medicine just to treat the symptoms. This is trying to treat the underlying problem," said Burns, of NIH's National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

"I know you're really nervous," Kaushal told Josue's father, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Everything is going to be fine."

Just 4 months old, Josue was undergoing his second open-heart surgery. The first operation, a day after his birth, was a temporary fix to keep his heart pumping and create an aorta, the main artery leading to the body, big enough for blood to flow. While he babbled happily at his family and nurses, Josue never got strong enough to be discharged to his Edgewater, Maryland, home. This time, Kaushal would take pressure off Josue's right ventricle — and inject those stem cells.

Even in adults, stem cell regeneration is highly experimental. But small studies involving heart attack survivors and older adults with heart failure have found what Dr. Denis Buxton, a stem cell specialist at NIH's heart institute, calls a modest benefit in how well their hearts pump blood.

For testing in babies, Kaushal turned to Dr. Joshua Hare at the University of Miami's Interdisciplinary Stem Cell Institute, who researches a specific type of stem cell donated from the bone marrow of healthy adults. Hare's institute freezes these so-called mesenchymal stem cells, which have a long safety record in adult studies, and is providing them free for the baby study.

Initially, Kaushal's team tested piglets, whose hearts are similar to humans. When the right ventricle was damaged, they found stem cell injections preserved the piglets' heart tissue. Apparently the cells spurred some of the heart's existing repair mechanisms.

Back in the Baltimore operating room, University of Miami researchers helped Kaushal's nurses thaw the frozen stem cells and prepare injections. A few feet away, Kaushal was moving a large vein so it will drain deoxygenated blood from the top of Josue's body straight to his lungs without having to enter that overworked right ventricle. (When he's 3, Josue will need a final operation to similarly reroute blood returning from his lower body.)

Then, just before his chest was stitched back up, Josue became the second baby with this defect to receive the experimental bone marrow stem cells.

It's an early-stage study that will compare 30 babies, half given stem cells, to see if the strategy is safe and shows any difference over surgery alone. If so, it could open stem cell research for other pediatric

heart problems.

Other types of stem cells also are being explored for hypoplastic left heart syndrome. Mayo Clinic researchers have tested stem cells taken from affected babies' umbilical cord blood. Kaushal also plans to try stem cells from affected newborns' own heart tissue, something researchers in Japan are pursuing.

It will take several years to know if stem cell experiments work. But, like many babies after their second surgery for the heart defect, Josue bounced back — and a week later, finally got to go home.

Scotland seeks own future in EU despite UK's departure

By SYLVIA HUI, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon offered proposals Tuesday to protect Scotland's place in Europe after Britain leaves the European Union, saying it's possible to keep Scotland in Europe's single market even after Brexit.

But Prime Minister Theresa May played down the prospect of Scotland getting a separate Brexit deal, saying that her government will be negotiating a "United Kingdom approach" with Brussels.

Britain voted to leave the EU in June but 62 percent of voters in Scotland backed remaining in the 28-nation bloc. Sturgeon, who backs Scottish independence, said Britain's departure should be "flexible" to address the needs of the U.K.'s different constituents — England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Launching a document titled "Scotland's Place in Europe," Sturgeon said it was best for Scotland — and the rest of Britain — to remain in the European single market and customs union.

Leaving the EU single market, she argues, would be a blow to many Scottish — and British — businesses that would face new tariffs on trade. Staying in the single market though would require signing up to EU rules on the freedom of movement — regaining control of borders was one of the main reasons behind the vote to leave the EU.

Sturgeon argued that the EU referendum did not give a mandate to take any part of Britain out of the European single market. Nonetheless, she conceded it was unlikely that Britain will choose to stay in the free trade bloc.

In that event, Sturgeon proposed that Scotland could stay in the European Economic Area by means of special arrangements like those that apply to the Channel Islands and the Faroe Islands.

She also proposed a substantial transfer of new powers to the Scottish Parliament — including over immigration and import and export control — in order for Scotland to pursue its own relationship with the EU.

May's office at Downing Street said the British government would look closely at Sturgeon's proposals, which are expected to be discussed in detail in January.

But May said it was "not right" to accept "differential relationships" for separate parts of Britain with Brussels. She said she has promised to seriously consider any plans, but "there may be proposals that are impractical."

"What we will be negotiating is a United Kingdom approach and a United Kingdom relationship with the European Union," she told lawmakers.

Michelle Obama tells Oprah that 2016 election 'was painful'

WASHINGTON (AP) — First lady Michelle Obama tells Oprah Winfrey that this past election was "painful," but says she and her husband will support President-elect Donald Trump's ongoing transition to the White House and beyond because it's "what's best for the country."

Mrs. Obama sat down with Winfrey at the White House for an hour-long special that was broadcast Monday on CBS.

Michelle Obama was a vocal supporter of Democrat Hillary Clinton during the campaign, one she told Winfrey "was challenging for me as a citizen to watch and experience."

"It was painful," she added.

The first lady touched on her emotional remarks on the campaign trail following the revelation of Trump's graphic and predatory comments about women in a 2005 recording. Obama told a New Hampshire crowd

in October that Trump's remarks about grabbing women had shaken her "to the core."

"A lot of people have been shaken to their core and still are," she told Winfrey. "They are still feeling the reverberations of that kind of caustic language."

Still, Mrs. Obama says she and the president are supporting Trump's transition because "no matter how we felt going into it, it is important for the health of this nation that we support the commander in chief."

"It wasn't done when my husband took office, but we're going high, and this is what's best for the country," she said, a reference to her comments during the campaign that when opponents go "low," Democrats should take the high road.

Some congressional leaders refused to support her husband when he took office, Mrs. Obama said, adding that the strategy was "good for politics, but it wasn't good for the country."

As for her own political future, Mrs. Obama says she won't run for public office.

"People don't really understand how hard this is," she said. "It's not something that you cavalierly just sort of ask a family to do again."

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 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."

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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.

After 2 years, experts say MH370 likely north of search area

By KRISTEN GELINEAU, Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — For two years, a handful of ships have diligently combed a remote patch of the Indian Ocean west of Australia in a \$160 million bid to find Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. On Tuesday, investigators made what was surely a painful admission: They have probably been looking in the wrong place.

The latest analysis by a team of international investigators concluded the vanished Boeing 777 is highly unlikely to be in the current search zone and may instead be in a region farther north. But though crews are expected to finish their deep-sea sonar hunt of the current search area next month, the possibility of extending the search to the north appeared doubtful, with Australia's transport minister suggesting the analysis wasn't specific enough to justify continuing the hunt.

The latest twist in the search for Flight 370 highlights the extraordinary difficulty officials have faced in their attempts to find the aircraft based on the faintest scraps of data. All along, officials have said they are not simply looking for a needle in a haystack — they are looking for the haystack.

On Tuesday, the haystack was poised to shift again, with the release of a report by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, which is leading the search for the plane. The report is the result of a November meeting of international and Australian experts who re-examined all the data used to define the search area for the aircraft, which vanished during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014, with 239 people on board.

Since the plane disappeared, experts have analyzed a series of exchanges between the aircraft and a satellite to estimate a probable crash site along a vast arc of ocean in the southern hemisphere. A deep-sea search of a 120,000-square kilometer (46,000-square mile) stretch of water along the arc has so far come up empty.

In November, the experts went back over the satellite data, along with the results of a new ocean drift analysis of the more than 20 items of debris likely to have come from the plane that have washed ashore on beaches throughout the Indian Ocean. The analysis, based on where the items washed up and when,

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suggested the debris originated farther north along the arc from the current search zone.

Given the number of aircraft parts found so far, the team concluded that a debris field had floated on the water surface after the plane crashed. So they eliminated areas of the ocean where air crews had searched the surface in the early stages of the hunt.

That left a 25,000-square-kilometer (9,700-square-mile) area immediately to the north of the current search zone as the most likely place where the plane hit the ocean, the report said.

The investigators concluded with "a high degree of confidence" that the plane is not in the current search area. And they agreed the new area needs to be searched.

"The experts concluded that, if this area were to be searched, prospective areas for locating the aircraft wreckage, based on all the analysis to date, would be exhausted," the report said.

However, a new search would require fresh funding. The countries involved — Malaysia, Australia and China — agreed in July that the \$160 million search will be suspended once the current effort is exhausted unless new evidence pinpoints the plane's exact location.

Australian Transport Minister Darren Chester suggested an extension was unlikely, noting that the latest report does not give a specific location of the plane.

"As agreed at the Tripartite Ministers meeting in Malaysia in July we will be suspending the search unless credible evidence is available that identifies the specific location of the aircraft," Chester said in a statement. "The search for MH370 has been the largest in aviation history and has tested the limits of technology, and the capacity of our experts and people at sea."

Malaysia's Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai did not explicitly rule out a new search, but said in a statement, "We remain to be guided as to how this can be used to assist us in identifying the specific location of the aircraft." When asked about the search, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson did not comment beyond noting China's role in the effort so far.

Australian government oceanographer David Griffin, who worked on the analysis of how the debris drifted, said he is confident the plane is in the newly identified search area. And he dismissed the idea that the new analysis means the search to date has been a wasted effort, saying that the current search zone was based on the best available data at the time.

"It could have been where we were searching, absolutely, but the new information does clarify that immediately north is more likely," Griffin said.

As part of their analysis, Griffin and his team built replicas of the first piece of debris that was found — a wing fragment known as a flaperon that was discovered on Reunion Island off the African coast in July 2015. The team then set the replicas adrift, measuring how fast they traveled and noting how much the wind influences their rate of speed. They then ran computer simulations of how the aircraft parts could have drifted, which helped paint a picture of where they originated.

The newly identified search zone does include an area that was searched very early on in the hunt, but crews didn't comb a wide enough area to rule it out, Griffin said. "They didn't go quite far enough away from the arc to cover all possibilities," he said.

The fact that crews were so close to the area now identified as the likeliest crash site — coupled with the lack of commitment to search the new area — is sure to frustrate families of those on board, who have been pushing the governments to continue searching.

"They should keep searching no matter how much money they will spend," said Li Jingxin, whose brother was on the plane. "The cost of the search has nothing to do with us relatives. They should also raise the amount of compensation (to families) to make up for the time lost while they searched the wrong place."

Associated Press reporter Rod McGuirk in Canberra, Australia, and news researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed to this report.

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Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 21, the 356th day of 2016. There are 10 days left in the year. Winter arrives at 5:44 a.m. Eastern time.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 21, 1891, the first basketball game is believed to have been played at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts; devised by James Naismith, "Basket Ball" involved the use of a soccer ball and two peach baskets, with nine players on each team. (The final score of this experimental game: 1-0.)

On this date:

In 1620, Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower went ashore for the first time at present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman concluded their "March to the Sea" as they captured Savannah, Georgia.

In 1879, the Henrik Ibsen play "A Doll's House" premiered at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen.

In 1937, Walt Disney's first animated feature, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," had its world premiere in Los Angeles.

In 1940, author F. Scott Fitzgerald died in Hollywood, California, at age 44.

In 1945, U.S. Army Gen. George S. Patton, 60, died in Heidelberg, Germany, 12 days after being seriously injured in a car accident.

In 1958, Charles de Gaulle was elected to a seven-year term as the first president of the Fifth Republic of France.

In 1968, Apollo 8 was launched on a mission to orbit the moon.

In 1971, the U.N. Security Council chose Kurt Waldheim to succeed U Thant as Secretary-General.

In 1976, the Liberian-registered tanker Argo Merchant broke apart near Nantucket Island, off Massachusetts, almost a week after running aground, spilling 7.5 million gallons of oil into the North Atlantic.

In 1988, 270 people were killed when a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a Pam Am Boeing 747 over Lockerbie, Scotland, sending wreckage crashing to the ground.

In 1991, eleven of the 12 former Soviet republics proclaimed the birth of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the death of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Ten years ago: At Camp Pendleton, California, four Marines were charged with murder in the killings of 24 Iraqi civilians in Haditha (hah-DEE'-thuh); four Marine officers were accused of failures in investigating and reporting the deaths. (Of the eight, six had charges dismissed, and one was acquitted of making false statements; Staff Sgt. Frank Wuterich (WOO'-tur-ich), who had his unpremeditated murder charge reduced to voluntary manslaughter, ended up pleading guilty to negligent dereliction of duty.) Final results showed opponents of Iran's ultra-conservative president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (ah-muh-DEE'-neh-zahd), winning nationwide elections for local councils.

Five years ago: The U.S. Army announced charges against eight soldiers related to the death of a fellow GI, Pvt. Daniel Chen, who apparently shot himself in Afghanistan after being hazed. (Of the eight, five received prison sentences and two received demotions; four of the eight faced dismissal from the service.) Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers was selected the 2011 AP Male Athlete of the Year. Baylor's Robert Griffin III was selected The Associated Press college football player of the year.

One year ago: A Taliban attacker rammed a bomb-laden motorcycle into a joint NATO and Afghan patrol near the Bagram Airfield, killing six Americans in the deadliest attack on foreign troops since the previous August. The nation's three-decade-old ban on blood donations from gay and bisexual men was formally lifted, but major restrictions continued to limit who could give blood in the U.S. Clemson's Dabo Swinney was named The Associated Press college football coach of the year.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Freddie Hart is 90. Talk show host Phil Donahue is 81. Movie director

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John Avildsen is 81. Actress Jane Fonda is 79. Actor Larry Bryggman is 78. Singer Carla Thomas is 74. Musician Albert Lee is 73. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas is 72. Actor Josh Mostel is 70. Actor Samuel L. Jackson is 68. Movie producer Jeffrey Katzenberg is 66. Actor Dennis Boutsikaris is 64. Singer Betty Wright is 63. International Tennis Hall-of-Famer Chris Evert is 62. Actress Jane Kaczmarek is 61. Country singer Lee Roy Parnell is 60. Entertainer Jim Rose is 60. Former child actress Lisa Gerritsen is 59. Actor-comedian Ray Romano is 59. Country singer Christy Forester (The Forester Sisters) is 54. Rock musician Murph (The Lemonheads; Dinosaur Jr.) is 52. Actor-comedian Andy Dick is 51. Rock musician Gabrielle Glaser is 51. Actress Michelle Hurd is 50. Actor Kiefer Sutherland is 50. Actress Karri Turner is 50. Actress Khristyne Haje is 48. Country singer Brad Warren (The Warren Brothers) is 48. Actress Julie Delpy is 47. Country singer-musician Rhea (rehn) Boyer (Carolina Rain) is 46. Contemporary Christian singer Natalie Grant is 45. Actor Glenn Fitzgerald is 45. Singer-musician Brett Scallions is 45. World Golf Hall of Famer Karrie Webb is 42. Rock singer Lukas Rossi (Rock Star Supernova) is 40. Actress Rutina Wesley is 38. Rock musician Anna Bulbrook (Airborne Toxic Event) is 34. Country singer Luke Stricklin is 34. Actor Steven Yeun is 33. Actress Kaitlyn Dever is 20.

Thought for Today: "Many human beings say that they enjoy the winter, but what they really enjoy is feeling proof against it." — Richard Adams, English author.