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Dale and Joyce Grenz at 905 N. 1st St. had a nice nativity scene up in their yard.

Apts for Rent

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

Open: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

The cardboard/paper
recycling trailer at the school is **Closed**

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

Merry Christmas! I hope you had a wonderful holiday filled with family, food and fun. If you're a Vikings fan, and I'm guessing you are because you're reading this, I hope that horribly display of "football" on Christmas Eve didn't damper your spirits too much!

The Minnesota Vikings lost the battle border against the Green Bay Packers by a score of 38-25. The score doesn't indicate how lopsided of a loss this was for the Vikings, who fall to 7-8 for the season. It all started the night before the game, when the team plane slid off the runway in Appleton, WI and the players had to be evacuated by a firetruck. Reports say it took over five hours for the team to get from the airport to the hotel, which certainly played a part in the team's performance.

The Vikings offense put up 25 points and 446 total yards on Saturday, but that wasn't nearly enough to overcome a phenomenal game by Aaron Rodgers. Quarterback Sam Bradford threw for a season-high 382 yards and three touchdowns, but he also had a poorly-timed fumble that put a damper on any comeback attempt by the Vikings. The ground game actually played pretty well, with Jerick McKinnon and Matt Asiata combining for 84 yards on 17 carries (4.9 yards per carry).

The Vikings' offense did their part, but once again it was the Vikings' defense that let us down. For the second week in a row, the opposing team saw their backup quarterback take the field because the Vikings were down by an insurmountable number of points. The defense allowed Aaron Rodgers to throw for 347 yards and four touchdowns on only 38 attempts, in addition to a rushing touchdown. There is no doubt Aaron Rodgers is one of the best quarterbacks in the league, and when an elite quarterback is playing lights-out, it's incredibly difficult to overcome. But at the end of the day, the Vikings' defense must be prepared to face elite quarterbacks if they want to make it to, and through, the playoffs.

The player of the game was a no-brainer this week. Adam Thielen was a one-man wrecking crew, catching 12 passes for 202 yards and two touchdowns. Not only was Thielen able to create separation, but he was also able to make contested catches along the sideline which helped keep the Vikings' offense on the field. Stefon Diggs may be the most physically gifted receiver on the team, but Thielen has become the Vikings' most consistent pass catcher this season.

I would also like to give a nod to Eric Kendricks, as the Vikings' middle linebacker was the only starter on defense who seemed like he cared if the team won or lost. Kendricks finished with 11 tackles, 2.5 sacks and 3 quarterback hits.

The player who needs the most improvement this week is Terence Newman. ESPN reported after the game that Newman decided to undercut head coach Mike Zimmer and change the game plan on defense. I'm not sure how much the players decided to change, but these types of reports are troubling. Hopefully these reports are erroneous, but as the saying goes, "Where there's smoke, there's fire". If the reports are true, then there is a chance Mike Zimmer has lost the locker room.

Looking ahead, the Vikings play at home against the Chicago Bears on New Year's Day. Chicago is 3-12 this season, but one of their wins was against the Vikings earlier this year on Halloween night. After starting the season a perfect 5-0, it's incredible that the Vikings will need to win their last game of the season just to avoid a losing season.

This offseason will be one of the most interesting in Vikings' history, with decisions needed on several young players, as well as whether to keep or release Adrian Peterson. Teddy Bridgewater's health will also be a factor in what the team does. Keep it locked right here every week as I break down everything Vikings related, as well as news and notes from around the league. Skoll!

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A New Season

One of my favorite times of the year farming was the day we started to put the seed in the ground, because on that day, the seed had every opportunity to produce a high-yielding harvest. The next few months would require hard work to help that seed mature – and we'd need to pray that factors outside our control would cooperate as well – but that was all yet to come; planting was a day of hope and opportunity.

Each new year, we find that same sense of optimism about what's to come, and perhaps nowhere is that truer for 2017 than in Washington, D.C., where the new year will bring a new Congress, a new administration, and a new hope for the future.

The repeal of Obamacare will likely be one of the first seeds planted in 2017. For years, our efforts have been shut down by Senate Democrats or vetoed by the president, but we now have a path to repeal. At the same time, we have been working openly and collaboratively to assemble a replacement for Obamacare that fundamentally decreases the cost of healthcare, increases access and affordability, protects coverage for those with pre-existing conditions and our young people, and gives you the peace of mind that your most intimate financial and health decisions can be made by you with the consult of your doctor.

While the next Farm Bill isn't expected to be finalized until 2018, the hearing process is expected to begin in 2017. We have already begun writing some of the new policies that ought to be included, but we'll continue collecting feedback and ideas throughout the next year.

Comprehensive tax reform is another 2017 priority for both Congress and the president-elect. In 2015, I became the first South Dakotan in history to earn a seat on the House Ways and Means Committee, which is the committee that specializes in tax-related reforms. We've been focused on writing a new tax code that is simpler, fairer, and more accountable than the one that exists today.

President-elect Trump and Congress also have fixing the regulatory environment at the top of our New Year's resolution lists. Some of these regulations can be repealed by the administration acting alone. Others will require congressional action. Either way, it's a must-do beginning this January.

We will also continue our efforts to reform the Indian Health Service, expand the Black Hills National Cemetery, keep the D.C. Booth Fish Hatchery open, increase support for the Lewis & Clark rural water project, maintain services at the Hot Springs VA Hospital, and ensure anti-human trafficking efforts have the support they need. Supporting the administration on national security and border security issues will also be a priority.

There is plenty of work to be done to make sure these seeds of opportunity produce a harvest in 2017, but I am encouraged by the outlook. This New Year, I hope you too can find the hope and optimism that defines this season. On behalf of my entire family, I wish you the best in 2017.

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A South Dakota Christmas

Each year around the holidays, Jean and I like to reflect upon all of our blessings. We are incredibly grateful for our family and friends, our good health and the fact that we get to call South Dakota home. We are looking forward to spending Christmas with our loved ones, including my dad Grandpa Don and his wife Rosemary, Jean's parents, our four kids, their spouses, our eight grandkids and all of our extended family members.

For as long as I can remember, our family has always gathered together after the 5 o'clock Christmas Eve mass at Ss. Peter & Paul Catholic Church in Pierre. We look forward to celebrating the holiday at our house with our family again this year, and continuing to tell the story of Christmas and reflect upon what is truly important this holiday season: family, friends, and the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is also important during this time to express our gratitude to the men and women in uniform who may be spending the holidays far from home. Because of their service, the United States is the greatest, freest, most prosperous country in the world. I recently had the honor of attending a welcome home ceremony in Sioux Falls for the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, and it was heartwarming to see families reconnect after spending nearly one year away from each other. We wish all of our servicemen and women, and their families, a blessed holiday season, and we pray that they will all be together again very soon.

For some, the holidays can be a challenging time of year. Showing kindness to our neighbors—and to strangers—costs nothing and can make a difference in someone's day, week or even year. We have so much to be grateful for as South Dakotans and Americans. During the Christmas season, we are encouraged to spread the message of peace on earth and goodwill to all. This is a message that we should remember throughout the rest of the year as well.

Once again, I would like to wish all South Dakotans a very blessed Christmas and peace in the new year. I thank those of you who took the time to write, call or meet with me as I traveled across the state. It is an honor to work for you in the United States Senate. Thank you for all you do to make South Dakota the best place in the world to call home.

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What A Christmas!

The Christmas Storm lived up to its expectations with much weather drama throughout the state. Just here in Brown County, we had these weather alerts:

Winter Storm Watch

Freezing Rain Advisory

Ice Storm Warning

Flash Flood Warning

High Wind Warning

No Travel Advised in Brown County

Blizzard Warning

Then the sun came out!

But many communities are without power as of this morning yet. Crews from several Coops are out trying to restore power. Many electric poles were broken off. In Groton, there were blinks, most likely caused by outages that created a disturbance in the power.



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125,000 BTU Heater- \$349.00

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Groton City Dec. 19 Meeting Minutes

December 19, 2016

The Groton City Council met on the above date at 7:00pm at the Groton Community Center for their regular second monthly meeting with the following members present: Opp, Flihs, McGannon, Peterson, and Mayor Hanlon presiding. Glover and Blackmun were absent. Also present were: Finance Officer Lowary, Attorney Johnson, Paul Kosel, and Kathy Sundermeier.

The minutes were approved as read on a motion by Opp and seconded by McGannon. All members present voted aye.

Moved by McGannon and seconded by Opp to authorize the following bills for payment. All members present voted aye.

First State Bank 7,354.61 ss & wh; Consolidated Fed Cr Union 1,125.00 emp savings; Groton Chamber of Commerce 700.00 gifts; 1st National Bank 9,604.27 lagoon loan payment; AFLAC 749.62 emp ins; April Abeln 38.75 dep flex; Car Quest 16.68 oil, filters, parts; Dakota Doors Inc 2,130.60 door openers; Dakota Press 2,174.46 publishing; Dearborn National 88.00 life ins; Jim Gerdes 100.00 Santa; Groton Independent 42.36 publishing; Guardian Ins 245.30 emp ins; Heartland Cons Power District 46,780.15 power; Shawn Lambertz 387.04 mileage, meals; Anita Lowary 131.87 med flex; MJs 1,628.98 gas,dsl,oil,battery; SD Supplement Retirement 1,560.00 emp retirement; USTI 945.00 police comp supp; Weber Landscaping 90.78 erosion blanket; Wellmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield 13,256.67 health ins; Western Area Power Adm 27,097.08 power

Moved by McGannon and seconded by Peterson to make the following contingency transfers: General Fund Contingency= -\$25,840; Legal Services = \$500; Police Salaries = \$2,500; Swimming Pool Building = \$400; Economic Development services = \$50; Forestry Supplies = \$1,000; Comm Center Supplies = \$380; Liquor Publishing = \$10; Street Salaries = \$3,000 and Debt Service Interest = \$18,000. All members present voted aye.

Moved by McGannon and seconded by Opp to set up a water tower replacement reserve in the Water Fund for \$80,000. All members present voted aye.

Rubble site fees were tabled to Jan 3 meeting.

The Brown County Deputy proposed cooperative agreement was tabled to the Jan 3 meeting.

Municipal League Legislative Day will be held February 7 in Pierre for any Council members who wish to attend.

Lowary reported on the SDML board meeting she attended, including options on the Marcys Law amendment to the constitution and legislative proposals.

At 7:20pm the Council adjourned into executive session on a motion by Opp and seconded by McGannon to discuss legal and personnel matters SDCL 1-25-2 (1) & (3). All members present voted aye. Council reconvened at 7:40pm.

Moved by Opp and seconded by Flihs to hire Shannon Weidrick, Jennie Doeden, and Tady Glover at \$8.65 per hour as warming house attendants. All members present voted aye.

Meeting adjourned.

Scott Hanlon, Mayor

Anita Lowary, Finance Officer

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Today in Weather History

December 26, 1988: Moderate to heavy snow fell across western and northern South Dakota, as well as across most of Minnesota, from the evening of the 25th through the morning of the 27th. Much of the northern one-half to two-thirds of Minnesota and the western and northern sections of South Dakota were blanketed with 6-12 inches of new snow. Numerous accidents and minor injuries were indirectly related to the snowy conditions. Several snowfall amounts in South Dakota included 12 inches at Timber Lake; 10 to 12 inches at Seneca and Hoven; 11 inches at Aberdeen; 8 inches at Pierre, Eureka and Blunt; 7 inches at Chelsea, Redfield, Cottonwood, and Rapid City; and 6 inches at Ferney, Huron, and Eden. In Minnesota, 8 inches fell in Browns Valley, 6 inches fell at Wheaton, and 5 inches accumulated at Artichoke Lake.

1776 - George Washington crossed the ice clogged Delaware River. He marched on Trenton in the midst of snow and sleet thus surprising and capturing many of the British garrison. (David Ludlum)

1947 - New York City received a record 26.4 inches of snow in 24 hours, with as much as 32 inches reported in the suburbs. The heavy snow brought traffic to a standstill, and snow removal cost eight million dollars. Thirty thousand persons were called upon to remove the 100 million tons of snow. The storm claimed 27 lives. (26th-27th) (David Ludlum)

1983 - Miami, FL, established a December record with a morning low of 33 degrees. Just three days earlier, and again three days later, record warm temperatures were reported in Florida, with daytime highs in the 80s. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 - Freezing rain plagued parts of the south central U.S., from northwest Texas to southwestern Missouri. Southwestern Missouri was turned into a huge skating rink as roads became sheets of ice. Damage to tree limbs and power lines compared to a hundred tornadoes, and half of the city of Springfield was left without electricity for 24 hours. Snow, sleet and ice covered the northwest two thirds of Oklahoma. 75,000 homes were left without electricity as ice accumulated one to two inches in a 40-mile band from Duncan to Norman to Tulsa to Miami. 25,000 of those homes were still without power a week later. The storm claimed the lives of seven persons. (24th-27th) (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Low pressure produced heavy snow from North Dakota to western sections of the Great Lakes Region, with up to fourteen inches reported in the Chicago area. Cold arctic air hovered over the Plateau Region. Temperatures in the Big Smokey Valley of Nevada plunged to 31 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Strong northerly winds behind an arctic cold front produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region and dangerous wind chill temperatures in the northeastern U.S. Wind chill readings as cold as 40 degrees below zero were reported in New York State. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - A major snow storm in Utah caused several fatalities due to avalanches. As much as 2 ft of snow fell in parts of the state, particularly south of Salt Lake City. Three people that were seen snowboarding in the Aspen Grove recreational area have been presumed dead, all others managed to escape or be rescued (Reuters).

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Blizzard Wa...

Today



Chance Snow Showers and Blowing Snow

High: 19 °F

Tonight



Decreasing Clouds

Low: 6 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 21 °F

Tuesday Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 16 °F

Wednesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 32 °F

Wednesday Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 20 °F

Thursday

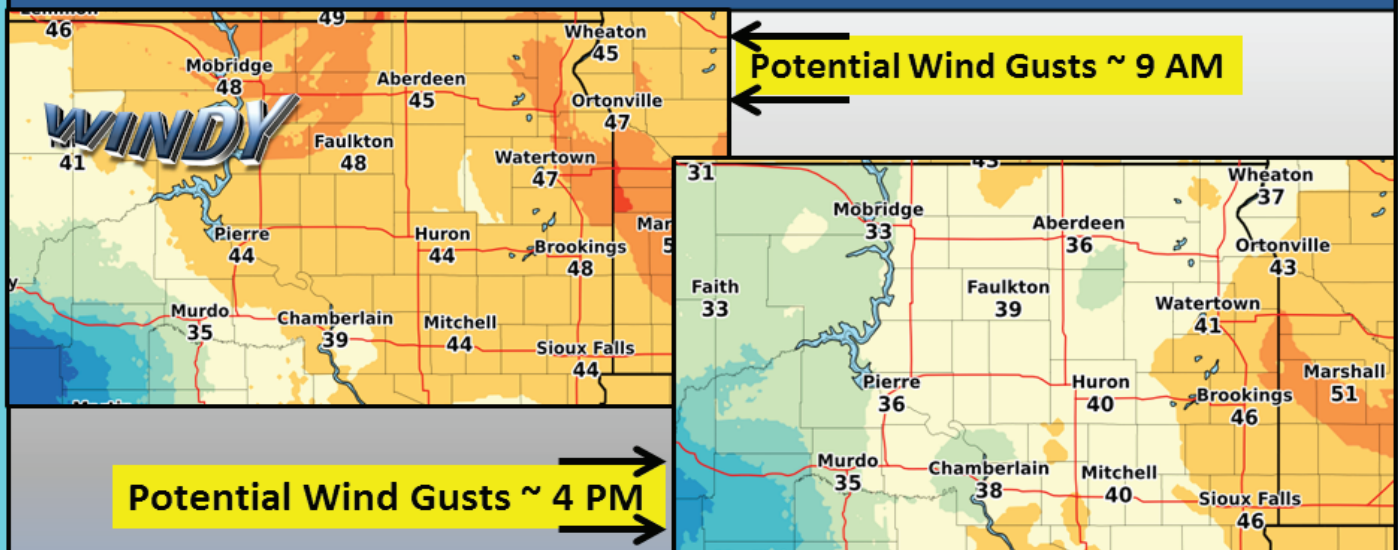


Partly Sunny and Blustery

High: 28 °F

Very Strong Winds Today

Gradually Diminishing Later this Afternoon



- Strong winds will combine with falling snow this morning
- Reduced visibility below one mile at times possible
- Morning commute affected – worst in open areas

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD



weather.gov/Aberdeen



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen

Updated: 12/26/2016 5:38 AM Central

Published on: 12/26/2016 at 5:39AM

A strong storm system over western Minnesota will continue to pull away from the region today. However lingering light snow and very strong winds will still promote blowing and drifting snow over parts of the area, mainly this morning. The strong winds should slowly subside this afternoon through this evening.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 35.5 F at 11:55 PM

Low Outside Temp: 27.0 F at 12:00 AM

High Gust: 41.0 Mph at 6:53 PM

Rain: 0.86

Today's Info

Record High: 54° in 1907

Record Low: -29° in 1990

Average High: 23°F

Average Low: 3°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.43

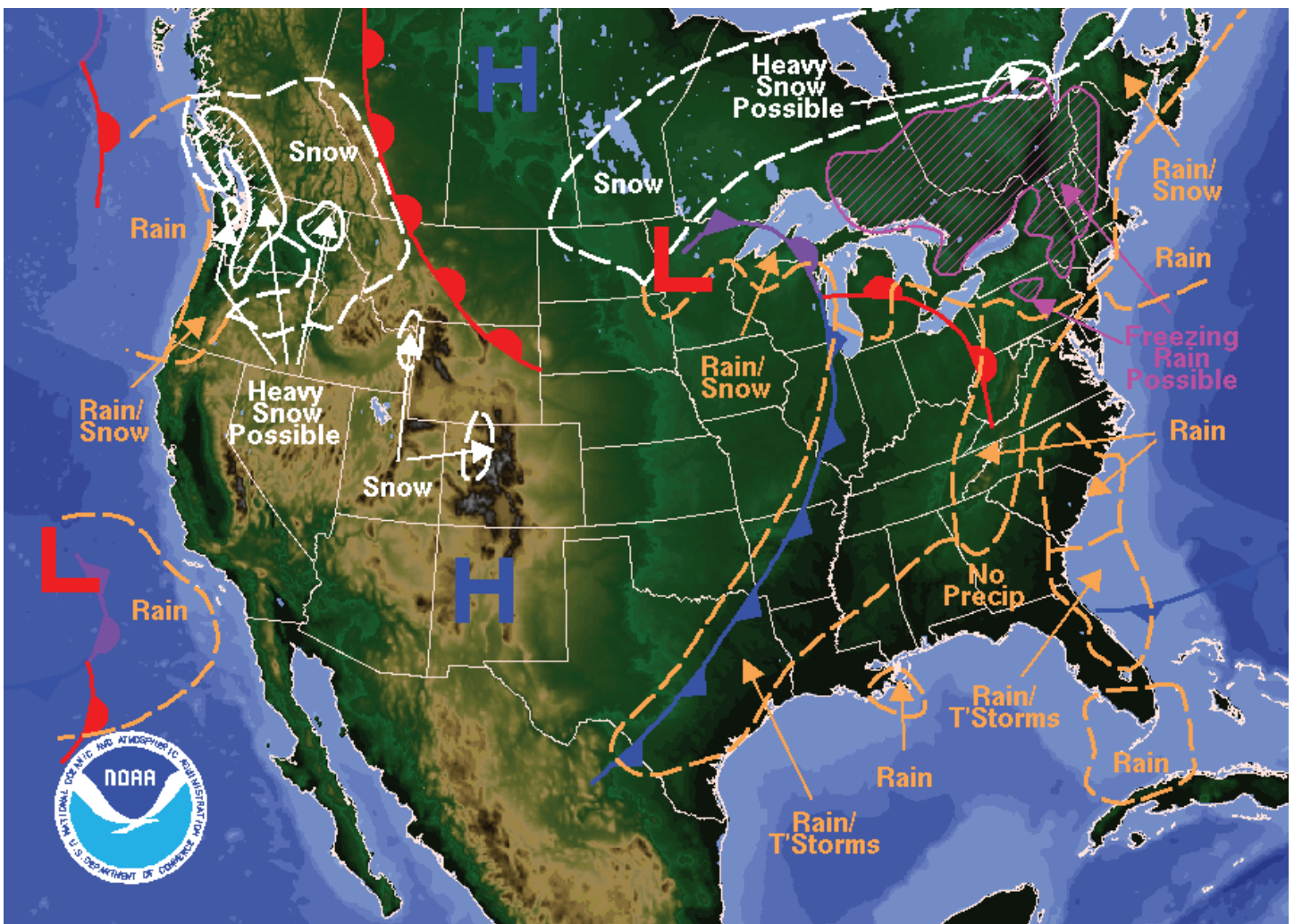
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.74

Average Precip to date: 21.63

Precip Year to Date: 19.08

Sunset Tonight: 4:56 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Mon, Dec 26, 2016, issued 4:17 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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A GIFT WORTH RECEIVING

"Mommy," asked a small child, "how long did Baby Jesus stay in the manger?"

Puzzled, the mother answered. "Not too long, I would imagine."

Unfortunately, there are far too many individuals who leave Jesus in the stable, seeing His birth as an end, not the beginning. Not everyone realizes that this day is the day that the journey to the cross actually began on earth. This One who was born on this day of days is often left wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. It seems that many have no understanding of the spiritual significance or importance of Christmas.

But for those of us who accept and acknowledge Christ as our Savior, we rejoice and say with the Apostle Paul, "Thank God for His Son – a gift too wonderful to describe!"

This Gift is the gift of God Himself: His only begotten Son. It is the source of His grace, the expression of His mercy, the revelation of His plan, the meaning of His purpose, the passion of His love, the assurance of His presence and the provision for our salvation. He knew what we needed then and what we need now. In Him we have faith to fight our fears and hope for a life in His presence. "Too wonderful" indeed.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for this Gift we do not deserve, desperately need, is available from no other Source and cannot live without. With grateful hearts, we thank You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

News from the Associated Press

Blizzards, ice storms wreak havoc across northern plains

CHICAGO (AP) — Travel conditions remained hazardous as a winter storm swept across much of the northern Great Plains Monday, with blowing and drifting snow creating near-zero visibility on some roads.

The combination of freezing rain, snow and high winds that forced the shutdown Sunday of vast stretches of highways in the Dakotas continued into Monday morning, and authorities issued no-travel warnings for much of North Dakota.

The storm also has caused widespread power outages in the Dakotas, Nebraska and western Iowa.

The South Dakota Rural Electric Association said more than 12,000 of its customers were without power Monday morning. In Nebraska, winds gusting up to 70 mph were cited for hundreds of power outages in central and eastern portions of the state on Sunday, although by Monday morning utilities reported that power had been restored to most customers.

“Between the ice and snow, and winds howling like crazy, there will be nothing moving” until late afternoon Monday, said National Weather Service meteorologist Greg Gust in Grand Forks, North Dakota. “Then it’s dig-out time.”

Gust’s advice to travelers: “Stay put.”

The weather service office in Bismarck, North Dakota, predicted snow accumulations of 8 to 15 inches in western parts of the state and thunderstorms in the central region.

The North Dakota Transportation Department closed most of a 240-mile stretch of Interstate 94 Sunday night, from the Montana border to Jamestown. That stretch remained closed Monday morning. Portions of U.S. Highways 2, 52 and 281 were also closed because of snow, ice and “near zero visibility.” Motorists who drive past the roadblocks can be fined up to \$250.

No-travel advisories were issued for much of North Dakota, including the Williston, Dickinson, Minot, Bismarck, Jamestown, Valley City and Grand Forks areas.

Authorities in South Dakota shut down Interstate 90 from the Wyoming border to Chamberlain — a distance of about 260 miles. And the Rapid City Fire Department sent out its special tracked vehicle for the first time this season to help stranded motorists east of Rapid City.

Icy conditions in Aberdeen, South Dakota, prompted the Brown County Sheriff’s Office to issue a no travel advisory. Aberdeen was also under a weather service flash flood warning after rain and snowmelt flooded major intersections in the city.

The weather service warned anyone who “must travel” on icy roads in central Minnesota to have an extra flashlight, food and water.

Interstate 90 remains closed across western South Dakota

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Interstate 90 remains closed along the western half of South Dakota from the Wyoming border to Chamberlain. And the South Dakota Department of Transportation warns that travel will be extremely difficult across the state this morning.

The National Weather Service says blizzard conditions will continue across the plains of north and east of the Black Hills before improving later in the day. Blowing snow whipped by winds gusting into the mid-40 mph range are cutting visibility in eastern South Dakota, too.

The Rapid City Fire Department sent out its special tracked vehicle for the first time this season to help stranded motorists east of Rapid City.

The South Dakota Rural Electric Association says over 12,000 of its customers are without power, mostly in northeastern South Dakota.

82-year-old Salvation Army volunteer still bell ringing

By Sara Bertsch, The Mitchell Daily Republic

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — A dime, nickel or even just a few pennies is all Corrine Granger asks that people donate when they see her ringing a bell.

"You got it, you give it," said Granger, 82, as she sat near the shiny red kettle marking her a volunteer bell-ringer for the Salvation Army.

Donning a red apron, filled with candy, Granger spends six days a week, four hours each day, as a bell-ringer — just the same as she's been doing since 1952.

The Elk Point native moved to the Mitchell area with her husband when she was 18 years old. Looking for a church to attend in the Mitchell area, Granger and her husband chose the Salvation Army, which serves as a church, social service organization and thrift store, The (Mitchell) Daily Republic (<http://bit.ly/2gUqgZ4>) reported.

Little did Granger know, she would still be volunteering and working with the organization 64 years later.

Granger and her husband, Eugene, had nine children, each one of them baptized and dedicated with the Salvation Army. All of the children also were bell ringers.

"All of my kids grew up in bell ringing," Granger said. "They always hopped in the car and we all came. They knew when it was bell ringing time."

Now that her children are adults with full-time jobs and children of their own, they don't have time to be a volunteer bell-ringer, Granger said, but they all still recall the fun, family time spent bell ringing when they were younger.

Granger said it was a family affair to go out, ring the bell and raise money for those who are less fortunate. And it's an activity she still enjoys doing.

But bell ringing is just one of countless other jobs and tasks Granger has helped with at the Salvation Army. Granger currently serves as a cook for the organization, arriving each day at 8:30 a.m. and leaving around 2 p.m., giving her a little time before her 4 p.m. shift at Shopko.

On top of cooking and bell ringing, Granger also volunteers to deliver groceries, gives a ride to a fellow employee for his bell ringing shift and picks up bread on Saturdays to deliver to the church.

And each Sunday morning, Granger goes to church, unlocks the door, starts the coffeemaker and sets up for Sunday School.

"I'm always busy doing something," Granger said.

Just as she's helped the Salvation Army for all these years, the group has also helped Granger.

About 40 years ago, Granger said their family home in Mount Vernon burned down, leaving her, her husband and her nine children without a place to live.

But thanks to the Salvation Army, the family was able to stay in a hotel room in Mitchell for two weeks crammed together. They also were given food by the organization, Granger said.

The family lucked out and found a good deal on a home in Mitchell two weeks later, and to this day, Granger still lives in the home with one of her sons.

Her son, Bill, lost his legs to diabetes a few years ago, Granger said, and she still takes care of him. Granger also has another son, in Parkston, who is paralyzed and on a feeding tube. She continues to visit him and bring him to family get-togethers, she said.

Granger's husband Eugene died in 2009, she said, but she still lives in the same home.

Through each of these life obstacles, there's been one organization that's been there through it all — the Salvation Army.

"They help me keep my sanity," she said with a laugh. "They're good to me. If I need something, they help me and I help them."

And the organization's help for the Granger family doesn't end there.

Five years ago, Granger was diagnosed with lymphoma. Being a cook for the group, she had to miss work to receive chemotherapy and radiation. Granger said they always allowed her the next day off to recover, allowing her to keep her job. Five months after battling lymphoma, Granger was also diagnosed with breast cancer. She had one breast completely removed, and the Salvation Army was there again to

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help her through that time.

And it's something Granger will never forget.

"There isn't anything I wouldn't do for them," Granger said. "It's like a home for me."

"Thank you and Merry Christmas."

These are the five words that Granger repeats each time someone passes by her sitting near the sign labeling her a Salvation Army volunteer.

Wearing a heavy black coat, with a Salvation Army logo on the right arm, Granger said there's nowhere else she'd rather be during the holiday season than sitting in her spot in the entrance of Shopko, bell ringing.

After more than 60 years, Granger is an expert when it comes to bell ringing and she's even gathered a fan base.

People from the community who know Granger will stop by to donate some money and just say, "Hello." They don't go into the department store, Granger said.

There's one woman whose daughter died recently, Granger said, who always makes a point to stop and visit Granger while she's bell ringing. And even though she doesn't have much money to donate, Granger said this woman always puts something in the bucket.

"She gave what she had," Granger said "That meant more, you know?"

Maj. Vickie Cole has known Granger for the past two years since joining the Salvation Army. Cole said in those two years, she's seen how caring and compassionate Granger is.

"She believes in always giving back and helping the Salvation army no matter what," Cole said. "She wants kids to have toys at Christmas and a food box. She knows this money will help in that way."

During the holiday season, Cole said finding volunteers to be bell-ringers can be difficult, but they can always count on Granger.

For the organization, donations are very important and Cole said Granger is always working to get as much money as possible, so the group doesn't have to spend anything extra.

"She's a very giving person," Cole said.

With pockets full of candy, Granger said one of her favorite parts of bell ringing is seeing the children. Children, along with their parents, will stop by, drop a donation in the bucket and talk with Granger. She'll give them some candy and send them off with a "Merry Christmas."

Granger also volunteers to do the bell ringing each year as a way to get out of the house and do something, she said. Not only does it help others out, it helps her out.

So far this year, Granger is the only person signed up to ring the bell on Christmas Eve, which is a tradition for Granger, who said she always works on Dec. 24 until 6 p.m.

And Granger, who said she remains in good health, doesn't plan on quitting her bell ringing duties anytime soon. The 82-year-old, who will be 83 in a few weeks, said she will work with the Salvation Army, not just bellringing, for as long as she can.

"I told them I'll probably be there until my last breath," Granger said with a laugh. "The Salvation Army is like a home to me."

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

South Dakota congregation prepares to disband

By DANA HESS, Madison Daily Leader

MADISON, S.D. (AP) — Constructed of fieldstone, St. Peter Lutheran Church of Orland Township was built to last. While the church building will remain, its small congregation is getting ready to disband.

The church closure isn't a failure of faith but rather a change in demographics. The congregation has dwindled to about 20 members, not enough to sustain the church or pay its bills, the Madison Daily Leader (<http://bit.ly/2hNeQeh>) reported.

"As a congregation, it was a very difficult decision to decide to close but numbers, attendance and our membership was dwindling," said Sue Janssen, congregation president. "There's not very many families that live out here anymore. The income versus expenses just wasn't penciling out."

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According to Janssen, the congregation was formed in 1884 and met in the homes of parishioners until the original wooden church could be built in the 1890s. Fundraising for the current church started in 1948 or '49.

When farms and farm families were thriving, so was the church. Janssen estimated that at one time the church had 200 or more members.

On April 23, the church will host its last St. Peter service. Bishop David Zellmer of the South Dakota Synod of the ELCA will officiate. Former pastors have also been invited. A dinner will be served after the service.

Interim pastor Wayne Gallipo of Sioux Falls came to St. Peter knowing that some hard decisions would need to be made.

"They weighed all the options, looked at the hard data and put their emotions aside," Gallipo said.

That didn't make the decision any easier or less painful.

"It's similar to grieving the death of a loved one," Gallipo said the church closing. "It's very hard for them."

"Part of what was very hard was what will happen to the building," said Janssen. "That made it very hard for us to decide to close. It's a beautiful building. It's solid. It's not something you can move away or tear down."

Helping to ease the pain of closing is the church's neighbor, Charlie Johnson. A member of St. Thomas Catholic Church in Madison, Johnson is spearheading an effort to make sure that the church building lives on long after the congregation disbands.

"He felt there was an idea formulating to have a community-type building," Janssen said. "When the congregation heard that, we were like, whew."

Johnson, who lives on the farm west of the church and owns the farmland around it, is full of ideas about how the church building could be used after April 23.

"I think the ideas and concepts are endless," Johnson said. "It would all depend on enthusiasm and participation."

As Johnson sees it, in its second life the church would be a perfect venue for weddings, receptions, birthday parties, concerts or as a center for day-long retreats.

"A lot of people would intend to be buried here yet, or have family in the cemetery," Johnson said. "It could still serve as a place for a funeral or at least a reception down in the hall after the burial."

While the future of the church building is up in the air, the adjoining cemetery is run by its own nonprofit organization.

Johnson, an organic farmer, was part of two tours that came through the area this summer. In each case they toured local farms and had lunch at St. Peter, paying the church a rental fee and compensating the church ladies who put together the meal.

"I'm hoping we can continue things like that," Johnson said. "What's going to be needed is a new non-profit entity that's going to take over the participation of the building and build up enough of a following."

Johnson envisions a group with a part-time director and a membership large enough to pay dues that would handle the facility's bills.

While there are no living quarters on the site, the building includes a sanctuary with room for 250, a basement that can seat 180, bathrooms, a pastor's office and a basement study room.

Johnson said it would be a perfect location for artists.

"It would provide a rural setting, a quiet setting where they could do their music or do their art," Johnson said, calling the building itself a fieldstone work of art.

The church grounds are home to two statues by Allan Fisher, "The Way" and "A Victory Over Death."

"He had come out here to church a few times and was inspired by the rural setting, the nature," Janssen said of Fisher. "The peacefulness inspired him to sculpt 'The Way'."

The cutout of Christ and a lamb allows the prairie in the distance to become part of the artwork.

There are plenty of ideas about how to use the church and the interest in a community center has spread beyond the congregation. There were 19 people at a recent meeting to toss around ideas. Only three of them were from St. Peter.

During its almost 70 years of existence, the church has had a storied past. Johnson recalls that in 1986,

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at the height of the farm crisis, Dan Rather spent a week broadcasting the CBS Evening News from the KELO studios in Sioux Falls. One night he visited St. Peter Church where farmers gathered to talk to Rather about the farm crisis.

Johnson said some area residents were in for a surprise that night as Rather got lost a couple times along the way to the church. They didn't know what to think of the famous newsman on their front porches asking for directions.

Another time the church was in the news for a sadder reason. In 2000 the church was vandalized by two youngsters, causing \$40,000 worth of damage.

Janssen recalls the date, Aug. 27, because it's her mother's birthday. She arrived early at the church that day to finish her Sunday School lesson.

"It was like a tornado," Janssen said, describing the damage. "It was pretty devastating to us, but it was obvious that they needed our help."

The boys came to the church to apologize. They paid restitution and did some jail time.

The church received an outpouring of generosity from neighbors and other churches. Now it's time for St. Peter to be generous.

Gallipo said the church's baptismal font is going to Table of Grace Church in Harrisburg.

While an inventory team goes from room to room deciding what should be donated and what should be thrown out, there's still a question about what will happen to the parishioners.

With membership that ranges from Madison to Montrose to Chester, finding new churches for the members is a priority, Janssen said.

Even though the congregation is disbanding, Gallipo offers a message of hope.

"It's not an end to the ministry of St. Peter," Gallipo said. "It goes on forever through them as they move on to other places."

Information from: The Madison Daily Leader, <http://www.madisondailyleader.com>

Trumps pick for ambassador to Israel sparks hot debate

By JOSH LEDERMAN, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — If President-elect Donald Trump wanted to show he planned to obliterate President Barack Obama's approach to Israel, he might have found his man to deliver that message in David Friedman, his pick for U.S. ambassador.

The bankruptcy lawyer and son of an Orthodox rabbi is everything Obama is not: a fervent supporter of Israeli settlements, opponent of Palestinian statehood and unrelenting defender of Israel's government. So far to the right is Friedman that many Israel supporters worry he could push Israel's hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be more extreme, scuttling prospects for peace with Palestinians in the process.

The heated debate over Friedman's selection is playing out just as fresh tensions erupt between the U.S. and Israel.

In a stunning decision Friday, the Obama administration moved to allow the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution condemning Israeli settlements as illegal. The move to abstain, rather than veto, defied years of U.S. tradition of shielding Israel from such resolutions, and elicited condemnation from Israel, lawmakers of both parties, and especially Trump.

"Things will be different after Jan. 20th," when he's sworn in, Trump vowed on Twitter.

Presidents of both parties have long called for a two-state solution that envisions eventual Palestinian statehood, and Netanyahu says he agrees. Friedman, who still must be confirmed by the Senate, does not. He's called the two-state solution a mere "narrative" that must end.

Under Obama, the U.S. has worked closely with J Street, an Israel advocacy group sharply critical of Netanyahu. Friedman accuses Obama of "blatant anti-Semitism" and calls J Street "worse than kapos," a reference to Jews who helped the Nazis imprison fellow Jews during the Holocaust.

For decades, the U.S. has opposed Israeli settlement-building in lands it seized in the 1967 Mideast war. Friedman runs a nonprofit that raises millions of dollars for Beit El, a settlement of religious nationalists

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near Ramallah. Beit El runs a right-wing news outlet and a yeshiva whose dean has provocatively urged Israeli soldiers to refuse orders to uproot settlers from their homes.

So it's unsurprising that Friedman's nomination has already sharpened a growing balkanization of American Jews, between those who want the U.S. to push Israel toward peace and those who believe Obama's approach abandoned America's closest Mideast ally.

It's a debate playing out even at Temple Hillel, near the Long Island-Queens border, where Friedman's father was rabbi for almost half a century.

"Clearly, David's opinions do not appeal to everybody in the synagogue, and they appeal to others in the synagogue," said Ken Fink, the synagogue's president and longtime congregant. "But there's a huge amount of pride for the hometown boy."

Thirty-two years before Trump's election, President Ronald Reagan donned a yarmulke and noshed on chicken cutlets and noodle pudding at Rabbi Morris Friedman's home, after a speech at Temple Hillel affirming the separation between church and state. Coming just two weeks before Reagan's re-election, the attempt to woo Jewish voters struck some as opportunistic, and they protested on the streets of the heavily Jewish town of North Woodmere.

Seated at the Sabbath table with Reagan was David Melech Friedman — his middle name means "king" in Hebrew. The rabbi's son went on to become Trump's bankruptcy lawyer, an advocate for far-right policies on Israel, and now, Trump's choice for ambassador, despite having no diplomatic experience.

Cindy Grosz, who said she's known Friedman for nearly 50 years, recalled big parties with boisterous debates about Jewish issues held in his family's sukkah, the outdoor hut Jews build during the harvest festival Sukkot.

"He still has the same best friends he's had for over 30 years," Grosz said.

At his midtown Manhattan law firm, Friedman opens his offices to those in mourning who need a minyan — a quorum of 10 men in Orthodox Judaism — to say the Mourner's Kaddish, a prayer that observant Jews say daily for one year after a parent's death.

And it was a parent's death, in a way, that brought Friedman and Trump closer together. Over the years, Friedman has told friends the story of how the billionaire real estate mogul defied an oppressive snowstorm that had kept others away to "sit shiva" for Friedman's father during the Jewish mourning period.

Educated at Columbia University and NYU School of Law, Friedman developed a reputation as an aggressive, high-stakes bankruptcy attorney, representing Trump when his Atlantic City casinos went through bankruptcy.

In the courtroom, he's known as a formidable opponent, said attorney Tariq Mundiya, Friedman's adversary in several cases. He said he'd been aware of Friedman's advocacy on Israel but added, "When you're in the fog of war with David, the last thing you're talking about is the Middle East."

Enraged by Trump's pick, left-leaning groups and Palestinian officials have suggested his confirmation could spell the end of any serious discussions about peace.

Netanyahu has stayed publicly quiet about Trump's pick. Friedman and Trump's transition team didn't respond to requests for comment.

Associated Press writers Josef Federman and Daniel Estrin in Jerusalem and Tia Goldenberg in Beit El, West Bank, contributed to this report.

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

Fans mourn pop's George Michael as charities reveal his work

By GREGORY KATZ, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Grieving fans on Monday mourned the death of George Michael as British charities revealed that the pop star had secretly been a major behind-the-scenes donor who gave his time and money to support cherished causes.

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The man with the reputation for self-indulgence had actually given millions of pounds (dollars) to charities involved with helping children, cancer victims and AIDS sufferers.

He was also remembered for small acts of kindness: helping his village in north London get a Christmas tree, and volunteering at a homeless shelter.

Former Beatle Paul McCartney posted a statement on his website praising Michael's "sweet soul music," which he said will live on.

"Having worked with him on a number of occasions his great talent always shone through and his self-deprecating sense of humor made the experience even more pleasurable," McCartney said, posting a picture of the two of them together.

The singer's death was announced late Sunday. Many paid tribute on Facebook and Twitter and others cited years of good works that received little publicity — largely because Michael insisted on keeping his charity work out of the limelight.

Fans placed flowers and other tributes at his homes in north London and in Goring, England, where he died of apparent heart failure.

Michael's later years were marked by occasional brushes with the law and a series of driving incidents related to substance abuse, but this was overlooked Monday as directors of major charities and advocacy groups stepped forward to praise him.

Among the groups he supported were the Terrence Higgins Trust, which helps people with AIDS, Macmillan Cancer Support, and Childline, which offers confidential phone counseling for young people.

Childline founder Esther Rantzen said Michael gave royalties from his 1996 hit "Jesus To A Child" to the charity along with many other donations.

"Over the years he gave us millions and we were planning next year, as part of our 30th anniversary celebrations to create, we hoped, a big concert in tribute to him — to his artistry, to his wonderful musicality but also to thank him for the hundreds of thousands of children he helped," she said.

She said Michael was determined that no one outside the charity should know "how much he gave to the nation's most vulnerable children."

Jane Barron from the Terrence Higgins Trust said Michael made many donations and gifts, including the royalties of his "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me" duet with Elton John in 1991.

Michael had spoken publicly about the pain of losing a partner to AIDS early in the epidemic, but he kept his long history of donations to the Trust private.

Rights activist Peter Tatchell, who knew Michael before he achieved fame, said Michael had hidden his homosexuality in the early part of his career because gay public figures were subjected to vicious treatment by the British tabloid press.

He praised the singer for making his sexual orientation known after he was arrested in 1998 for lewd behavior in a public toilet in Los Angeles.

Tatchell said Michael's response to his arrest amounted to "a defiant defense of the right to be gay" that had an impact throughout the gay community.

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. GEORGE MICHAEL DIES OF HEART FAILURE AT 53

He was blessed with sensual good looks and an exquisite voice, attributes he used to become first a teenybopper heartthrob and then a mature solo artist.

2. WHAT RUSSIA'S JET CRASH PROBE FOCUSES ON

As the nation holds a day of mourning for the 92 victims, a minister says a pilot error or a technical fault — not terrorism — is likely to be the cause of the tragedy.

3. WHY U.S. ELECTIONS ARE STILL VULNERABLE TO HACKING

Paperless electronic machines make it almost impossible to have a meaningful recount. They also raise

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the possibility that attackers could rig polls in ways that might not ever be detected.

4. TRUMP'S PICK FOR ENVOY TO ISRAEL HAS ALL SIDES ON EDGE

David Friedman has no diplomatic experience and his beliefs clash sharply with core canons of U.S. policy.

5. FROM OBAMA, A FINAL CHRISTMAS TRIBUTE TO THE TROOPS HE'S LED

He tells marines at a base in Hawaii that serving as commander in chief has been the privilege of his life.

6. WHICH PROBLEMS AWAIT CUBAN PRESIDENT IN 2017

Raul Castro faces a possible recession and a new U.S. administration promising to undo measures that gave many Cubans expectations of a better future.

7. FLEEING WAR, SOUTH SUDANESE CREATE BOOMING CAMPS IN UGANDA

Many local Ugandans who were once refugees themselves see the newcomers as welcome.

8. CHINA RESUMES TIES WITH SAO TOME

This is a triumph for Beijing over rival Taiwan after the African nation abruptly broke away from the self-ruled island last week.

9. HOW SMALLER SKI RESORTS TRY TO STAY COMPETITIVE

From baking doughnuts for skiers to displaying local art, they rely on personality to compete with mega-resorts.

10. WNBA OFFERS PLAYERS SECURITY APP FOR SAFETY OVERSEAS

"It's great the league is doing that and showing they care," Indiana Fever star Marissa Coleman says.

Recounts or no, US elections are still vulnerable to hacking

By **MICHAEL RUBINKAM** and **FRANK BAJAK**, Associated Press

ALLENTOWN, Pa. (AP) — Jill Stein's bid to recount votes in Pennsylvania was in trouble even before a federal judge shot it down Dec. 12. That's because the Green Party candidate's effort stood almost no chance of detecting potential fraud or error in the vote — there was basically nothing to recount.

Pennsylvania is one of 11 states where the majority of voters use antiquated machines that store votes electronically, without printed ballots or other paper-based backups that could be used to double-check the balloting. There's almost no way to know if they've accurately recorded individual votes — or if anyone tampered with the count.

More than 80 percent of Pennsylvanians who voted Nov. 8 cast their ballots on such machines, according to VotePA, a nonprofit seeking their replacement. A recount would, in the words of VotePA's Marybeth Kuznik, a veteran election judge, essentially amount to this: "You go to the computer and you say, 'OK, computer, you counted this a week-and-a-half ago. Were you right the first time?'"

These paperless digital voting machines, used by roughly 1 in 5 U.S. voters last month, present one of the most glaring dangers to the security of the rickety, underfunded U.S. election system. Like many electronic voting machines, they are vulnerable to hacking. But other machines typically leave a paper trail that could be manually checked. The paperless digital machines open the door to potential election rigging that might not ever be detected.

What's more, their prevalence magnifies other risks in the election system, such as the possibility that hackers might compromise the computers that tally votes, by making failures or attacks harder to catch. And like other voting machines adopted since the 2000 election, the paperless systems are nearing the end of their useful life — yet there is no comprehensive plan to replace them.

"If I were going to hack this election, I would go for the paperless machines because they are so hard to check," said Barbara Simons, a former IBM executive and co-author of "Broken Ballots," a history of the unlearned lessons of flawed U.S. voting technology.

FRAUD AND THE U.S. VOTING SYSTEM

Although Stein premised her recount effort on the need to ensure that the 2016 election wasn't tainted by hacking or fraud, there's no evidence of either so far — a fact federal judge Paul Diamond cited prominently in his decision halting the Pennsylvania recount. "Suspicion of a 'hacked' Pennsylvania election borders on the irrational," the judge wrote in his opinion.

Stein also pursued recounts in Wisconsin and Michigan, to little avail. Those states use more reliable

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paper-based voting technologies. (The Electoral College certified Republican Donald Trump's presidential victory last week.)

But a cadre of computer scientists from major universities backed Stein's recounts to underscore the vulnerability of U.S. elections. These researchers have been successfully hacking e-voting machines for more than a decade in tests commissioned by New York, California, Ohio and other states.

Stein and her witnesses said their fraud concerns were justified given U.S. charges that Russia meddled in the 2016 presidential campaign. Emails of top Democrats were hacked and leaked in what U.S. intelligence officials called Russian subterfuge against Democrat Hillary Clinton. Over the summer, hackers also tried to breach the voter registration databases of Arizona and Illinois using Russian-based servers, U.S. officials said. Election networks in at least 20 states were probed for vulnerabilities.

"It's a target-rich environment," said Rice University computer scientist Dan Wallach. Researchers would like to see the U.S. move entirely to computer-scannable paper ballots, since paper can't be hacked. Many advanced democracies require paper ballots, including Germany, Britain, Japan and Singapore.

Green Party lawyers seeking the Pennsylvania recount called the state's election system "a national disgrace" in a federal lawsuit, noting that many states outlaw paperless voting. They asked a judge to order a forensic examination of a sampling of the electronic machines, saying that's the only way to know for sure that votes weren't altered.

That would involve examination of all of the systems involved in the election — voting-machine computer chips and memory cards that store operating software and ballots, the computers that program the ballots, and even the machine vendors' source code — to detect any "bugs, holes or back doors" a hacker could have exploited, said Daniel Lopresti, chairman of the Lehigh University computer-science department.

But forensic analyses aren't foolproof, especially if hackers were good at covering their tracks. "What you're hoping for is some evidence that was left, some degree of clumsiness or carelessness, a belief by the individual that we won't dig quite that deep," Lopresti said.

PENNSYLVANIA: A PERFECT TARGET

The U.S. voting system — a loosely regulated, locally managed patchwork of more than 3,000 jurisdictions overseen by the states — employs more than two dozen types of machinery from 15 manufacturers. Elections officials across the nation say they take great care to secure their machines from tampering. They are locked away when not in use and sealed to prevent tampering.

All that makes national elections very difficult to steal without getting caught. "It would take a 'large conspiracy' to hack the results of a presidential election," said Kay Stimson, speaking for the National Association of Secretaries of State.

But difficult is not impossible. Wallach and his colleagues believe a crafty team of pros could strike surgically, focusing on select counties in a few battleground states where "a small nudge might be decisive," he said.

As a battleground state with paperless voting machines, Pennsylvania is a perfect candidate. In affidavits for the recount, computer scientist J. Alex Halderman of the University of Michigan laid out how attackers could conduct a successful hack:

—Probe election offices well in advance to determine how to break into computers.

—After identifying battleground states, infect voting machines in targeted counties with malware that would shift a small percentage of the vote to a desired candidate.

—After silently altering electronic tallies, erase digital tracks to leave no trace.

Just because the machines aren't on the internet doesn't mean they can't be hacked. Election workers could be duped or bribed into installing malware that sat dormant until Election Day. Locks could be picked to gain access to the machines, seals compromised with razor blades and acetone.

Studies by Halderman, Wallach and others proved years ago that it's possible to infect voting machines in an entire precinct via the compact flash cards used to load electronic ballots.

An infected machine "could do anything you can imagine," said Wallach. "It could flip votes from one candidate to another. It could delete votes. It could cast write-in votes for Mickey Mouse for president."

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HACKING THE COUNT

Vote-tallying systems, typically at the county level, are also tempting targets. They tend to be little more than PCs running a database.

Tabulation databases at the county level, which collect results from individual precincts, are supposed to be "airgapped," or disconnected from the internet at all times — though experts say they sometimes get connected anyway. They're considered insecure for other reasons; many have USB ports where malware could be introduced.

Vulnerabilities notwithstanding, there are no known cases of U.S. tallying systems being hacked. But it is not uncommon for candidates who have lost elections involving electronic voting to challenge results, claiming irregularities they blame on fraud, or human or mechanical errors.

Shelby County, Tennessee, home to Memphis, has seen a flood of lawsuits related to alleged tabulation errors, the most recent stemming from a 2015 court clerk race. "Nearly every election cycle in the county in recent memory has been plagued by a myriad of errors and complaints of wrongdoing," Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett wrote in a 2012 letter to the state comptroller recently obtained by The Associated Press.

OLD AND GETTING OLDER

Most voting machines in the U.S. are at or near the end of their expected lifespans. Forty-three states use machines more than a decade old. Most run on vintage operating systems such as Windows 2000 that pre-date the iPhone and are no longer updated with security patches. Old, stockpiled machines get cannibalized; when they can't supply parts, officials scrounge on eBay.

On Nov. 8, election officials across the U.S. handled numerous complaints of aging touchscreens losing calibration and casting votes for the wrong candidate. Such "vote flipping" tends to get exaggerated attention on social media and has become so familiar it's been enshrined in a TV episode of "The Simpsons."

But while many experts agree the U.S. voting system needs an upgrade, no one wants to pay to fix it.

From the private-sector perspective, it's a tiny market. University of Iowa computer scientist Douglas Jones estimates that voting-equipment makers pull in total annual revenues of less than \$200 million — roughly what Google generates in a day. The biggest player, ES&S, is private and has just 450 full-time employees. (Researchers worry that smaller companies like these are also much more vulnerable to hacking by sophisticated state actors.)

The sector boomed after the 2000 Florida recount debacle, when punch-card technology was discredited by hanging chads and a poor "butterfly" ballot design. Congress appropriated \$4 billion for election upgrades, and the states raced to replace punch cards and lever machines with digital technology.

But when that money ran out, so did many states' ability to address security concerns they'd overlooked in their initial rush. Four in 5 U.S. election officials polled by New York University's Brennan Center last year said they are desperate to replace equipment but lack the cash.

DISPARATE IMPACT

Voters in poorer areas suffer disproportionately, the center found. Data collected in Virginia, Ohio, Minnesota and Colorado suggests the poor are more apt to encounter failing machines. Six Minnesota counties buying new machines had household median incomes more than \$20,000 higher than jurisdictions not making purchases, the center found.

In Virginia, wealthier counties near Washington have upgraded to more trustworthy technology while lower-income counties in the state's southwest have not been able to afford it, said Edgardo Cortes, the state elections commissioner.

"The federal money is not there and in most instances state money is not being made available, either," said Cortes. "So the entire cost is falling to local governments."

Just as Congress delivered a death blow to punch cards, it should also outlaw paperless touchscreen voting machines and pay for their replacement, said Andrew Appel, a Princeton University computer scientist.

But even counties that can afford better voting tech face problems.

The clerk of Travis County, Texas, Dana DeBeauvoir, has been trying for a decade to build a bulletproof electronic voting system, because even the scanners that count paper ballots can be hacked. (Of course, such hacking could be detected and remedied by recounting paper ballots manually.)

The Travis County system would have a paper trail and use encryption systems to let voters confirm online that their vote counted and wasn't subject to tampering. For transparency, DeBeauvoir wants to use open source software that anyone can examine, not the proprietary code the industry uses.

None of the major vendors has shown interest, she says. "I don't think it fits their profit model."

Bajak reported from Houston. Associated Press writers Tami Abdollah in Washington and Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee, contributed to this report.

Russia: Crashed jet fragments pulled from Black Sea **By NATALIYA VASILYEVA and VERONIKA SILCHENKO, Associated Press**

SOCHI, Russia (AP) — Fragments of a plane were dragged out of the Black Sea on Monday amid a massive search operation as Russian officials declared that their investigation into the crash would focus on technical faults or pilot errors — not terrorism.

On shore, the nation held a day of mourning, laying flowers and lighting candles for the victims, who included dozens of singers in Russia's world-famous military choir, nine Russian journalists and a Russian doctor known for her charity work in war zones.

All 84 passengers and eight crew on the Russian military's Tu-154 plane are believed to have died Sunday morning when it crashed two minutes after taking off from the southern city of Sochi en route to Syria.

On Monday, more than 3,500 people on 45 ships — including 135 divers from across Russia — were sweeping a vast crash site in the Black Sea and along the shore, according to the Defense Ministry. Ten helicopters, drones and two deep-water submersibles were being used to help spot bodies and debris. The search area covered over 10 square kilometers (about 4 square miles) and was plagued by underwater currents.

Divers in the afternoon found parts of the jet a mile away from the shore and 25 meters (82) under the sea, the Emergency Situations Ministry said. Some of the debris was recovered and divers were going back into the water to search for more, it said, adding the fuselage has not been found yet.

The plane's black boxes have not been found yet either, Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov said. Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said plane's flight recorders did not have radio beacons, so locating them in the water was going to be challenging.

Speaking on television Monday, Sokolov said terrorism was not among the main theories for the crash cause, and that authorities were looking into a possible technical fault or a pilot error.

The intelligence agency FSB said echoed his comments in a later statement, saying it "has not found any signs or facts pointing to a possible terror attack or sabotage on board." The intelligence agency said it was now focusing its probe on possibilities such as a pilot error, low quality of fuel, external objects getting in the engine or an unspecified technical fault.

Rescue teams had recovered 11 bodies as well as body fragments and flew them Monday to Moscow, where the remains will be identified.

Russia also asked Georgia's breakaway republic of Abkhazia, which lies 7 kilometers (4.3 miles) east of the Sochi airport, to help look for plane debris or bodies.

The plane began its flight from Moscow's military airport of Chkalovsky. The FSB insisted the plane was under its surveillance and that only two people, both FSB officers, got onboard when the jet landed in Sochi for refueling. The plane did not carry any military or dual-use cargo, the FSB said.

Still, several aviation experts noted factors that could suggest a terror attack, such as the crew's failure to report any malfunction and the fact that debris from the plane was scattered over a wide area.

"Possible malfunctions ... certainly wouldn't have prevented the crew from reporting them," Vitaly Andreyev, a former senior Russian air traffic controller, told RIA Novosti.

The plane was taking the Defense Ministry's choir, the Alexandrov Ensemble, to perform at a New Year's concert at Hemeimeem air base in Syria's coastal province of Latakia. Despite the Syrian connection, Sokolov said the government saw no need to heighten security measures at Russian airports.

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The Tu-154 is a Soviet-built three-engine airliner designed in the late 1960s. The plane that crashed Sunday was built in 1983, and underwent factory check-ups and maintenance in 2014, the Defense Ministry said.

On Monday, a nationwide day of mourning for the plane victims, red and white carnations piled up outside the Moscow office of the Alexandrov Ensemble. One singer who did not get on the plane for personal reasons said he was devastated at the loss of so many talented colleagues.

Soloist Vadim Ananyev had stayed behind to help his wife with the kids because they just had a new baby. "I have lost my friends and colleagues, all killed, all five soloists - I feel in complete disarray," Ananyev told The Associated Press. "It is such a shame. I have known these people for 30 years. I know their wives and children. I feel terrible for the children and for all that I have lost."

Ananyev said he had received condolences from all over Russia and from abroad.

"We were loved all over the world, never mind the political situation," he said.

Mourners also lit candles and brought flowers to Channel One and NTV, whose TV journalists were going to Syria to cover the concert, and to a charity founded by Dr. Yelizaveta Glinka, who was on the plane bringing medicines to Syria.

At Sochi's brand-new Adler airport, which was built for the 2014 Winter Olympics, mourners came to light candles at the airport's chapel and lay flowers at an improvised shrine that featured photos of some of the victims. Locals also flocked to the city's port a few miles from the crash site to leave flowers by the waterfront.

Russian TV channels took entertainment shows off their programs Monday and outdoor seasonal celebrations were scrapped across Russia.

In Rome, Pope Francis led thousands of faithful in silent prayer for the plane crash victims and noted that the Russian army choir had performed in 2004 at the Vatican.

Vasilyeva reported from Moscow. Kate de Pury contributed to this report from Moscow.

Typhoon kills 6, spoils Christmas festivities in Philippines

By BULLIT MARQUEZ, Associated Press

BATANGAS, Philippines (AP) — A powerful typhoon blew out of the northern Philippines on Monday after killing at least six people and spoiling Christmas in several provinces, where more than 380,000 people abandoned celebrations at home to reach emergency shelters and other safer grounds.

Typhoon Nock-Ten cut power to five entire provinces due to toppled electric posts and trees, dimming Christmas revelries in Asia's largest Catholic nation. More than 300 flights were delayed or re-scheduled and ferries were barred from sailing, stranding more than 12,000 holiday travelers.

Six people died from drowning or by being pinned by fallen trees, poles and a collapsed concrete wall in the provinces of Quezon and Albay, southeast of Manila, after the typhoon made landfall in Catanduanes province Sunday night, officials said.

Many military camps and outposts in Catanduanes and outlying provinces were damaged and some troops were injured, the military said.

Nock-Ten, locally known as Nina, then blew westward across mountainous and island provinces, damaging homes, uprooting trees and knocking down communications.

After weakening on landfall, the typhoon had sustained winds of up to 120 kilometers (74 miles) per hour and gusts of 180 kph (111 mph) when it blew into the South China Sea after battering the congested provinces of Batangas and Cavite, south of Manila, government forecasters said.

A cargo ship with about two dozen crewmen radioed for help as their vessel started to list off Batangas. It later ran aground and turned on its side in Mabini town, the coast guard said.

The storm was one of the strongest to hit the Philippines since Typhoon Haiyan left more than 7,300 people dead or missing and displaced over 5 million in 2014. But officials in some provinces found it difficult to convince people to abandon their Christmas celebrations and head for the shelters before the

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storm hit. Some officials said they had to impose forced evacuations.

"Some residents just refused to leave their homes even when I warned them that you can face what amounts to a death penalty," Cedric Daep, a top disaster-response official in Albay, said by phone.

Shopping malls and stores were ordered to close early on Christmas Day to encourage people to remain indoors, "but at the height of the typhoon, many cars were still being driven around and people were out walking," Daep said. "We warned them enough, but we just can't control their mind."

Officials in Albay, where more than 150,000 villagers were displaced by the typhoon, declared a "state of calamity" on Sunday to allow faster disbursement of emergency funds.

About 20 typhoons and storms lash the Philippines each year. In the past 65 years, seven typhoons have struck the country on Christmas Day, according to the government's weather agency.

Tens of thousands of villagers, forced to spend Christmas in crowded and powerless emergency shelters, started to return home Monday to deal with the damage.

"They have left the evacuation centers and we're seeing the sun again," Ann Ongjoco, mayor of the town of Guinobatan in Albay, one of five provinces that lost electricity, said by phone.

But she said her town, where more than 17,600 villagers fled to shelters in schools, will not be able to resume the holiday celebrations because of the post-typhoon mess. "Many houses made of light materials were destroyed," she said.

Associated Press writer Jim Gomez in Manila contributed to this report.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Monday, Dec. 26, the 361st day of 2016. There are five days left in the year. The seven-day African-American holiday Kwanzaa begins today. This is Boxing Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 26, 1941, during World War II, Winston Churchill became the first British prime minister to address a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress. Churchill grimly warned that "many disappointments and unpleasant surprises await us," but also expressed faith that "the British and American peoples will, for their own safety and for the good of all, walk together in majesty, in justice and in peace."

On this date:

In 1776, British forces suffered a major defeat in the Battle of Trenton during the Revolutionary War.

In 1799, former President George Washington was eulogized by Col. Henry Lee as "first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

In 1865, James H. Nason of Franklin, Massachusetts, received a patent for "an improved coffee percolator."

In 1908, Jack Johnson became the first African-American boxer to win the world heavyweight championship as he defeated Canadian Tommy Burns in Sydney, Australia.

In 1944, during the World War II Battle of the Bulge, the embattled U.S. 101st Airborne Division in Bastogne, Belgium, was relieved by units of the 4th Armored Division. Tennessee Williams' play "The Glass Menagerie" was first performed at the Civic Theatre in Chicago.

In 1966, Kwanzaa was first celebrated.

In 1967, "Magical Mystery Tour," the Beatles' poorly received TV special, was broadcast (in black and white) on BBC1.

In 1972, the 33rd president of the United States, Harry S. Truman, died in Kansas City, Missouri, at age 88.

In 1980, Iranian television footage was broadcast in the United States, showing a dozen of the American hostages sending messages to their families.

In 1990, Nancy Cruzan, the young woman in an irreversible vegetative state whose case led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision on the right to die, died at a Missouri hospital.

In 1996, 6-year-old beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey was found beaten and strangled in the basement

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of her family's home in Boulder, Colorado. (To date, the slaying remains unsolved.)

In 2004, more than 230,000 people, mostly in southern Asia, were killed by a 100-foot-high tsunami triggered by a 9.1-magnitude earthquake beneath the Indian Ocean.

Ten years ago: Former President Gerald R. Ford died in Rancho Mirage, California, at age 93. Iraq's highest court rejected Saddam Hussein's appeal of his conviction and death sentence and said the former president should be hanged within 30 days. (Saddam was executed on Dec. 30, 2006, Iraq time.) A gasoline pipeline ruptured by thieves exploded in Lagos (LAY'-gohs), Nigeria, killing at least 260 people.

Five years ago: A heart surgeon from a Mayo Clinic in Florida flying across the northern corner of the state to retrieve a heart for transplant was killed with two other people when their helicopter crashed. A missing 9-year-old Indiana girl, Aliahna Maroney-Lemmon, was found dead, and the family friend who'd been watching her was charged with murder. (Michael Plumadore, who confessed to fatally bludgeoning and dismembering Aliahna, was later sentenced to life in prison.) Drew Brees set the NFL record for yards passing in a season, breaking a mark that Dan Marino had held since 1984, and the New Orleans Saints clinched the NFC South title with a 45-16 victory over the Atlanta Falcons.

One year ago: A new onslaught of tornadoes began erupting in the South; twisters ended up hitting parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Chicago police killed 19-year-old Quintonio LeGrier, a college student who an officer said was coming at him with a bat, and 55-year-old Bettie Jones, a neighbor who police said was shot accidentally. Basketball player Stephen Curry was named The Associated Press 2015 Male Athlete of the Year.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Donald Moffat is 86. Actor Caroll Spinney (Big Bird on TV's "Sesame Street") is 83. Rhythm-and-blues singer Abdul "Duke" Fakir (The Four Tops) is 81. Record producer Phil Spector is 77. "America's Most Wanted" host John Walsh is 71. Country musician Bob Carpenter (The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) is 70. Funk musician George Porter Jr. (The Meters) is 69. Baseball Hall of Fame catcher Carlton Fisk is 69. Retired MLB All-Star Chris Chambliss is 68. Baseball Hall of Famer Ozzie Smith is 62. Former Sen. Evan Bayh, D-Ind., is 61. Humorist David Sedaris is 60. Rock musician James Kottak (The Scorpions) is 54. Country musician Brian Westrum (Sons of the Desert) is 54. Rock musician Lars Ulrich (Metallica) is 53. Actress Nadia Dajani is 51. Rock musician J is 49. Country singer Audrey Wiggins is 49. Rock musician Peter Dinklage (Candlebox) is 47. Rock singer James Mercer (The Shins; Flake) is 46. Actor-singer Jared Leto is 45. Actress Kendra C. Johnson is 40. Rock singer Chris Daughtry is 37. Actress Beth Behrs is 31. Actor Kit Harington is 30. Actress Eden Sher is 25. Pop singer Jade Thirlwall (Little Mix) is 24. Actor Zach Mills is 21.

Thought for Today: "The people can never understand why the President does not use his supposedly great power to make 'em behave. Well all the President is, is a glorified public relations man who spends his time flattering, kissing and kicking people to get them to do what they are supposed to do anyway."
— President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972).