

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Wednesday, Dec. 28

**Senior Menu:** Meat Loaf, Baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, fruited Jell-O, whole wheat bread.

## Thursday, Dec. 29

**Senior Menu:** Ham and bean soup, egg salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, oatmeal raisin cookie.

## Friday, Dec. 30

**Senior Menu:** Turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, broccoli, ice cream sundae, whole wheat bread.

## Saturday, Dec. 31

**Catholic Parish:** Worship at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church at 4 p.m., worship at St. Joseph in Turton at 6 p.m.

## Sunday, Jan. 1

**United Methodist Church Parish:** 9 a.m. service in Conde, 10 a.m. coffee fellowship time, 11 a.m., worship at Groton (No Sunday School)

**Emmanuel Lutheran Church:** Worship at 9 a.m. (No Sunday School)

**Catholic Parish:** Worship at St. Anthony in Bristol at 9 a.m.

**Heaven Bound Ministries in Pierpont:** Worship at 10 a.m.

## Monday, Jan. 2

**Emmanuel Lutheran Church:** Bible Study at 6:30 a.m.

City Council meeting at Groton Community Center at 7 p.m.

## 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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TJ: 605/380-7915 **TreeLine Tree Service**

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## Gas Prices to Ring in the New Year on the High Side

Dec. 27, 2016 – South Dakota's gas price average of \$2.23 is the highest it's been since Nov. 4, AAA reports. Today's mark of \$2.23 per gallon is 28 cents above the price recorded one year ago.

"Heading into 2017, gasoline demand is expected to drop drastically after a record-busting year-end holiday travel season. Pump prices will respond likewise as demand declines," said Marilyn Buskohl, spokeswoman for AAA South Dakota.

	Today	Last Week	Change	Nov. 29	Change	Last year
Aberdeen	\$2.196	\$2.093	\$0.103	\$2.17	\$0.026	\$1.999
Brookings	\$2.300	\$2.222	\$0.078	\$2.16	\$0.144	\$1.999
Huron	\$2.322	\$2.354	-\$0.032	\$2.31	\$0.008	\$1.974
Mitchell	\$2.233	\$2.221	\$0.012	\$2.24	-\$0.011	\$1.929
Pierre	\$2.279	\$2.230	\$0.049	\$2.37	-\$0.088	\$2.091
Rapid City	\$2.112	\$2.105	\$0.007	\$2.17	-\$0.055	\$2.065
Sioux Falls	\$2.219	\$2.124	\$0.095	\$1.95	\$0.269	\$1.753
Vermillion	\$2.124	\$2.142	-\$0.018	\$1.95	\$0.171	\$1.831
Watertown	\$2.302	\$2.228	\$0.074	\$2.21	\$0.097	\$1.886
Yankton	\$2.317	\$2.210	\$0.107	\$2.25	\$0.072	\$1.912
South Dakota	\$2.233	\$2.187	\$0.046	\$2.15	\$0.087	\$1.948

Nationwide, retail averages have increased 28 of the past 31 days and prices have moved higher by fractions of a penny since Friday. The national average for regular gasoline currently sits at \$2.29 per gallon, which is four cents more than one week ago, 16 cents more than one month ago and 29 cents more year-over-year.

AAA estimates U.S. drivers have saved about \$27 billion at the pump so far this year compared to the same period last year. Today's national average price for a gallon of gasoline is 29 cents more than the average price on New Year's Day in 2016 (\$2.00). Most U.S. drivers are expected to pay the second-cheapest New Year's Day gas prices since 2009, when the national average was \$1.62.

To start off the new year, all eyes will be on OPEC to see if they, along with partnering countries, will stick to their 6-month promise to cut 1.8-million b/d of crude per day. The Oil Price Information Service projects that member compliance will likely be around about 70 percent, with expectations that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and other Arab Gulf countries will stick to the deal while Libya and Nigeria could potentially increase their production output if conflict in both countries continues.

Over the past five years, the average domestic drop in demand during January has been 358,000 barrels per day or about 15-million gallons, according to OPIS. The oil information service estimates a larger dip this year.

### Quick Stats

· The nation's top five least expensive markets are: South Carolina (\$2.04), Mississippi (\$2.07), Texas (\$2.07), Arkansas (\$2.07) and Alabama (\$2.08).

· The biggest weekly price increases are reflected in Michigan (+14 cents), Illinois (+13 cents), Wisconsin (+12 cents), Ohio (+10 cents) and Minnesota (+10 cents).

### Central States

The Great Lakes region often sees dramatic fluctuations in pump prices as regional refinery and distribution issues have regularly sent prices sharply higher. The past week has been no different with five states in the region topping the list of the largest weekly increases: Michigan (+14 cents), Illinois (+13 cents), Wisconsin (+12 cents), Ohio (+10 cents) and Minnesota (+10 cents). While increases in the Central States have not been as pronounced, they are still substantial, with North Dakota (+9 cents), Iowa (+8 cents), Kansas (+7 cents), Nebraska and Oklahoma (+6 cents) and South Dakota (+5 cents) all ranking in the top-15.

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Last week BP shut down a 70,000-b/d reformer unit at its 430,000-b/d Whiting, Ind., refinery, according to reports from OPIS. The outage was only expected to last a few days but will have an impact on supplies in the region. The refinery is the largest in the region and any production outages typically result in increases at the pump.

## **Oil Market Dynamics**

Last month, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) along with non-cartel countries worked out an agreement to limit crude oil production by 1.8 million barrels per day beginning in January 2017. Efforts to curb oil production are aimed at rebalancing the oil supply and as a result, markets have reacted, causing retail prices to increase. Last week, Libya announced the re-opening of pipelines from two major oil fields which has led many to speculate that increased production in Libya may counter OPEC's anticipated cuts. Traders will pay close attention to Libya's efforts and monitor OPEC's ability to implement production cuts starting in January. At the close of Friday's formal trading session on the NYMEX, WTI was up seven cents to settle at \$53.02 per barrel. Markets were closed Monday.

Motorists can find current gas prices along their route with the free AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. The app can also be used to map a route, find discounts, book a hotel and access AAA roadside assistance. Learn more at [AAA.com/mobile](http://AAA.com/mobile).

## **Help Wanted!**

The South Dakota Creativity Association board (SD DI) is currently looking for people interested in filling open Affiliate and Regional Challenge Master positions for the upcoming tournament season. These positions involve studying a current Destination Imagination Challenge and being involved in insuring that consistency in appraising is maintained from tournament to tournament throughout our state. Many of these positions are open this year due to retiring long-time dedicated volunteers. This is a volunteer position, but the board helps defray some travel costs. The tournaments run from the end of February to the end of March, but we'd like these positions filled within the next month. Please pass this on to anyone that you think might be interested in a position. If interested yourself, or if you want more details as to what the position entails, please contact the SD Affiliate Director, Dean Fenenga at [di.soda.ad@gmail.com](mailto:di.soda.ad@gmail.com). The board and hundreds of students across our state thank you for your support of South Dakota Destination Imagination.

## Gov. Daugaard Declares State of Emergency Following Winter Storm

PIERRE, S.D. – Gov. Dennis Daugaard has declared a state of emergency for all of South Dakota following a Christmas Day storm that resulted in stranded motorists and electrical power outages.

The Governor, in issuing the Executive Order, has ordered that state government technical resources be made available to support county governments in efforts to restore normal travel conditions and emergency services. Those technical resources will be coordinated by the state Department of Public Safety's Office of Emergency Management.

"Every part of South Dakota was impacted in some way by this holiday storm," said Gov. Daugaard. "If it was not heavy snow, it was freezing rain and high winds. Many South Dakotans and visitors had to change their Christmas plans because of the storm's impact."

Blizzard conditions forced the closure of Interstate 90 from the Wyoming border to Chamberlain from Sunday night through Monday morning. Electrical power outages were reported in many parts of the state.

Office of Emergency Management staff already have been contacting counties about the type of resources needed and damages sustained.

-30-

Note: Here is a copy of the executive order as issued by Gov. Daugaard:

WHEREAS, the entire State of South Dakota has been impacted by a Christmas Day severe winter storm which brought freezing drizzle and rain, snow, and high winds leading to blizzard conditions in areas where snow fell; and,

WHEREAS, The storm caused widespread hazardous travel conditions and road closures due to zero visibility; and,

WHEREAS, The blizzard conditions interrupted the normal flow of emergency, school, mail, business and farm traffic; and,

WHEREAS, Icing on power lines combined with strong winds caused thousands to be without power from the storm; and,

WHEREAS, Emergency shelters were needed to house stranded motorists caused by road closures and blizzard conditions as well citizens without power; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DENNIS DAUGAARD, Governor of the State of South Dakota, under provisions of SDCL 34-48A, otherwise known as the Emergency Management law, do hereby declare a state of emergency to exist in South Dakota.

IT IS FURTHER DECLARED, that technical resources available to state government will be utilized under coordination of the Department of Public Safety, Office of Emergency Management, in support of county government to restore normal travel conditions and emergency services.



## Friends . . . Near and Far

*Editor's Note: This is the 42nd in a series featuring your friends, near and far.*

### Stacy Gackle Otkin

**JobWise what are you doing today? Also list title if you have one.** Financial Services - Senior Compliance Analyst at MetaBank

**How long have you been working at the current job?** 2 years in March

**How did you get your current job?** I applied for the job and earned it based on my past experience.

**If you have previous employments list them and how long you were there.**

Great Western Bank 1 1/2 years  
Dakota Community Bank 3 years

Plains Commerce Bank 6 years

**What year did you graduate from high school and name of high school:** 2000 - Groton High School

**Where did you attend college and what was your degree?** Northern State 2 years  
Southeast Technical Institute - 1 1/2 years earned my Associates degree 12-2003.

**What advice would you give the high school students today?** Don't compare yourself to anyone else - be you. Be a blessing to others.

**List your major accomplishments that you have had so far in life.**

Earned my Associates degree.  
Vice President of the Sioux Falls Compliance Professionals Organization  
Married my soul mate - Josh Otkin  
Mother to 6 amazing children.

**Are you married? If so what is your spouses name and where was she from?** Married to Josh Otkin - he is from Colman SD

**How did the two of you meet?** We met online

**Do you have any children?** We have 6 amazing children. Landen 16, Kaitlynn 13, Treyten 12, Braeden 9, Shaelynn 2 (on December 26th) and Easten - 5 months

**Do you feel that your high school and college education prepared you adequately for post education life?** Yes it did help prepare me. Having deadlines to meet helped me learn how to become organized and prioritize.



Left to right are Treyten, Josh holding Shaelynn, Kaitlynn, Stacy holding Easten, Landen and Braeden.

## Case IH Heaters

70,000 BTU Heater- \$249.00

125,000 BTU Heater- \$349.00

215,000 BTU Heater-\$449.00

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## Today in Weather History

December 28, 2000: Northwest winds of 35 to 50 mph, gusting to around 65 mph, occurred across central and north central South Dakota in the morning. The high winds resulted in blizzard conditions at some locations just east of the Missouri River. Further east, in northeast South Dakota, northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph combined with newly fallen snow to generate blizzard conditions from the morning into the early afternoon hours. Travel was very difficult in many places and many motorists found themselves in ditches. There were also several non-injury accidents.

1839 - The third storm in two weeks hit the northeastern U.S. It brought two more feet of snow to Hartford, CT, and Worcester, MA. Whole gales swept the coast causing many wrecks. (David Ludlum)

December 28, 1879: Tay Bridge is the main-line railway across the Tay River in Scotland, between the city of Dundee and the suburb of Wormit in Fife. During the evening hours of December 28, 1879, strong winds were said to blow at right angles to the bridge. Witnesses said the storm was as bad as they had seen in 20 to 30 years. The winds at Glasgow and Aberdeen were measured at 71 mph. Winds were estimated to be 80 mph in Dundee. A passenger train departing at 7:13 pm was said to disappear three minutes later. The train was found at the bottom of the river, along with the high girders and much of the ironwork of their supporting piers. There were no survivors. The Court of Inquiry report concluded that, "The fall of the bridge was occasioned by the insufficiency of the cross bracing and its fastenings to sustain the force of the gale."

1897 - The temperature at Dayville, OR, hit 81 degrees to establish a state record for December. (The Weather Channel)

1924 - Iowa experienced its coldest December morning of record. Morning lows averaged 25 degrees below zero for the 104 weather stations across the state.

1955 - Anchorage, AK, was buried under 17.7 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for that location. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1958 - Albuquerque, NM, received 14.2 inches of snow to establish a 24 hour record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Up to twenty inches of snow buried southern Minnesota, and 20 to 40 mph northwesterly winds produced snow drifts six feet high, and reduced visibilities to near zero at times in blowing snow. There were a thousand traffic accidents in Michigan during the storm, resulting in thirty-five injuries. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds behind a cold front claimed three lives in eastern Pennsylvania, and injured a dozen others in eastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Maryland. Winds gusted to 87 mph at Hammonton NJ and in the Washington D.C. area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Squalls continued to bring snow to the Great Lakes Region, with heavy snow reported near Lake Superior and Lake Ontario. Syracuse NY received 8.5 inches of snow to push the total for the month past their previous December record of 57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - A severe snow storm hit northern California and southern Oregon. As much as 2 feet of snow fell along Interstate 5 closing a 150-mile stretch of the interstate, stranding hundreds of travelers. Winds from the storm caused power outages to more than 200,000 customers in California and Oregon. One man died of a heart attack after helping other drivers. (CNN)








2004 - Los Angeles (downtown) broke a daily rainfall record for the month of December (5.55 inches). This was the third wettest calendar day in Los Angeles since records began in 1877.

2005 - An outbreak of severe thunderstorms across portions of the southeast United States on the 28th produced hail, high winds and a few tornadoes. The states of Georgia and Tennessee were the most affected. (NCDC)

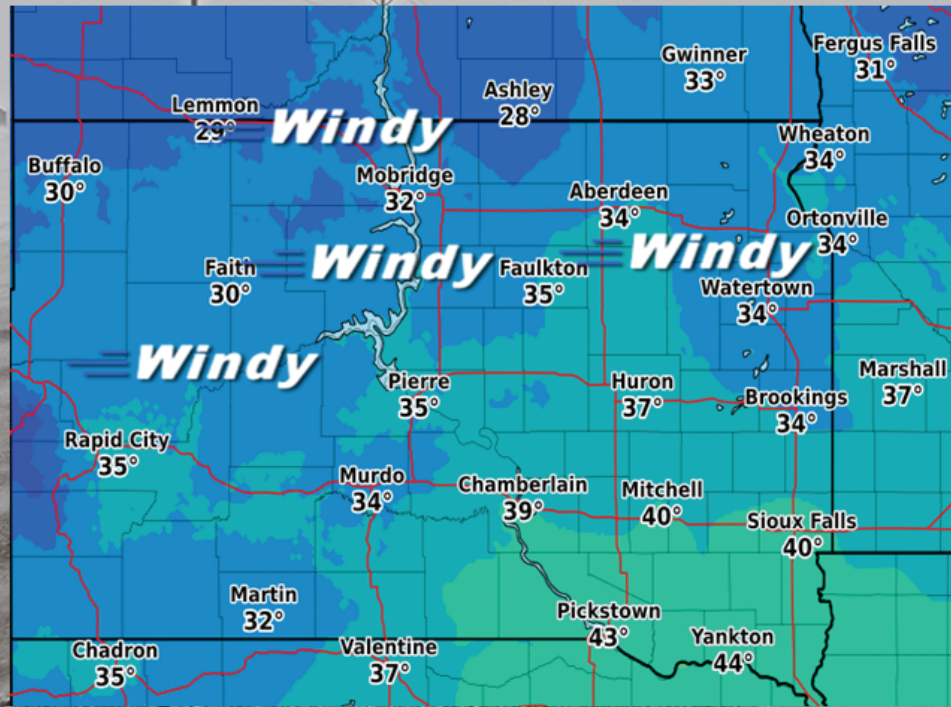


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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
 20%						
Slight Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Patchy Blowing Snow and Blustery	Patchy Blowing Snow and Blustery	Increasing Clouds	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 34 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 28 °F	Low: 9 °F	High: 35 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 20 °F

## Windy Today Areas Of Blowing & Drifting Snow



National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD

Created: 12/28/2016 4:27 AM

[www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr)

 NWSAberdeen

 @NWSAberdeen



Published on: 12/28/2016 at 4:53AM

While mild temperatures are expected today - gusty west winds will cause some blowing and drifting. There may be some travel difficulties across the forecast area today as a result - particularly west river and the Missouri Valley. Windy conditions are expected to continue into Thursday as well.



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## Yesterday's Weather

**High Outside Temp: 28.7 F at 9:26 PM**

**Low Outside Temp: 5.5 F at 7:26 AM**

**High Gust: 16.0 Mph at 2:04 PM**

Rain: 0.00

## Today's Info

**Record High: 57° in 1898**

**Record Low: -24° in 1924**

**Average High: 23°F**

**Average Low: 3°F**

**Average Precip in Dec.: 0.46**

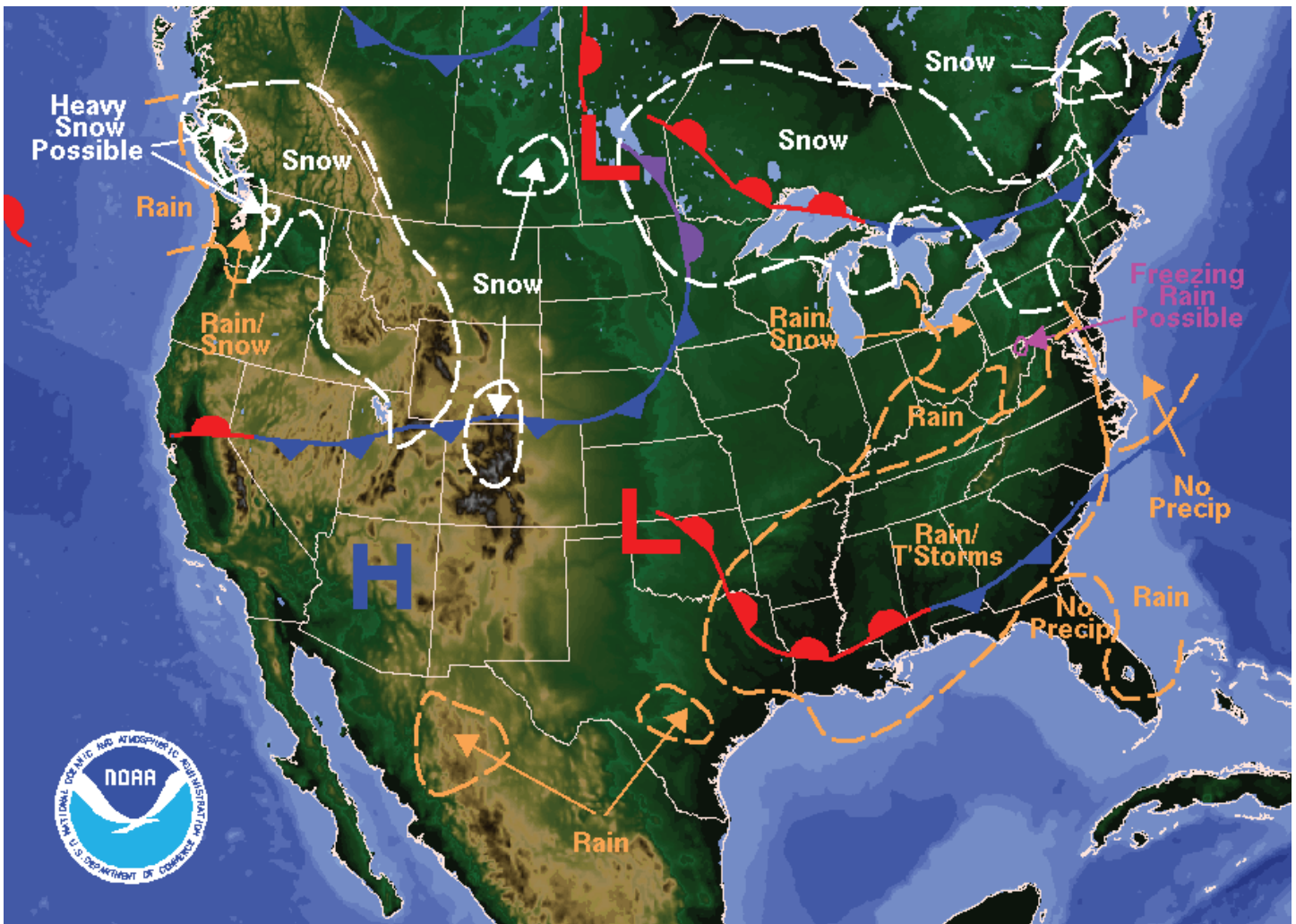
**Precip to date in Dec.: 1.74**

**Average Precip to date: 21.66**

**Precip Year to Date: 19.08**

**Sunset Tonight: 4:58 p.m.**

**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:13 a.m.**



Weather Forecast for Wed, Dec 28, 2016, issued 4:20 AM EST  
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center  
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



## WHEN HEAVEN CAME DOWN

A little girl took her first elevator ride with her father. When they arrived at the top floor, he asked, "What did you think of that? Did you like it?"

"I don't know, Daddy," she replied. "It was kind of funny. We got into this little house, and then the upstairs came down."

An amusing little story, isn't it? But that's exactly what happened when God sent His Son into the world. God sent Jesus, His Son, into the world to give us life and light, hope and healing, grace and goodness.

We are expected to do the same through Him. We are to take the message of salvation to others, light up the dark pathways of those who are still blinded by sin, give hope to those who are unable to see past their problems, show grace to those who are burdened beyond measure and demonstrate goodness to those who are in need by sharing our possessions with them.

It is not enough that we know God's "Golden Rule." He expects us to live it every day of our lives.

Prayer: Help me, Dear Jesus, to live as You lived and do as You did that I might give to others what You gave to me. May I take a little bit of heaven to others because You brought all of heaven to me. In Your Name. Amen.

Scripture: John 10:9-18 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

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## News from the Associated Press

### Tuesday's Scores By The Associated Press

#### BOYS' BASKETBALL

Todd County 74, Bennett County 43

Winner 54, Bon Homme 44

#### POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

NSU Wolves Classic

Aberdeen Christian vs. Harding County, ccd.

Edmunds Central vs. Mott-Regent, N.D., ccd.

Leola/Frederick vs. Timber Lake, ccd.

Mott-Regent, N.D. vs. Edmunds Central, ccd.

Northwestern vs. Edgeley-Kulm-Montpelier, N.D., ccd.

Potter County vs. Britton-Hecla, ccd.

Redfield/Doland vs. St. Francis Indian, ccd.

Waubay/Summit vs. Eureka/Bowdle, ccd.

#### GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Lennox 73, Dakota Valley 64

Winner 62, Bon Homme 36

Huron Holiday Classic

Colman-Egan 51, Hitchcock-Tulare 47

Elk Point-Jefferson 45, Chester 31

Faulkton 47, James Valley Christian 28

Jones County 57, Iroquois 14

Marty Indian 51, Mitchell Christian 34

Potter County 42, Wolsey-Wessington 32

#### POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

Bennett County vs. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, ppd. to Jan 30.

Todd County vs. Red Cloud, ppd.

### Rapid City councilman hurt by defunding of suicide group

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City council member says he's deeply hurt by the city's decision to stop funding a support group for relatives of people who take their own lives.

The Front Porch Coalition played a crucial role in helping Councilman John Roberts and his wife make it through the loss of their son, he told the Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2i4ripN>).

After a committee recommending annual Human Services grants opted to stop funding the coalition, Roberts spoke to council members this month about how the local nonprofit impacted him and his wife.

He recalled that when he was first elected to the council, he said someone suggested he serve as the liaison for the Front Porch Coalition, but because it didn't directly affect him at the time he dismissed it.

"And then three years later, my son committed suicide," he said. "So when people are affected by it, it changes the priorities."

Roberts added that he is sad to see "even \$3,000 being taken away from a group that (changes) people's lives."

The \$15,000 grant requested by the coalition to expand its youth suicide prevention training was rejected.

The organization's executive director, Stephanie Schweitzer Dixon, said she was disappointed to find out the work the coalition does isn't a priority to the council.

"It's unfortunate that the city council and the committee had to make the decision they did, and that this state's leading cause of death of our youth is not their priority," Dixon said.

Roberts told the council that the small organization's impact is wide-reaching and too important to those affected to be dismissed.

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

## Man arrested in apparent homicide at Rapid City motel

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Police in Rapid City have a suspect under arrest in an apparent homicide at a motel.

Authorities say the 33-year-old man from Rapids City was arrested Tuesday afternoon. He is being held in the Pennington County Jail.

Police were dispatched to the Stardust Motel about 3 a.m. Tuesday on a report of an unconscious man. The 61-year-old man was pronounced dead at Rapid City Regional Hospital.

A police statement says the preliminary investigation indicates the man died of blunt force trauma.

The man's name is being withheld until his family can be notified.

## Polygamous leader Seth Jeffs set for change of plea hearing

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Another high-ranking polygamous group leader appears ready to take a plea deal in a multimillion dollar food-stamp fraud case.

Seth Jeffs has a change of plea hearing scheduled for Wednesday morning in Salt Lake City. He runs the group's South Dakota compound and is a brother of the sect's imprisoned leader, Warren Jeffs.

Last week, fellow defendant John Wayman agreed to a plea deal that secured his release from jail after six months.

Seth Jeffs and Wayman are among 11 people charged in February on accusations of funneling followers' food stamp benefits into front companies and using them to fund leaders' lavish lifestyles.

Another high-profile defendant, Lyle Jeffs, remains on the run after escaping home confinement this summer.

## Turkey, Russia discussing Syria cease-fire plan

By PHILIP ISSA and SUZAN FRASER, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Turkish and Russian officials are discussing the contours of a cease-fire for Syria, Syrian opposition factions said, building on cooperation between the two countries following a deal they brokered for the evacuation of opposition fighters from the northern city of Aleppo earlier this month.

Several rebel groups said, however, that they are withholding their approval of any agreement until they receive details about its terms.

An official with one of the factions told The Associated Press that Russian and Turkish officials were debating a cease-fire proposal that would encompass the whole of Syria. He spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were ongoing. Rebels have spoken up in the past against proposals that would allow the government to continue its offensives around the outskirts of the capital, Damascus.

Turkey's Anadolu Agency said Wednesday morning that Ankara and Moscow had reached an agreement, but there was no confirmation from state officials.

The Syrian opposition official said factions were holding vigorous discussions over the possibilities.

Another official with a different group said the proposal has not been formally presented to the opposition.

"It is difficult to accept or refuse the matter before we look at the details, of course," said the official, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity so as not to bias intra-opposition talks.

The Anadolu report said a plan would be presented to all sides of the Syria conflict and aims for a cease-fire that would come into force "in all regions" where fighting between pro-government forces and opposition groups is taking place. It quoted unnamed officials.

Terror organizations would be kept out of the scope of the cease-fire agreement, the agency said, without elaborating on which insurgent groups would be considered terror organizations.



It said a peace process in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana would go ahead under Russia and Turkey's leadership if the cease-fire holds. Anadolu said the two countries would act as "guarantors" of the peace process.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman confirmed Russia and Turkey were in "constant contact" to prepare for planned Syria peace talks in Kazakhstan, but did not comment about the possibility of a cease-fire.

In the U.N., a top Russian diplomat said a draft U.N. Security Council resolution that would impose sanctions on Syria for chemical weapons use is unacceptable to Moscow, which has veto power on the council.

A resolution drafted by Britain and France, which was obtained by The Associated Press, would impose sanctions on an array of Syrian individuals, organizations and companies allegedly involved in chemical weapons attacks in the war-torn country. It would also ban sales of helicopters to Syria.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted by the state news agency Tass on Wednesday as saying the resolution "is categorically unacceptable to us. We warn them against attempts to fan tensions in the U.N. Security Council."

And in Syria, activists said at least 20 civilians have been killed in an airstrike on an Islamic State-held village in Deir el-Zour province in eastern Syria.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group reported Wednesday that several unknown warplanes bombed the village of Hajna the night before, killing 12 people from one family and 10 from another. It said at least 10 children were killed.

The activist group Deir Ezzor 24 said no one in the two families survived.

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Fraser reported from Ankara, Turkey. Associated Press writer Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

## Second flight recorder recovered from Black Sea crash site

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Search teams on Wednesday recovered another flight recorder from a military plane that crashed in the Black Sea, killing all 92 people aboard, the Defense Ministry said.

The first flight recorder was found the previous day and experts have started analyzing its data, seeking to identify the cause of the crash.

The Tu-154 of the Russian Defense Ministry crashed into the sea early Sunday, two minutes after taking off in good weather from the city of Sochi. It was carrying members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, widely known as the Red Army Choir, to a New Year's concert at a Russian military base in Syria.

The Defense Ministry said 15 bodies and 239 body fragments have been recovered from the crash site. It previously said 17 bodies had been found.

A massive recovery effort has involved 3,600 people, including about 200 navy divers flown to the site from all over Russia. They have been aided by drones and submersibles.

Investigators were looking into whether the crash might have been caused by bad fuel, pilot error, equipment failure or objects stuck in the engines. The top Russian investigative agency said it had taken samples from a fuel tank used to fill the plane, which flew from Moscow's Chkalovsky military airport and stopped in Sochi for refueling.

The Komsomolskaya Pravda daily and online publication Life.ru published what they described as a script of cockpit conversation, with a pilot yelling about a problem with the plane's flaps and then shouting: "Commander, we are falling!" It was impossible to verify the report, but both publications were known to have good connections with Russian security agencies.

Flaps are moveable panels mounted on the edge of the wings to increase lift.

The Kommersant daily also said that investigators believed that the crash was caused by a combination of malfunctioning flaps and pilot error, which caused the plane to lose speed and stall.

However, Nikolai Antoshkin, the former deputy chief of the Russian air force, dismissed the claim, saying that responding to flap malfunctions is part of standard pilot training. "If flaps fail to retract or extend in

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time ... pilots know how to deal with it, it's not a problem at all," he said in remarks carried by state RIA Novosti news agency.

Russia's main domestic security and counter-terrorism agency, the FSB, said it found "no indications or facts pointing at the possibility of a terror attack or an act of sabotage."

However, some aviation experts have noted that the crew's failure to report any technical problem and the large area over which fragments of the plane were scattered could point to an explosion on board.

The Tu-154 is a Soviet-built three-engine airliner designed in the late 1960s. Russian airlines decommissioned the noisy, fuel-guzzling aircraft years ago, but the military and other government agencies continue using the plane, which is still loved by crews for its maneuverability and sturdiness.

The plane that crashed Sunday was built in 1983 and underwent factory checkups and maintenance in 2014, and earlier this year. Investigators have taken relevant documents from the plant that did the job.

## 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. TURKEY, RUSSIA REPORTEDLY AGREE ON SYRIA CEASE-FIRE PLAN

A Turkish news agency says Ankara and Moscow are working to ensure that the truce would come into effect at midnight, although there was no immediate confirmation from the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

### 2. CARRIE FISHER FOUND BEST MATERIAL IN HER OWN TROUBLES

"People relate to aspects of my stories and that's nice for me because then I'm not all alone with it," she told The AP in 2009.

### 3. OBAMA, JAPAN'S ABE DECRY 'HORRORS OF WAR'

They seek to prove that even the bitterest enemies can become allies, during a historic pilgrimage to the hallowed waters of Pearl Harbor.

### 4. FOR TRUMP WHITE HOUSE, DIPLOMATIC SECURITY CHALLENGES REMAIN

As president, Trump will be responsible for protecting America's diplomats, but so far he's offered virtually no insight into how he'll do that.

### 5. SECOND FLIGHT RECORDER RECOVERED FROM BLACK SEA CRASH SITE

The first black box was found the previous day and experts have started analyzing its data to determine the cause of the tragedy that killed 92 people.

### 6. WHO IS TRAFFICKING FOOD AS COUNTRY GOES HUNGRY

The Venezuelan military is using its control over the national food supply to make money, The AP finds.

### 7. WHERE POLICE LAUNCH 2017 KINDNESS CAMPAIGN

Law enforcers in Alaska's capital city are spearheading efforts to turn the new year into a community-wide year of kindness.

### 8. KACHIN REBELS SEE MORE MYANMAR ATTACKS

They say the government has only escalated fighting since Aung San Suu Kyi took over as leader, crushing the hopes that had led many ethnic minorities to support her party.

### 9. WHY MORE AMERICANS ARE RETIRING ABROAD

Experts say retirees most often cite the cost of living as the reason for leaving the U.S.

### 10. GREAT SPORTS DYNASTIES NEVER HAVE TIME TO SAVOR THE MOMENT

For Nick Saban and the Alabama Crimson Tide, there's little time for joy and satisfaction because it's always on to the relentless pursuit of the next title.

## For Trump White House, diplomatic security challenges remain

By VIVIAN SALAMA, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump hammered rival Hillary Clinton during the presidential campaign for failing to prevent the attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, Libya, when she was secretary of state. Soon he'll be the one responsible for protecting America's diplomats, but he's offered virtually no insight

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into how he'll do that.

After the 2012 Benghazi attack, Congress boosted spending on security to protect the tens of thousands of Americans and foreign staff that make up the U.S. diplomatic service. Security experts and career diplomats say there have been improvements, but that significant shortfalls remain.

Last week's assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey, Andrei Karlov, was a chilling reminder that diplomats are increasingly exposed to threats, even in countries that are typically not regarded as hardship posts. The assassin shouted, "Don't forget Aleppo," apparently referring to Russia's military engagement in Syria.

It's not clear whether having a brashly outspoken figure like Trump in the White House will compound diplomatic security challenges. The foreign policy of Trump and his pick for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, remains somewhat of an enigma.

The Trump transition team didn't respond to questions about how his administration will address diplomatic security issues.

Keeping diplomats safe is a costly business. In the last budget year, Congress approved \$3.39 billion for the Diplomatic Security Bureau's functions around the world. That accounts for about 7 percent of the State Department's overall budget.

Diplomatic security has also become highly contentious since the killings of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans at Benghazi.

The Republican-led House Select Committee on Benghazi concluded in June that there were lethal mistakes by the Obama administration, though it found no "smoking gun" pointing to wrongdoing by Clinton. The committee included Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Kan., Trump's pick to head the CIA.

Another member of the committee, Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, criticized the Obama administration for refusing to create the position of undersecretary for diplomatic security. He called it the most important change "to enhance diplomatic security." He claimed committee Democrats "stonewalled and played games while we searched for the truth."

The top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, accused Republicans of losing interest in diplomatic security now that the election is over.

"Since the issue is no longer a useful cudgel against Secretary Clinton, I fear the (Republican) majority's commitment to diplomatic security will once again fade, and the State Department could face cuts both to security budgets and to core diplomatic functions," Schiff said.

A 2012 government inquiry following the Benghazi attacks made more than two dozen recommendations for security improvements, highlighting serious lapses in management and leadership that left the consulate vulnerable.

The Bureau of Diplomatic Security declined to answer specific questions on the areas where improvement is still needed, but said that diplomatic security "constantly balances available resources to provide a safe and secure environment for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy."

Security experts and diplomats say more can be done within individual diplomatic missions to improve safety. Mission security chiefs can use more training, and ambassadors and other mission leaders should also be given greater authority over security matters since they are most familiar with conditions on the ground, experts say.

Fred Burton, a former diplomatic security agent, said mission security officials "never had that ability to speak for ourselves at these kinds of decision-making meetings because you're pushed down on this flow chart and then you're left ... with all the challenges of being in a place like Benghazi."

Burton, author of "Under Fire: The Untold Story of the Attack in Benghazi," said he's not optimistic the problem can be fixed unless Tillerson is confirmed "and his desire is to restructure the bureaucracy inside State."

Traditionally, host countries have been obligated by treaty to protect diplomatic facilities. But with non-state actors gaining ground and capable of destabilizing governments, it's falling to the U.S. to take all precautions to protect its diplomats while still giving them the freedom to do their jobs.

Robert Ford, a former ambassador to Syria, said the most helpful way Congress and the administration

could advance diplomatic security is by providing "strong support for locally determined security resource needs."

"Security issues cannot realistically be micro-managed from Washington-based officials because only the people on the ground have an up-to-date sense of conditions and the evolution of threats," he said.

## Trump expands inner circle with new security official, envoy

By VIVIAN SALAMA, Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump tapped an experienced hand from the George W. Bush era and a longtime Trump Organization official to become members of his inner circle when he assumes office next month.

Thomas Bossert will become an assistant to the president for homeland security and counterterrorism. A statement from Trump's transition team said Bossert will advise the president on issues related to homeland security, counterterrorism and cybersecurity, and coordinate the Cabinet's process for making and executing policy in those areas.

The president-elect also appointed one of his main advisers on U.S.-Israel relations during the campaign and transition as special representative for international negotiations. Jason Greenblatt has worked for the Trump Organization for over two decades and currently serves as its executive vice president and chief legal officer.

The homeland security position notably "is being elevated and restored to its independent status alongside the national security adviser," the statement said. Policymakers have long debated whether such national security jobs should operate independently from the White House.

Bossert will work closely with Trump's pick for national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn. Bossert is currently president of the risk management consulting firm CDS Consulting. He previously served as deputy assistant to the president for homeland security under Bush.

Donald Trump's West Wing is shaping up to have multiple power centers. Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and senior adviser Steve Bannon will work as "equal partners," according to Trump, and counselor Kellyanne Conway is also expected to have autonomy. Trump's influential son-in-law, Jared Kushner, will have a direct line to the president as well.

Trump has long stoked rivalries among his staff in business and during his presidential campaign. But some critics fear doing so in the White House could sow confusion and slow decision-making.

Discussing the appointment of Greenblatt, Trump said he "has a history of negotiating substantial, complex transactions on my behalf," and has the expertise to "bring parties together and build consensus on difficult and sensitive topics."

Trump recently named his other top adviser on Israel, David Friedman, as his pick for U.S. ambassador to Israel.

The billionaire-turned-president-elect is spending the holidays at his Florida resort, where he's held a steady stream of meetings with senior staffers, advisers and business executives. A number of key posts in his administration remain; his transition team says he will fill those positions in the coming days.

Meanwhile the president-elect continued the debate over whether he would have won an election against President Barack Obama.

Trump posted on Twitter Tuesday, "President Obama campaigned hard (and personally) in very important swing states, and lost. The voters wanted to MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!"

It wasn't immediately clear whether Trump was referring to Obama's own presidential runs, or the campaigning the president did in 2016 on Hillary Clinton's behalf. Obama swept most key swing states in his two bids for the White House, but Clinton fell short, losing to Trump.

A dispute erupted a day earlier between Obama and Trump, spurred by Obama's hypothetical musings that had he run again, he would have been victorious. Obama suggested he still holds enough sway over the coalition of voters that elected him twice to get them to vote for him once again.

Trump's response: "NO WAY!"



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Later Tuesday, Trump thanked himself for a surge in a key gauge of consumer confidence. He wrote on Twitter that The Conference Board had reported that its consumer confidence index had climbed to 113.7 in December.

Trump noted that's the highest the index has climbed in more than 15 years, then added, "Thanks Donald!"

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman in Washington and Julie Pace in Buffalo, New York, contributed to this report.

## Obama, Japan's Abe decry 'horrors of war' at Pearl Harbor

By JOSH LEDERMAN and CALEB JONES, Associated Press

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii (AP) — The leaders of Japan and the United States sought to remind the world that even the most bitter enemies can become allies, during a historic pilgrimage to the hallowed waters of Pearl Harbor.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not apologize, but conceded Japan "must never repeat the horrors of war again."

Seventy-five years after Japan's surprise attack, Abe and President Barack Obama peered down Tuesday at the rusting wreckage of the USS Arizona, clearly visible in the tranquil, teal water. In a show of respect for the war dead, Obama and Abe dropped purple petals into the water and stood in silence.

More than 1,000 U.S. war dead remain entombed in the submerged ship, which Japan struck as part of the devastating attack that killed more than 2,300 Americans and sent America marching into World War II.

"As the prime minister of Japan, I offer my sincere and everlasting condolences to the souls of those who lost their lives here, as well as to the spirits of all the brave men and women whose lives were taken by a war that commenced in this very place," Abe said later at nearby Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

That was the closest Abe would get to an apology for the attack. And it was enough for Obama, who also declined to apologize seven months ago when he became America's first sitting president to visit Hiroshima, where the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb in a bid to end the war.

It was enough, too, for Alfred Rodrigues, a U.S. Navy veteran who survived the attack. The 96-year-old said he had no hard feelings and added, "War is war."

"They were doing what they were supposed to do, and we were doing what we were supposed to do," Rodrigues said before the visit.

In the years after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. incarcerated roughly 120,000 Japanese-Americans in internment camps before dropping atomic bombs in 1945 that killed some 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 70,000 in Nagasaki.

Since the war, the U.S. and Japan have built a powerful alliance that both sides say has grown during Obama's tenure, including strengthened military ties. Yet there are questions about whether the relationship will fray under President-elect Donald Trump, a possibility neither Obama nor Abe addressed.

Abe, who became Japan's first leader to visit Pearl Harbor with a U.S. president, said the visit "brought utter silence to me." His remarks capped a day that was carefully choreographed by the U.S. and Japan to show a strong and growing alliance between former foes.

Japanese officials said that in their talks, Abe and Obama agreed to closely monitor the movements of China's first and sole aircraft carrier, which has sailed into the western Pacific for the first time.

The Japanese officials also said the two leaders affirmed that movements by the Chinese carrier Liaoning "warrant close attention from mid-term and long-term perspectives."

White House officials who accompanied Obama to Hawaii did not comment on the announcement from the Japanese, and in an unusual move, they didn't release a written description of the meeting. But in Washington, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said the U.S. recognizes lawful uses of the sea, and the same rights apply to the U.S., China and other nations.

He said, "as we often make the case with our own naval vessels sailing ... in those same waters, it's freedom of navigation."

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Obama and Abe started Tuesday's activities here with a formal meeting at a another nearby military base, in what the White House said was likely Obama's last meeting with a foreign leader before leaving office in January. It was a bookend of sorts for the president, who nearly eight years ago invited Abe's predecessor to be the first leader he hosted at the White House.

Speaking after he and Abe laid green-and-peach wreaths at the memorial, Obama called Pearl Harbor a sacred place and said that "even the deepest wounds of war can give way to friendship and lasting peace." It's a notion Obama tried throughout his presidency to put into practice, as he reached out to former adversaries Iran, Myanmar and Cuba.

Japanese leaders have visited Pearl Harbor before, but Abe was the first to go to the memorial above the sunken USS Arizona, where a marbled wall lists the names of U.S. troops killed in the Japanese attack.

"There's this sense of guilt, if you like, among Japanese, this 'Pearl Harbor syndrome,' that we did something very unfair," said Tamaki Tsukada, a minister in the Embassy of Japan in Washington. He said he believes Abe's visit would "absolve that kind of complex that Japanese people have."

Associated Press writers Brian Skoloff in Kailua, Hawaii, and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

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

## Appreciation: Fisher found best material in her own troubles

By LYNN ELBER, AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Carrie Fisher, a princess onscreen and off, played both roles in her own gutsy way. As Leia of the "Star Wars" franchise, she commanded the troops, enjoyed a fling with Han Solo — and, in real life, co-star Harrison Ford — and showed fledgling 1970s feminists what life as a liberated woman might be like in a galaxy far, far away.

As the offspring of Hollywood royals Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher, she drew on her painful family history and personal demons to forge a distinctively tart, unsettlingly funny style as a best-selling writer.

Fisher's throaty voice and inviting delivery also told the tale: She'd lived through much and wanted to — needed to — share her journey that included drug addiction, mental illness and electroshock treatment.

"People relate to aspects of my stories and that's nice for me because then I'm not all alone with it," she told The Associated Press in 2009. "Also, I do believe you're only as sick as your secrets. If that's true, I'm just really healthy."

Fisher, who died Tuesday at age 60, revealed her struggles before such confessionals became routine. Her vehicles included a 1987 semi-autobiographical novel, "Postcards from the Edge," and a one-woman show, "Wishful Drinking," that went to Broadway and TV.

She avoided few topics in the piece, including the scandal that engulfed her superstar parents (singer Fisher ran off with Elizabeth Taylor); her brief marriage to pop star Paul Simon; the time the father of her daughter left her for a man, and waking up next to the dead body of a platonic friend who had overdosed in her bed.

"I'm a product of Hollywood inbreeding. When two celebrities mate, something like me is the result," she joked in the show. And there was this wisecrack: "I don't have a problem with drugs so much as I have a problem with sobriety."

Fisher had been hospitalized since Friday, after falling ill aboard a flight and being treated by paramedics at the Los Angeles airport. Her family gave no details on the emergency, while media reports said she had suffered a heart attack.

Her feature film debut was opposite Warren Beatty in the 1975 hit "Shampoo." She also appeared in "Austin Powers," "The Blues Brothers," "Charlie's Angels," "Hannah and Her Sisters," "Scream 3" and "When Harry Met Sally ..."

But she is best remembered as the tough, feisty and powerful Princess Leia in the original "Star Wars" films, making a statement with her character and no-nonsense braided buns.

She famously despised the latter, and even had mixed feelings about her famous character. She knew it then and audiences later figured it out: Playing Han Solo would have suited her better.

"When I first read the script I thought that's the part to be, always wry and sardonic," Fisher told a gathering in England in 2015. "He's always that. I feel like a lot of the time Leia's either worried or pissed or, thank God, sort of snarky."

She reprised the role of Leia in Episode VII of the series, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" in 2015, and her digitally rendered image appears in the newest installment, "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story."

Fisher kept telling her own story after "Postcards From the Edge" became a best-seller and was adapted into a 1990 movie starring Shirley MacLaine and Meryl Streep.

Other books included "Delusions of Grandma," "Surrender the Pink," "The Best Awful," "Shockaholic" and this year's autobiography, "The Princess Diarist," in which she revealed that she and Ford had an affair on the "Star Wars" set.

Ever ready to satirize herself, she played Carrie Fisher a few times, as in David Cronenberg's dark Hollywood sendup "Maps to the Stars" and in an episode of "Sex and the City."

Fisher starred with her mother in a documentary set to air on HBO in 2017. "Bright Lights: Starring Debbie Reynolds and Carrie Fisher" premiered at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year.

Besides her mother, she is survived by her brother, Todd Fisher, and her daughter, Billie Lourd.

Someone made sure Fisher would be thought of with a wistful smile: Her bulldog, Gary Fisher, had his own Twitter account that offered this message Tuesday: "Saddest tweets to tweet. Mommy is gone. I love you @carrieffisher."

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AP writers Lindsey Bahr and Sandy Cohen in Los Angeles and Mark Kennedy and Hillel Italie in New York contributed to this report.

## Trump names Bush-era veteran and policy newcomer to posts

By VIVIAN SALAMA, Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday appointed an experienced hand from the George W. Bush era to his national security circle and a figure from the Trump Organization to make international deals.

Thomas Bossert will become an assistant to the president for homeland security and counterterrorism. A statement from Trump's transition team said Bossert will advise the president on issues related to homeland security, counterterrorism and cybersecurity, and coordinate the Cabinet's process for making and executing policy in those areas.

The position notably "is being elevated and restored to its independent status alongside the national security adviser," the statement said. Policymakers have long debated whether such national security jobs should operate independently from the White House.

Bossert will work closely with Trump's pick for national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn. Bossert is currently president of the risk management consulting firm CDS Consulting. He previously served as deputy assistant to the president for homeland security under Bush.

The president-elect also appointed one of his main advisers on U.S.-Israel relations as special representative for international negotiations. Jason Greenblatt has worked for the Trump Organization for over two decades and currently serves as its executive vice president and chief legal officer.

In the statement, Trump said Greenblatt "has a history of negotiating substantial, complex transactions on my behalf," and has the expertise to "bring parties together and build consensus on difficult and sensitive topics."

Trump recently named his other top adviser on Israel, David Friedman, as his pick for U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Trump's West Wing is shaping up to have multiple power centers. Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and senior adviser Steve Bannon will work as "equal partners," according to Trump, and counselor Kellyanne

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Conway is also expected to have autonomy. Trump's influential son-in-law, Jared Kushner, will also have a direct line to the president.

Trump has long stoked rivalries among his staff in business and during his presidential campaign. But doing so in the White House could sow confusion and slow decision-making.

In New York Tuesday afternoon, police hastily cleared the lobby of Trump Tower to investigate an unattended backpack, only to find that it contained children's toys. Video taken by a bystander and posted on Twitter showed people running through the lobby for the exits.

The bomb squad checked out the package and gave an "all clear" just after 5 p.m.

Trump lives in the tower and has his offices there, although he is spending the holidays at his Florida resort, where he's held a steady stream of meetings with senior staffers, advisers and business executives. A number of key posts in his government remain; his transition team says he will fill those positions in the coming days.

Meanwhile, Trump's plan to dissolve his charitable foundation before he takes office to eliminate any conflicts of interest appears to be harder than he thought.

The New York attorney general's office said Tuesday that Trump cannot move ahead with his decision to dismantle his charitable foundation because state prosecutors are probing whether the president-elect personally benefited from its spending.

"The Trump foundation is still under investigation by this office and cannot legally dissolve until that investigation is complete," said Amy Spitalnick, spokeswoman for state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman.

The statement came after Trump announced that he wanted to dissolve the Donald J. Trump Foundation, part of what his presidential transition team says is an effort to erase any potential conflicts of interest before he takes office Jan. 20.

But the foundation's inner workings have been the subject of Schneiderman's investigation for months and could remain a thorny issue for Trump's incoming administration. Democrats nationally have said they are ready to raise any legal or ethical issues from Trump's global business empire during his presidency.

Trump's charity has admitted that it violated IRS regulations barring it from using its money or assets to benefit Trump, his family, his companies or substantial contributors to the foundation.

Trump asserted on Twitter late Monday that his foundation was run efficiently.

"The DJT Foundation, unlike most foundations, never paid fees, rent, salaries or any expenses," the president-elect tweeted. "100% of the money goes to wonderful charities."

For a second day, Trump also pointed to economic indicators as evidence of a positive response to his Election Day victory.

In a tweet late Tuesday, Trump said, "The U.S. Consumer Confidence Index for December surged nearly four points to 113.7, THE HIGHEST LEVEL IN MORE THAN 15 YEARS! Thanks Donald!"

The Conference Board said Tuesday that its consumer confidence index was up from 109.4 in November and the highest since it reached 114 in August 2001 — a sign consumers are confident in the aftermath of a divisive election campaign.

The index measures consumers' assessment of current conditions, which dipped from November but was still very positive, and their expectations for the future, which hit a 13-year high.

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Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman in Washington and Julie Pace in Buffalo, New York, contributed to this report.

## Trump signals shift from Obama's focus on multilateralism

By JULIE PACE, AP White House Correspondent

For eight years, President Barack Obama's foreign policy doctrine has been rooted in a belief that while the United States can take action around the world on its own, it rarely should.

"Multilateralism regulates hubris," Obama declared.

His successor, President-elect Donald Trump, has derided some of the same international partnerships Obama and his recent predecessors have promoted, raising the prospect that the Republican's "America



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First" agenda might well mean an America more willing to act alone.

"The United Nations has such great potential but right now it is just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time," Trump tweeted days after the UN Security Council approved a resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Both Israel and Trump called on the U.S. to use its veto power to block the measure, but the Obama administration instead abstained.

Trump's criticism of the United Nations is shared by some in his party, including a handful of GOP lawmakers who have called for Congress to withhold funding for the body following the settlements vote.

Some of Trump's other positions have drawn swift rebuke from Republicans, particularly his criticism of NATO during the presidential campaign and his suggestion that the U.S. might not defend partners that don't fulfill financial obligations to the long-standing U.S.-European military alliance.

Trump has also challenged the necessity of multilateralism in his economic agenda, pledging to scrap the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership trade accord in favor of one-on-one agreements that he says will be more favorable to U.S. businesses and workers.

With Trump still about three weeks away from taking office, it's unclear how his campaign rhetoric will translate into action. Even as he has criticized the UN and NATO, he has vowed to "aggressively pursue joint and coalition military operations" with allies to take on the Islamic State militant group. What those military operations might entail is uncertain, given that Trump's views on national security have been both isolationist and muscular, including his recent call for expanding U.S. nuclear capabilities.

Richard Grenell, who served as U.S. spokesman at the United Nations during President George W. Bush's administration and has been working with Trump's transition team, downplayed the prospect that Trump will withdraw from or even disregard the UN and NATO once he takes office.

"Trump is talking about reforming these organizations so that they live up to their ideals, not about abandoning them," Grenell said in an interview.

Obama has also been critical of U.S. partners at times, telling *The Atlantic* magazine earlier this year that some U.S. allies were "free riders" eager for Washington to solve the world's problems. Obama also has pushed NATO partners to live up to an agreement that they spend at least 2 percent of their country's gross domestic product on defense, a guideline only a few members adhere to.

But the president's major foreign policy decisions have highlighted his belief that the U.S. is better served acting in concert with other nations — and that a lack of involvement from allies should be a warning sign to Washington. Both Republican Presidents George H.W. and George W. Bush were also proponents of coalition-building before taking drastic action overseas.

With the support of the UN Security Council and NATO allies, Obama joined the bombing campaign in Libya in 2011. He backed away from plans to launch airstrikes against Syria in 2013, spooked in part by the British Parliament's refusal to authorize its military to participate and scant willingness among other allies to join the effort.

On the diplomatic front, Obama's administration worked alongside five other nations to secure a landmark nuclear accord with Iran and partnered with the European Union to level economic sanctions against Russia for its provocations in Ukraine.

Like much of Obama's approach to foreign policy, his preference for acting as part of a coalition was shaped by lessons learned from the Iraq war he inherited from George W. Bush. While numerous other countries were part of the war at the start, the U.S. had by far the largest commitment and bore the brunt of the casualties and the financial burden. Responsibility for quelling the sectarian violence and instability that consumed Iraq after the 2003 invasion also fell predominantly to the U.S.

During a foreign policy address in 2014, Obama chastised those who criticized him for seeking to share burdens with other countries and who saw working through institutions such as the UN as a "sign of weakness."

When crises arise that do not directly threaten the U.S. but still demand action, Obama said, "We have to work with others because collective action in these circumstances is more likely to succeed, more likely to be sustained (and) less likely to lead to costly mistakes."

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

## 'Star Wars' actress and author Carrie Fisher dies at 60

By SANDY COHEN, AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Carrie Fisher, a daughter of Hollywood royalty who gained pop-culture fame as Princess Leia in the original "Star Wars" and turned her struggles with addiction and mental illness into wickedly funny books, a hit film and a one-woman stage show, died Tuesday after falling ill aboard a flight last week. She was 60.

"Carrie was one of a kind ... brilliant, original. Funny and emotionally fearless. She lived her life, bravely," "Star Wars" co-star Harrison Ford said in a statement.

Fisher, the daughter of actress Debbie Reynolds and singer Eddie Fisher, had been hospitalized since Friday, when paramedics responded to a report of a patient in distress at Los Angeles airport. Her family gave no details on the emergency, but media reports said she had suffered a heart attack.

"Thank you to everyone who has embraced the gifts and talents of my beloved and amazing daughter," Reynolds wrote on her Facebook page Tuesday. "I am grateful for your thoughts and prayers that are now guiding her to her next stop. Love Carries Mother."

Fisher made her feature film debut opposite Warren Beatty in the 1975 hit "Shampoo." She also appeared in "Austin Powers," "The Blues Brothers," "Charlie's Angels," "Hannah and Her Sisters," "Scream 3" and "When Harry Met Sally ..."

But Fisher is best remembered as the headstrong Princess Leia in the original "Star Wars" in 1977, her hair styled in futuristic braided buns. She uttered the immortal phrase "Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope."

She reprised the role in Episode VII of the series, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" in 2015, and her digitally rendered image appears in the newest installment, "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story."

"She was extremely smart; a talented actress, writer and comedienne with a very colorful personality that everyone loved," "Star Wars" creator George Lucas said in a statement.

"In 'Star Wars' she was our great and powerful princess - feisty, wise and full of hope in a role that was more difficult than most people might think."

Fisher long battled drug addiction and mental illness. She said she smoked pot at 13, used LSD by 21 and was diagnosed as bipolar at 24. She was treated with electroshock therapy and medication.

In 1987, her thinly veiled autobiography "Postcards From the Edge" became a best-seller. It was adapted into a 1990 movie starring Shirley MacLaine and Meryl Streep.

More books followed: "Delusions of Grandma," "Surrender the Pink," "The Best Awful," "Shockaholic" and this year's autobiography, "The Princess Diarist," in which she revealed that she and Ford had an affair on the "Star Wars" set.

Fisher's one-woman show, "Wishful Drinking," which she had performed across the country since 2006, was turned into a book, made its way to Broadway in 2009 and was filmed for HBO in 2010.

Little was off-limits in the show. She discussed the scandal that engulfed her superstar parents (Fisher ran off with Elizabeth Taylor); her brief marriage to singer Paul Simon; the time the father of her daughter left her for a man; and the day she woke up next to the dead body of a platonic friend who had overdosed in her bed.

"I'm a product of Hollywood inbreeding. When two celebrities mate, something like me is the result," she said in the show. At another point, she cracked: "I don't have a problem with drugs so much as I have a problem with sobriety."

Ever ready to satirize herself, she played Carrie Fisher a few times, as in David Cronenberg's dark Hollywood sendup "Maps to the Stars" and in an episode of "Sex and the City."

In the past 15 years, Fisher appeared as a television guest star, perhaps most memorably as a has-

been comedy legend on "30 Rock." She also supplied the voice of a recurring character on the animated "Family Guy" for the past decade.

"Carrie Fisher was smart, funny, talented, surprising and always a hell of a fun time to be around. Family Guy will miss her immensely," show creator Seth MacFarlane tweeted.

Fisher starred with her mother in a documentary set to air on HBO in 2017. "Bright Lights: Starring Debbie Reynolds and Carrie Fisher" premiered at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year.

She endeared herself to the social-media generation with her quirky tweets, laden with crazy keyboard symbols and colorful typefaces.

Her ever-present bulldog, Gary Fisher, had his own Twitter and Instagram account. ("Saddest tweets to tweet. Mommy is gone. I love you @carrieffisher," the dog's Twitter feed read.)

Besides her mother, Fisher is survived by her brother, Todd Fisher, and her daughter, Billie Lourd.

In a 2009 interview with The Associated Press, Fisher wasn't coy about revealing details about her life. She hoped to remove the stigma from mental illness.

"People relate to aspects of my stories and that's nice for me because then I'm not all alone with it," she said. "Also, I do believe you're only as sick as your secrets. If that's true, I'm just really healthy."

AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr in Los Angeles and AP Drama Writer Mark Kennedy in New York contributed to this report.

## No one could make us laugh through pain like Carrie Fisher

By HILLEL ITALIE, AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — No one could make us laugh through the pain like Carrie Fisher.

The daughter of Hollywood stars Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds, and a survivor of early fame, drug addiction and bipolar disorder, she wrote with unsentimental wit and understanding about her private struggles and about an industry she was raised in but stood apart from.

Fisher, known to the world as Princess Leia of "Star Wars," died Tuesday at 60, four days after falling ill aboard an airline flight. Media reports said the actress had suffered a heart attack.

"I do believe you're only as sick as your secrets. If that's true, I'm just really healthy," she said in a confessional 2009 interview with The Associated Press.

The public fell in love with her twice: as Princess Leia and as the wry truth-teller of such books as "Postcards From the Edge," "Wishful Drinking" and "The Princess Diarist," in which she revealed having an intense affair with "Star Wars" co-star Harrison Ford.

Fisher told plenty of secrets about others — about her parents' breakup when she was 2, about being advised by Warren Beatty on wearing a bra in "Shampoo," and about arguing with then-husband Paul Simon about whether it was better to be a man or a woman.

Asked by NPR recently why she wrote about her fling with Ford, who was 15 years older and married, she joked that she could hold back no longer because he had refused to die: "I kept calling and saying, 'When are you going to die because I want to tell the story?'"

But she was toughest on herself and unafraid to turn trauma into humor. She became the most knowledgeable of celebrities, with a great and generous gift for bringing us into her unusual life.

"One of the therapists came in to admit me and asked how long I had been a drug addict," she wrote in "Postcards," her autobiographical novel that became a movie of the same name. "I said I didn't think I was a drug addict because I didn't take any one drug. 'Then you're a drugs addict,' she said. She asked if I had deliberately tried to kill myself. I was insulted by the question. I guess when you find yourself having overdosed, it's a good indicator that your life isn't working."

She is survived by her mother; her daughter, Billie Lourd, from a relationship with talent agent Bryan Lourd; her brother, the actor-filmmaker Todd Fisher; and her half-sisters, actresses Joely and Tricia Leigh Fisher. Her father died in 2010.

Born and raised in Beverly Hills, Carrie Fisher was a bookish child who had difficult relationships with

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both parents. In a celebrity breakup that made headlines everywhere in 1958, Eddie Fisher left his family for Elizabeth Taylor.

Eddie Fisher was hardly present for his daughter in her early years, and Reynolds' second husband, shoe store magnate Harry Karl, was even worse. He squandered his own money and Reynolds' on gambling and prostitutes and left the actress and her children broke and devastated.

Carrie Fisher went into the family business early — too early, she would later say. She was performing on stage by age 12 and appeared with Reynolds in the 1973 Broadway revival "Irene." She was still a teenager when she made her feature film debut in "Shampoo" in 1975.

Even after "Star Wars," Fisher would speak often of feeling overshadowed by her mother and about the need to break away, a conflict dramatized in "Postcards From the Edge."

Mother and daughter were estranged for years but reconciled later in life and came to admire each other's talent and determination. "Bright Lights: Starring Debbie Reynolds and Carrie Fisher," an HBO documentary, is scheduled for release in 2017.

Fisher's film credits included a wide range of spoofs, musicals and romantic comedies, from "Austin Powers" and "The Blues Brothers" to "Hannah and Her Sisters" and "When Harry Met Sally ..." Meryl Streep was the star when "Postcards From the Edge," with a screenplay by Fisher, was adapted into a film of the same name in 1990. Shirley MacLaine played Streep's mother, the stand-in for Reynolds.

But for millions, Fisher was Princess Leia, with her now-iconic hair buns and metal bikini. She uttered the immortal phrase "Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope" in the original "Star Wars" in 1977.

Director George Lucas, who considered Jodie Foster, Amy Irving and dozens of others for the role, said he had been looking for an actress who could "hold her own" against her male co-stars.

In her 2008 memoir "Wishful Drinking," she recounted how Lucas told her on the first day of shooting that she couldn't wear a bra under her costume because "there's no underwear in space." Lucas, she said, later explained that a woman could be strangled by her bra in the weightlessness of space.

Fisher wisecracked in her book that that would make for a "fantastic obit," adding: "I tell my younger friends that no matter how I go, I want it reported that I drowned in moonlight, strangled by my own bra."

Fisher would make a lot of wisecracks about the role that made her pop-culture royalty and led Reynolds to note ruefully she was now regarded as the mother of Princess Leia.

Fisher disliked her hairstyle, disparaged her hybrid British-American accent in the films and was appalled by some of the "Star Wars" merchandise, including a Princess Leia candy dispenser.

Given the chance, she would have preferred to play Han Solo.

"When I first read the script I thought that's the part to be, always wry and sardonic," she told a gathering in England in 2015. "He's always that. I feel like a lot of the time Leia's either worried or pissed or, thank God, sort of snarky. But I'm much more worried and pissed than Han Solo ever was, and those aren't fun things to play."

Her drug problems pre-dated "Star Wars." She recalled smoking pot at age 13 (She would later learn that there is a kind of marijuana called "Princess Leia.") and dropped acid at 21.

She used so much cocaine that even world-class partyer John Belushi, who died of a drug overdose at 33, warned her to stop.

In her 20s, she was diagnosed as bipolar and treated with electroshock therapy and medication, which she wrote about in the memoir "Shockaholic."

"People relate to aspects of my stories, and that's nice for me because then I'm not all alone with it," she told the AP in 2009.

Ever ready to satirize herself, she even played "Carrie Fisher" a few times, as in David Cronenberg's dark Hollywood sendup "Maps to the Stars" and in an episode of "Sex and the City." In the past 15 years, Fisher also had a steady career as a television guest star, perhaps most memorably as a has-been comedy legend on "30 Rock."

Her one-woman show, "Wishful Drinking," which she had performed on and off across the country since 2006, made it to Broadway in 2009 and was captured for HBO in 2010.

"I don't have a problem with drugs so much as I have a problem with sobriety," she wisecracked in the show. At another point, she said: "I'm a product of Hollywood inbreeding. When two celebrities mate,



something like me is the result.”

## Stray bag of toys prompts scare at Trump Tower

BY JENNIFER PELTZ, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A stray backpack prompted the partial evacuation of Trump Tower on Tuesday, though bomb squad technicians quickly determined the unattended bag contained children’s toys and was harmless.

Video posted online showed people running through the Manhattan skyscraper’s public lobby as uniformed police officers waved them toward the exits.

Stephen Davis, the New York Police Department’s top spokesman, said the bomb squad gave the “all clear” around 5 p.m. after examining the backpack left near the entrance to Niketown, a store in the building.

President-elect Donald Trump lives in the tower and has his offices there, though he was at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida when the bag was discovered.

His newly appointed press secretary, Sean Spicer, Tweeted that officials were “back to work” following the “false alarm.”

Shoppers and visitors to Trump’s namesake skyscraper described a chaotic scramble.

“It was hysteria,” said Andy Martin, a 16-year-old from the New York City suburb of Huntington. “Police were shouting and telling people to leave.”

Trump Tower, in addition to being the president-elect’s home and business headquarters, contains residences, restaurants, retail stores — and a lobby that by law is open to the public to visitors daily from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Police receive about 42 reports every day of so-called suspicious packages, though that number can surge depending on current events. In the days after a pressure cooker bomb exploded earlier this year in New York City, police responded to more than 800 calls of “suspicious packages.”

Maria Beckford, visiting New York from her native London, was in Niketown with her 13-year-old son looking to buy a pair of soccer cleats when she said they were told to urgently leave the store.

“We actually had them in his hands but because of everything we just had to leave,” she said.

Associated Press writer Jake Pearson contributed to this report.

## Investigators study flight recorder from Black Sea jet crash

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and VERONIKA SILCHENKO, Associated Press

SOCHI, Russia (AP) — Investigators recovered the flight-data recorder from a crashed Russian military plane Tuesday and began reviewing its contents to learn why the jet went down moments after takeoff, killing all 92 people aboard, including members of a famous choir.

The Tu-154 crashed into the Black Sea early Sunday two minutes after departing in good weather from the city of Sochi. The plane was carrying members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, widely known as the Red Army Choir, to a New Year’s concert at a Russian military base in Syria.

Meanwhile, rescue workers raced to wrap up their efforts to recover bodies and wreckage ahead of predicted bad weather. The work has involved 3,500 people, including about 200 navy divers flown to the site from all over Russia. Aided by drones and submersibles, teams have recovered 12 bodies and numerous body fragments about a mile away from the shore.

The main flight recorder was quickly flown to Moscow, where experts started analyzing it, Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said. Preliminary findings could be available as early as Wednesday, according to some aviation experts.

Investigators were looking into whether the crash might have been caused by bad fuel, pilot error, equipment failure or objects stuck in the engines. The top Russian investigative agency, known as the Investigative Committee, said it had taken samples from a fuel tank used to fill the plane, which flew from Moscow’s Chkalovsky military airport and stopped in Sochi for refueling.

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The committee also said it found a witness who filmed the crash but offered no details.

Online publication Life.ru published what it described as a script of cockpit conversation, with one pilot yelling about a problem with the plane's flaps and then shouting: "Commander, we are falling!" It was impossible to verify the report, but Life.ru is known to have good connections with Russian security agencies.

Flaps are moveable panels mounted on the edge of the wings to increase lift.

The Interfax news agency reported that the flaps were not functioning in sync, causing the jet to lose speed and triggering an aerodynamic stall. It also said that the preliminary analysis of the flight recorder pointed at pilot error.

The government has sought to quell speculation that the crash might have been caused by a bomb planted on board or a portable air-defense missile. A terrorist attack on a Syria-bound military flight would badly embarrass the Kremlin at a time when it boasts about the success of its campaign in Syria after Aleppo fell into President Bashar Assad's hands.

Russia's main domestic security and counter-terrorism agency, the FSB, said it found "no indications or facts pointing at the possibility of a terror attack or an act of sabotage" on the plane.

However, some aviation experts have noted that the crew's failure to report any technical problem and the large area over which fragments of the plane were scattered point to a possible explosion on board.

The Tu-154 is a Soviet-built three-engine airliner designed in the late 1960s. Russian airlines decommissioned the noisy, fuel-guzzling aircraft years ago, but the military and other government agencies continue using the plane, which is still loved by crews for its maneuverability and sturdiness.

The plane that crashed Sunday was built in 1983 and underwent factory checkups and maintenance in 2014 as well as earlier this year. Investigators have taken relevant documents from the plant that did the job.

Isachenkov reported from Moscow. Nataliya Vasilyeva in Moscow also contributed to this report.

## The king of 2016: LeBron James named AP Male Athlete of Year

By TOM WITHERS, AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — LeBron James was jolted forward when the massive crowd swelled from the sidewalks and into Cleveland's streets, surrounding the convertible that he and his family were riding in. This wasn't supposed to happen.

James looked at his wife, Savannah, their baby daughter and two sons and feared for their safety.

"We were kind of afraid for a second," James said.

Then relieved.

Scanning the crowd, James spotted people dangling from lamp posts and traffic lights, even a few straddling window ledges to get a glimpse of the champion Cavaliers, who were being honored with a once-in-a-generation downtown parade after their comeback in the NBA Finals. James was awe-struck, and any concerns quickly melted away when he looked at the spectators' faces and saw only smiles, laughter and tears of joy.

"Everybody was just rejoicing in grace and happiness," James said, fondly reflecting on the picture-perfect day in June when Cleveland was transformed into a giant block party. "It was more than I could have ever imagined. It was unforgettable, unbelievable."

And he had made it possible.

James, who ended 52 years of sports heartache by bringing Cleveland a championship and used his superstar platform to address social causes, was chosen as The Associated Press 2016 Male Athlete of the Year, an award he won previously in 2013.

Results of the vote by 59 editors from AP member newspapers and customers were announced Tuesday.

James collected 24 first-place votes, beating out a pair of Olympic legends: Michael Phelps (16) and Usain Bolt (9), the fastest men in water and on land who are not accustomed to finishing behind anyone.

Chicago Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant, the NL MVP who led his team to its first World Series title since 1908, tied for fourth with Golden State star guard Stephen Curry, last year's winner. Cristiano Ronaldo,

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Von Miller and Andy Murray also received votes.

James joined Michael Jordan as the only NBA players to win twice. Jordan won it three straight years from 1991-94.

U.S. Olympic gymnast Simone Biles was named AP's top female athlete on Monday.

A rabid sports fan, James was flattered to be in the same class with Phelps, the 23-time gold medalist who added five more to his record collection at the Rio Olympics.

"To be that dominant in your respective sport, to see what he's been able to do over the years, what he does in that water, man, it's tremendous and very inspiring," James said. "When you have that type of tenure to be able to dominate, when you know that the entire competition is gearing up to beat you — and only you — and you're still able to come away No. 1 or always be at the top of the food chain, that's very inspiring."

That James received the honor in an Olympic year underscores the weight of his accomplishments.

His third NBA crown was for Cleveland, delivering on a promise James made to a city that hadn't celebrated a major championship since 1964 and had endured many torturous sports moments since.

James, whose game shows no signs of aging as he approaches his 32nd birthday in a few days, came up short in 2015, leading an injury-depleted Cleveland team to the finals where they lost to the Warriors. And although James posted the best statistical series of any player in history, his critics were quick to point out his 2-4 record in the finals compared to Jordan's 6-0.

The Cavs got a rematch with the record-setting, 73-win Warriors. Led by Curry, the league's unanimous MVP choice, Golden State was being talked about as potentially the best team ever, an argument that gained steam when it took a 3-1 lead.

James, though, wasn't going to be denied again. He scored 41 points in Games 5 and 6 and posted a triple-double in an epic Game 7 that will be remembered for his chase-down block of Andre Iguodala in the closing minutes — a defensive gem that stands as the signature play of his magnificent career.

After the final horn, James collapsed on the floor and when asked moments later about his emotions, the Ohio native who proudly says he's "just a kid from Akron," screamed at the TV camera: "Cleveland, this for you!"

"At that moment," James said, "I felt fulfilled. To know the history of our sports here and how heart-breaking at times it was for all those years that our fans had to go through, and the circumstances that we came back from, it was so fulfilling."

James' journey to his greatest triumph coincided with the passing of another great — the greatest of all — as Muhammad Ali died on June 4. During the playoffs, James watched tapes of Ali's fights for motivation. It was in the spirit of the boxing legend and global ambassador that James stood on stage with close friends Dwyane Wade, Chris Paul and Carmelo Anthony at the ESPYs in July to decry violence against unarmed black men and encourage fellow athletes to do more to support local police and improve communities.

James later donated \$2.5 million for a Smithsonian exhibit honoring Ali, and he's producing a documentary on the champ.

"He's definitely a person I'm inspired to be like, to have a social conscience about things," James said. "What I always saw in Ali was that he was always educated about everything he was speaking about. He was never just talking to be talking. There was a method to the madness."

"Ali definitely showed me the way."

## George Michael mourned by boyfriend, ex-boyfriend in London

By GREGORY KATZ, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — As mourners kept on flocking Tuesday to George Michael's home in north London, the singer's former longtime partner and his current boyfriend both spoke of their sadness at his death.

The boyfriend, hairstylist Fadi Fawaz, told the Telegraph newspaper on Tuesday he found the 53-year-old singer dead in bed when he arrived at Michael's house on Christmas Day so they could attend a holiday lunch together.

"Everything had been very complicated recently, but George was looking forward to Christmas, and so

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was I," Fawaz said. "Now everything is ruined. I want people to remember him the way he was. He was a beautiful person."

Fawaz tweeted "I will never stop missing you" to Michael.

Michael's former partner Kenny Goss, who was with the singer for many years, said in a statement that he was "heartbroken" by the death of his longtime love.

"He was a major part of my life and I loved him very, very much. He was an extremely kind and generous man," Goss said.

Michael announced in 2011 that he and Goss had separated.

Since word of his unexpected death, British newspapers have been filled with stories about Michael's many generous acts, often accompanied by his admonishments to keep them secret.

Among the stories that surfaced was Michael's donation of 15,000 pounds to a couple in need of money to pay for fertility treatments.

Crowds of grieving fans placed flowers and other tributes outside his home in the Highgate neighborhood of north London.

The singer's publicist released a statement saying Michael's family and close friends have been "touched beyond words" by the outpouring of affection for him.

"There could be no more fitting tribute than the many, many, kind words that have been said and the numerous plays his records have received," the statement said, adding that there was no truth to reports that Michael died under suspicious circumstances.

British authorities did not release any new information about Michael's death, which his manager said appeared to have been caused by heart failure. Police have said the death was not suspicious. An autopsy is planned, but the timing is uncertain.

## US, Russian militaries sharing more information on Syria

By **LOLITA C. BALDOR** and **BRADLEY KLAPPER**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S.-Russian talks on their separate fights against the Islamic State group are becoming more productive and more frequent, American officials said, with both sides trading information in real time and even outlining some of their strategic objectives in the months ahead. The progress dispels the notion that ties between the former Cold War foes are "frozen."

In the discussions, Russia has made clear its counterterrorism priority in Syria is retaking the ancient city of Palmyra, officials said. The U.S. is determined to pressure IS' headquarters in Raqqa.

The closer contacts between the two countries have developed despite their bitter accusations against each other over the devastation in Aleppo and Moscow's claim that relations are now "frozen on all practical levels."

The confidential military discussions aren't focusing on their opposing positions in Syria's civil war, where Russia is fighting alongside the government and the United States has backed rebel groups, officials said.

But U.S. officials with knowledge of the ongoing conversations are crediting both sides with putting aside much of the public animosity, which has included Washington's accusations of Russian war crimes in Aleppo and Moscow's charges of American support for terrorist groups such as al-Qaida.

Much of the talk has concerned the two nations' immediate operations.

Since Dec. 15, the U.S.-led coalition has conducted airstrikes on about two dozen locations around Palmyra, destroying air defense weapons, tanks, aircraft shelters, storage bunkers and other vehicles and equipment. At the same time, U.S. and Russian officials having been ensuring that the two militaries' don't cross paths in the airspace above the city that IS militants seized for the second time earlier this month, and that American strikes don't mistakenly hit Russian or Syrian forces.

But the talks have gone beyond the granular and even touched on broader U.S. and Russian plans, according to several U.S. officials, who weren't authorized to speak publicly on the confidential discussions and demanded anonymity.

The Russians have spelled out that after they retake Palmyra, they want to move on IS militants congre-



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gated in Deir el-Zour, a city closer to the Iraqi border. Succeeding in Deir el-Zour, according to one U.S. official, could take Russia several months.

Palmyra became a more urgent mission after Islamic State militants ended the Syrian government's nine-month hold over the city, seizing Russian and Syrian military equipment and weapons in the process. These include dangerous air defense artillery that could be used against coalition and friendly forces.

According to officials, the U.S. and Russian militaries have been communicating regularly, often in real time as strikes have been about to launch to make sure innocent troops aren't at risk. The new concentration of U.S. strikes around Palmyra in the past week has made the effort especially important for Russia, one senior U.S. official said.

The scope of the discussions suggests the two sides are pulling back from some of the extreme rhetoric in recent months, mainly colored by Russia's support for the successful Syrian military effort to retake all of Aleppo. While Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed hopes that Donald Trump will improve U.S.-Russian cooperation, it appears some of the groundwork already is being done.

U.S. officials have legal constraints on how far they can go. American law prohibits any military-to-military relations with Russia in the aftermath of its 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region.

But as Syria's various conflicts have escalated, it became more critical for the U.S. and Russia to make sure they avoid crashes and other problems in the increasingly crowded skies — as happened when the U.S. mistakenly killed dozens of Syrian soldiers in airstrikes near Deir el-Zour in September.

"We certainly don't want to have a repeat of that," said Air Force Col. John Dorrian, spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq and Syria.

Palmyra poses particular difficulties. Several hundred IS forces are believed to be in the city. But Syrian government and Russian troops are also there, making it difficult to tell them apart.

## The Gabby: Navy to commission USS Gabrielle Giffords

MOBILE, Ala. (AP) — A naval program that has become a target for critics is preparing to commission the USS Gabrielle Giffords, named for the U.S. politician who survived an assassination attempt in 2011.

The USS Gabrielle Giffords, constructed by Austal USA in Mobile, Alabama, has completed testing in the Gulf of Mexico and is scheduled to be commissioned in mid-2017. The company handed over the \$475 million ship to the Navy on Friday.

Giffords was shot in the head during a mass shooting in Arizona in 2011 and helped christen the ship in 2015. It's part of a hotly debated program that congressional critics slam as flawed and too expensive but that Navy leaders defend as a critical new step in naval warfighting.

The 421-foot-long Giffords will be the ninth in a series of high-speed vessels designed to navigate in shallow coastal regions known as littoral waters. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., has cited the \$12.4 billion spent for 26 littoral combat ships as the worst example of wasteful Pentagon spending.

The ship's name also has been a target for conservatives who see it as promoting stricter gun laws, a cause Giffords has promoted. Some critics lampooned the ship as being gun-free, a bit of parody and fake news that was debunked on snopes.com.

The Navy said it chose to name the ship in honor of Giffords because of the perseverance she showed after the shooting.

"Courage comes in many, many forms — physical, mental, spiritual and political. Gabby has truly modeled courage and resilience," Vice Adm. Philip Cullom said at the christening ceremony.

Constructed from aluminum and featuring a distinctive trimaran design, the Giffords is armed with missiles, machine guns and fast-firing weapons designed to hit a variety of targets. Its normal crew of 40 sailors and officers can be supplemented as needed for missions.

A sister ship of the Giffords, the USS Montgomery, sustained hull damage in October while navigating the Panama Canal. The same ship was damaged in a collision with a tugboat weeks before.

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## Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 28, the 363rd day of 2016. There are three days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 28, 1846, Iowa became the 29th state to be admitted to the Union.

On this date:

In 1612, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei observed the planet Neptune, but mistook it for a star. (Neptune wasn't officially discovered until 1846 by Johann Gottfried Galle.)

In 1832, John C. Calhoun became the first vice president of the United States to resign, stepping down because of differences with President Andrew Jackson.

In 1856, the 28th president of the United States, Thomas Woodrow Wilson, was born in Staunton (STAN'tun), Virginia.

In 1895, the Lumiere brothers, Auguste and Louis, held the first public showing of their movies in Paris.

In 1917, the New York Evening Mail published "A Neglected Anniversary," a facetious essay by H.L. Mencken supposedly recounting the history of bathtubs in America.

In 1937, composer Maurice Ravel died in Paris at age 62.

In 1945, Congress officially recognized the Pledge of Allegiance.

In 1961, the Tennessee Williams play "Night of the Iguana" opened on Broadway. Former first lady Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, the second wife of President Woodrow Wilson, died in Washington at age 89.

In 1973, the book "Gulag Archipelago," Alexander Solzhenitsyn's expose (eks-poh-SAY') of the Soviet prison system, was first published in Paris.

In 1981, Elizabeth Jordan Carr, the first American "test-tube" baby, was born in Norfolk, Virginia.

In 1989, Alexander Dubcek (DOOB'-chek), the former Czechoslovak Communist leader who was deposed in a Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968, was named president of the country's parliament.

In 1991, nine people died in a crush of people trying to get into a rap celebrity basketball game at City College in New York.

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush, at his Texas ranch, worked on designing a new U.S. policy in Iraq. Saddam Hussein's lawyer made a last-ditch effort to impede his client's execution. In Somalia, troops of the U.N.-backed interim government rolled into Mogadishu unopposed, putting an end to six months of domination of the capital by a radical Islamic movement.

Five years ago: North Korea's new leader, Kim Jong Un, escorted his father's hearse in an elaborate state funeral, bowing somberly and saluting in front of tens of thousands of citizens who wailed and stamped their feet in grief for Kim Jong Il. Turkish warplanes mistakenly killed 35 smugglers and other villagers in an operation targeting Kurdish rebels in Iraq. Kaye Stevens, a singer and actress who performed with the Rat Pack and was a frequent guest on Johnny Carson's "The Tonight Show," died in The Villages, Florida, at age 79.

One year ago: A grand jury in Cleveland declined to indict a white rookie police officer in the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, a black youngster who was shot while playing with what turned out to be a pellet gun. A teen fugitive known for using an "affluenza" defense for a drunken driving wreck and his mother were detained in Puerto Vallarta (PWEHR'-toh vah-YAR'-tah), Mexico. Iraqi forces backed by U.S.-led airstrikes drove Islamic State militants out of the center of Ramadi and seized the main government complex there. Ian "Lemmy" Kilmister, 70, the singer and bassist who founded Motorhead in 1975, died in Los Angeles. Specials drummer John (Brad) Bradbury, 62, died in England.

Today's Birthdays: Comic book creator Stan Lee is 94. Former United Auto Workers union president Owen Bieber is 87. Actress Nichelle Nichols is 84. Actress Dame Maggie Smith is 82. Rock singer-musician Charles Neville is 78. Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., is 72. Former Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., is 70. Rock singer-musician Edgar Winter is 70. Funk musician Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste (The Meters) is 68. Actor Denzel Washington is 62. Country singer Joe Diffie is 58. Country musician Mike McGuire (Shenandoah)

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is 58. Actor Chad McQueen is 56. Country singer-musician Marty Roe (Diamond Rio) is 56. Actor Malcolm Gets is 52. Actor Mauricio Mendoza is 47. Actress Elaine Hendrix is 46. Comedian Seth Meyers is 43. Actor Brendan Hines is 40. Actor Joe Manganiello is 40. Actress Vanessa Ferlito is 39. Rhythm-and-blues singer John Legend is 38. Actor Andre Holland is 37. Actress Sienna Miller is 35. Pop singer Kasey Sheridan (Dream) is 30. Actor Thomas Dekker is 29. Actress Mackenzie Rosman is 27. Pop singer David Archuleta is 26. Actor Miles Brown is 12.

Thought for Today: "If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree." — Michael Crichton (KRY'-tuhn), American author (1942-2008).