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Friday, Jan. 6

Senior Menu: Ranch Chicken breast, boiled potatoes, green beans, cake with strawberries, whole wheat bread.

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

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans, fruit, romaine salad.

United Methodist Church, Groton: MOMS Group at 9:30 a.m.

Double Header Basketball at Hamlin: Girls JV and Boys C team at 4 p.m., Boys JV and Girls C game at 5:15 p.m., Varsity girls at 6:30 p.m., Boys Varsity at 8 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 7

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church: Mass at 4:30 p.m.

Wrestling at Miller, 10 a.m.

Girls' Basketball team at Redfield Classic, playing St. Francis at 1:30 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 8

Catholic Parish: Mass at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church at 9 a.m., then at St. Joseph in Turton at 11 a.m.

United Methodist Parish: Worship in Conde at 9 a.m., coffee fellowship time at 10 a.m. and worship in Groton at 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton: Worship at 9 a.m., Sunday School at 10 a.m.

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

St. John's Lutheran Church: Worship at 9 a.m., Sunday School at 10 a.m.

Open Gym for JH-8 from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., and for grades 6-12 from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 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**



Put our experienced team to work for you!

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Lee Schinkel was program leader for Groton Kiwanis Club, on Jan 4. Lee introduced Tony, Amanda and daughter, Anna Bisbee, from Columbia; Tylan Glover, and Cody Swanson. Anna (right) and Tylan (left) presented their vocal solos from the Kiwanis talent contest; and Cody, Groton High School vocal instructor, accompanied them.

“Angels We Have Heard On High”

**Fill the Cooper house
this year!**

Open House

Sunday, Jan. 15, 2017

1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

208 N. 2nd St., Groton

Refreshments Served

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting January 9, 2017 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of December 12, 2016 school board meeting.

2. Approval of North Central Special Education Co-Op (NCSEC) agenda items...as fiscal agent.

3. Approval of December District bills for payment.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.

2. Approval of December 2016 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.

3. Approval of December 2016 School Transportation Report.

4. Approval of December 2016 School Lunch Report.

5. Update on Groton Area Elementary project progress.

6. Set date to receive and open bids for the Groton Area Elementary project.

7. Presentation of HS building massing and floor plan, review MS/HS building scope and project budget.

8. Approval of building floor plan and set date of bond election.

9. Continued discussion on SDHSAA classification for the sport of football.

10. School Board Committee Reports:

a. Building, Grounds, & Transportation: Clint Fjelstad, Merle Harder, Marty Weismantel

b. Personnel, Policy, & Curriculum: Deb Gengerke, Grant Rix

c. Negotiations: Kelly Kjelden, Steve Smith

11. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Set date and time for annual school board election – April 11, 2017 (7:00 AM – 7:00 PM), and authorize Business manager Weber to designate officials, with voting precincts in Andover, Bristol, Columbia, and Groton. [3 – year terms expiring: Dr. Smith and Mr. Rix]

2. Presentation of 2017-2018 school calendar draft.

3. Approve hiring Ryan Scepaniak as assistant wrestling coach for remainder for 2016-2017 wrestling season.

4. Approve retirement of Chuck Padfield as head cook at the conclusion of the 2016-2017 school year.

5. Executive session pursuant to SDCL 1-25-2(1) to discuss Superintendent's evaluation.

ADJOURN

Groton Coffee Cup League

Team Standings: James Valley 8, Kens 4, Jungle Lanes 3, Ten Pins 1

High Games: Vickie Kramp 209; Penny Stolle 185, 179; Vicki Walter 171

High Series: Vicki Walter 502, Penny Stolle 498, Vickie Kramp 490.



Upcoming Events

Friday, Jan. 6

Groton Area Girls at Hamlin

6:30 p.m.

Groton Area Boys at Hamlin

8:00 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 7

Groton Area Girls at Redfield Classic

Groton Area vs. St. Francis at 1:30 p.m.

Monday, Jan. 9

School Board Meeting at 7 p.m.

gdilive.com

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Today in Weather History

January 6, 1962: Snow, high winds, and sub-zero temperatures along with near blizzard conditions caused hazardous driving conditions across the area from the 6th into the 9th. Snowfall of generally 2 to 6 inches with winds of 30 to 40 mph caused widespread low visibilities along with drifts up to 4 foot high across central and northeast South Dakota.

January 6, 2010: A strong Alberta Clipper system tracked southeast through the northern plains on Tuesday night, January 5th through Thursday, January 7th. Sufficient Pacific moisture interacted with bitter cold Arctic air surging south from Canada resulting in widespread heavy snowfall over much of northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts ranged from 6 to 11 inches. The snow began across northeastern South Dakota in the late evening of the 5th into the early morning hours of the 6th. Many schools closed on the 6th and the 7th. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches in Andover and Doland; 7 inches in Britton, Sisseton, and near Milbank; 8 inches in Aberdeen, Bryant, and near Summit; 9 inches at Wilmot and Castlewood; 10 inches in Clear Lake and 11 inches at Watertown.

January 6, 2014:

The coldest air in recent history moved into the region during the early morning hours of the 5th and continued into the afternoon hours of the 6th. The combination of sub-zero temperatures with north winds produced dangerously cold wind chills from 40 below to around 55 degrees below zero. Winds gusted to over 40 mph at times. Several area activities were cancelled, as well as many schools on Monday the 6th. Some of the coldest wind chills include; 56 below in Summit; 55 below near Hillhead; 54 below in Brandt and Webster; 53 below in Clear Lake; 52 below in Herreid; 51 below in Leola; 50 below in Watertown, Sisseton, Bowdle, and McIntosh.

1880 - Seattle, WA, was in the midst of their worst snowstorm of record. Hundreds of barns were destroyed, and transportation was brought to a standstill, as the storm left the city buried under four feet of snow. (David Ludlum)

1884 - The temperature dipped to one degree below zero at Atlanta, GA. It marked the final day of a severe arctic outbreak in the South and Midwest. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm moving across the western U.S. spread heavy snow into the Central Rockies. Casper WY received 14 inches of snow in 24 hours, a January record for that location. Big Piney WY reported 17 inches of snow. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - It was a bad day for chickens. Heavy snow in Arkansas, with totals ranging up to 16 inches at Heber Springs, claimed the lives of 3.5 million chickens, and snow and ice up to three inches thick claimed the lives of another 1.75 million chickens in north central Texas. Up to 18 inches of snow blanketed Oklahoma, with Oklahoma City reporting a record 12 inches of snow in 24 hours. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

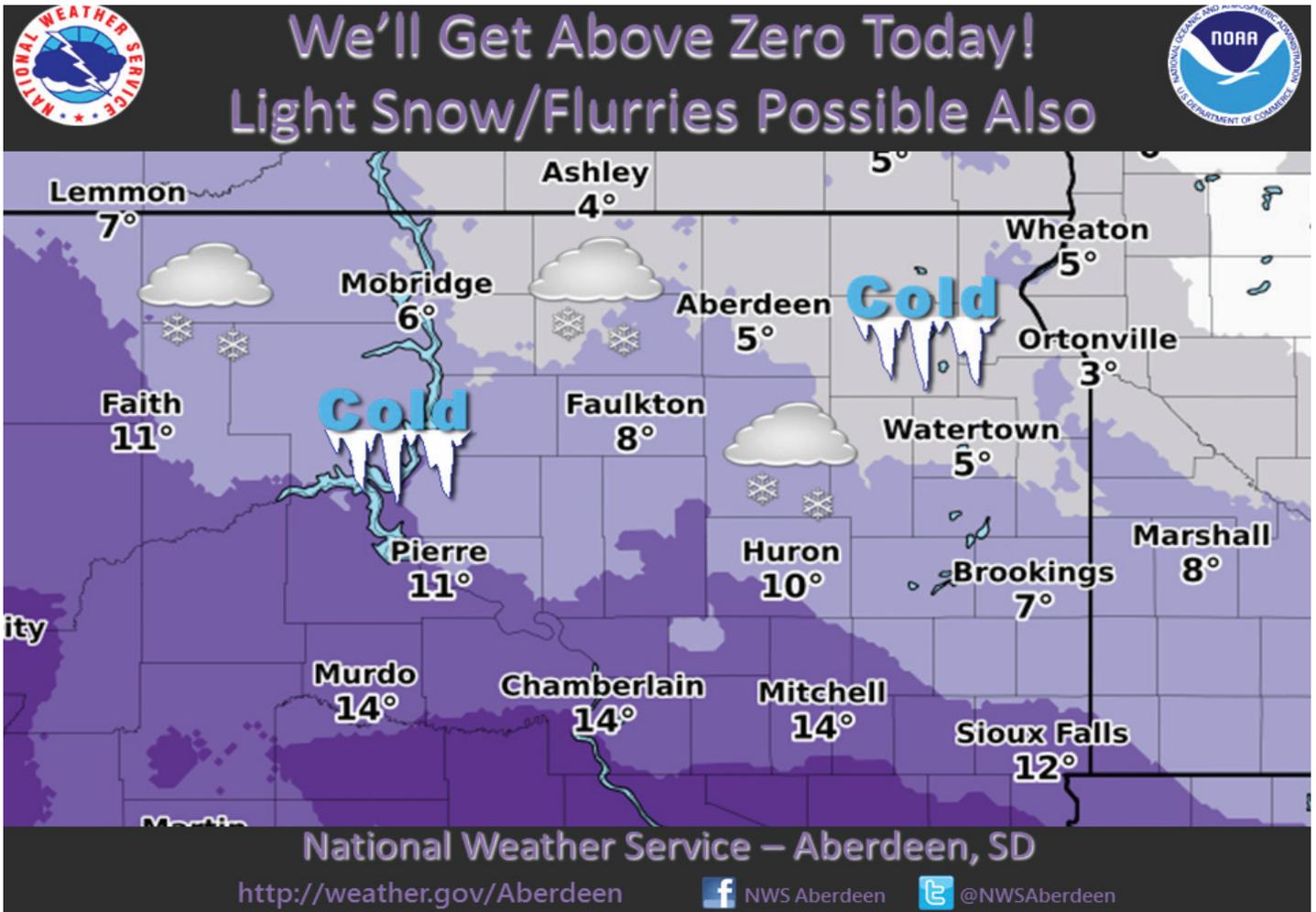
1989 - A "bonafide blizzard" ripped through south central and southeastern Idaho. Strong winds, gusting to 60 mph at the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, whipped the snow into drifts five feet high, and produced wind chill readings as cold as 35 degrees below zero. The blizzard prompted an Idaho Falls air controller to remark that "the snow is blowing so hard you can't see the fog".(National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Rain and gale force winds prevailed along the Northern Pacific Coast. Winds at Astoria OR gusted to 65 mph. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed over Florida. Five cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Miami with a reading of 86 degrees. The hot spot in the nation was West Palm Beach with a high of 87 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
30%					20%	40%
Mostly Cloudy then Chance Snow	Partly Cloudy	Cold	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Chance Snow then Cloudy
High: 5 °F	Low: -16 °F	High: 3 °F	Low: -10 °F	High: 15 °F	Low: -1 °F	High: 11 °F



Published on: 01/06/2017 at 5:52AM

Temperatures will remain very cold today, but at least we will rise above zero! A weak upper level disturbance will also be sliding southeast into the Dakotas today and bring flurries or areas of light snow. Any accumulations will be very minimal.

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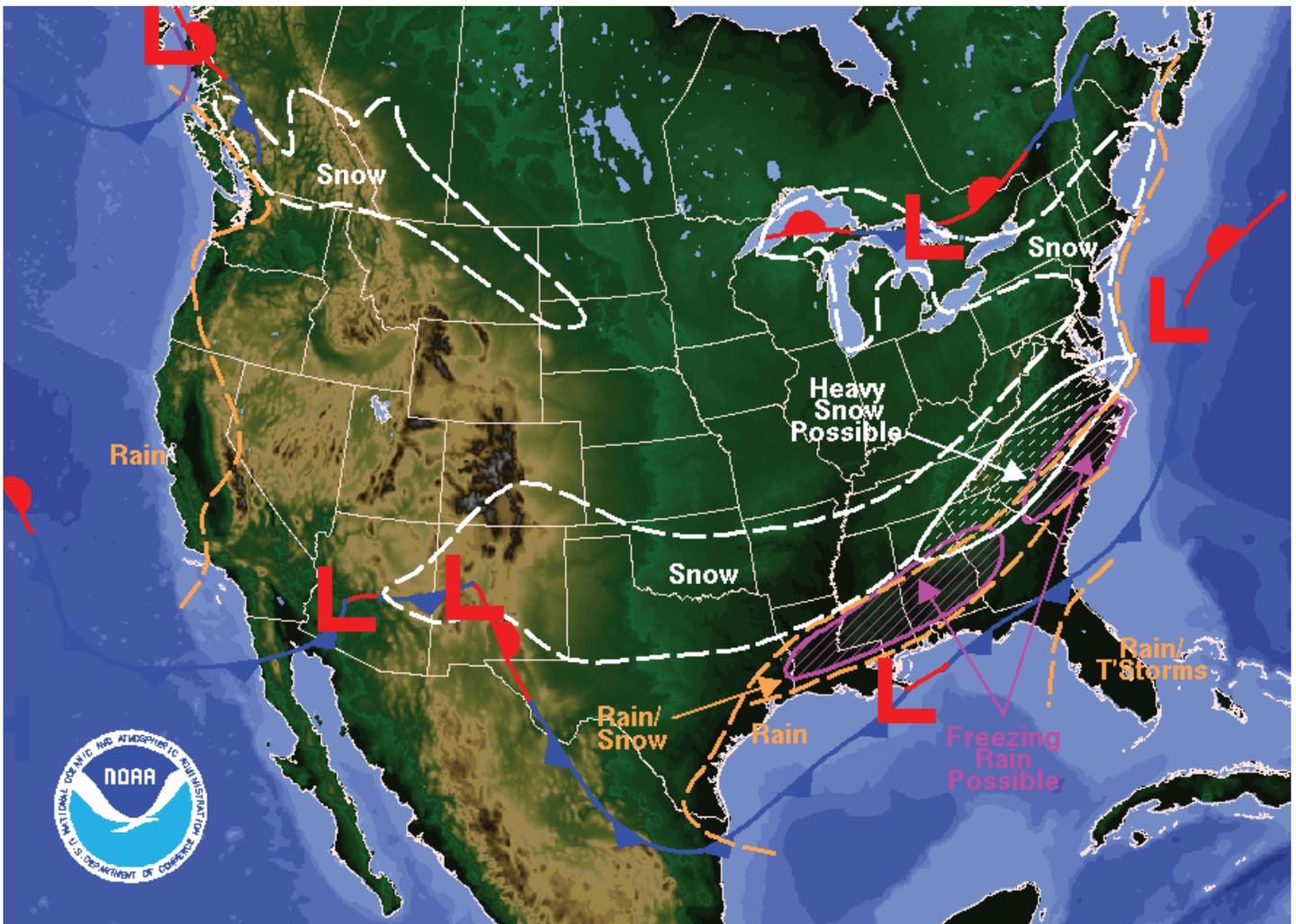
Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: -2.9 F at 4:14 PM
Low Outside Temp: -18.1 F at 6:23 AM
High Gust: 17.0 Mph at 10:53 AM

Rain: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 49° in 2012
Record Low: -30° in 1909
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.11
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.11
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:06 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Fri, Jan 06, 2017, issued 3:29 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Krekeler based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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FLAWED! DISCARD IT!

A great sculptor was commissioned to create a statue of Napoleon. The marble was ordered from a quarry in Greece known for its quality materials. As soon as it arrived in the studio of the famous sculptor, Canova, he examined it carefully. To his dismay he noticed that it was not perfect.

In disgust he shouted, "Discard it! It has a flaw in it. I will not lay my chisel upon it."

How fortunate we are that God's attitude toward and acceptance of sinners are the exact opposites. Paul boldly declares that God saved us "by His grace" – a word that means strong kindness toward someone! Imagine, if you can, how important God's grace is for us.

God is perfection and only perfection is good enough for Him. But, our very nature condemns us and will not allow us to grow into anything near perfection. So, if we are ever to get near to God, then, it must be on His terms.

God is also love. This love that we do not deserve or can ever understand is what makes grace necessary. There is nothing we could ever do that would enable us to remove the flaws in our lives. We need Someone who is above us and beyond us Who will reach out to us and say: "In spite of your flaws, I love you and will forgive you and transform you by My grace if you have faith in my Son."

In spite of their flaws, Jesus called men to be His disciples who were like us: ordinary sinners saved by grace. Accept His grace and love today.

Prayer: Lord, it's not about breaking Your laws that requires Your grace, but breaking Your heart. Forgive us, transform us and enable us to live worthy of Your love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

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News from the Associated Press

Thursday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 47, Burke/South Central 46
Belle Fourche 52, Lead-Deadwood 31
Corsica/Stickney 68, Platte-Geddes 44
Crawford, Neb. 84, Edgemont 15
Custer 55, Hill City 45
Dell Rapids 49, Beresford 34
Freeman Academy/Marion 40, Centerville 23
Great Plains Lutheran 47, Waubay/Summit 44
Gregory 63, Lower Brule 61
Harding County 64, Bowman County, N.D. 55
Huron 50, Mitchell 28
Kimball/White Lake 46, Hanson 43
Menno 47, Mitchell Christian 41
Miller 83, Mobridge-Pollock 65
Oelrichs 72, Sioux County, Neb. 59
Red Cloud 64, Pine Ridge 62
Sisseton 48, Milbank Area 34
St. Thomas More 72, Douglas 60
Sully Buttes 65, Highmore-Harrold 50
Timber Lake 58, Edmunds Central 43
Wall 82, Rapid City Christian 67
Warner 85, Ipswich 29
Webster 56, Deuel 51
Wessington Springs 51, Sunshine Bible Academy 48
Wolsey-Wessington 63, James Valley Christian 38
Big East Conference Tournament
First Round
Flandreau 70, Baltic 42
McCook Central/Montrose 41, Parker 38
Sioux Valley 104, Howard 42

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 45, Leola/Frederick 41
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 55, Burke/South Central 50
Arlington 45, Estelline 42
Avon 70, Scotland 25
Belle Fourche 56, Lead-Deadwood 15
Clark/Willow Lake 60, Lake Preston 53
Crow Creek 57, Chamberlain 41
Custer 41, Hill City 37
Dell Rapids 49, Beresford 40

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DeSmet 58, Colman-Egan 25
Deubrook 60, Dell Rapids St. Mary 26
Edgemont 34, Crawford, Neb. 33
Elk Point-Jefferson 61, West Central 56
Elkton-Lake Benton 42, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 32
Gordon/Rushville, Neb. 64, Bennett County 28
Heart River, N.D. 53, Harding County 29
Huron 55, Mitchell 42
Kimball/White Lake 57, Colome 27
Little Wound 82, Kadoka Area 52
Lyman 48, Gregory 20
Menno 46, Mitchell Christian 16
Milbank Area 39, Sisseton 23
Miller 50, Mobridge-Pollock 38
New Underwood 44, Philip 27
Northwestern 63, Hitchcock-Tulare 55
Oelrichs 74, Sioux County, Neb. 47
Potter County 43, Redfield/Doland 36
Sioux Falls Christian 47, Canistota 32
Sunshine Bible Academy 54, Wessington Springs 50, OT
Timber Lake 69, Edmunds Central 8
Todd County 54, Winner 53
Vermillion 77, Canton 47
Wall 62, Rapid City Christian 14
White River 57, Marty Indian 53
Wilmot 55, Florence/Henry 44
Wolsey-Wessington 33, James Valley Christian 18

Nebraska beer stores scrutinized for sales near reservation

By GRANT SCHULTE, Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A county commission in northwest Nebraska will decide as early as next week whether to recommend that the state shut down four beer stores blamed for widespread alcoholism on a South Dakota Indian reservation.

But at least one of the three commissioners said he doesn't believe that stopping the sales in Whiteclay would solve the problems on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Advocates on both sides made their case Thursday before the Sheridan County Board of Commissioners. The public hearing in Rushville was scheduled to hear public input on whether the county should ask the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission not to renew the beer stores' liquor licenses.

Sheridan County Commissioner Jack Andersen said he'd consider the testimony, but argued that closing the stores wouldn't keep reservation residents from drinking or traveling farther south into Sheridan County.

"I just don't see how closing the stores is going to help the problem," Andersen, of Lakeside, said in an interview before the hearing. "Closing them would be about the stupidest thing we could do."

Whiteclay's stores sold the equivalent of 3.5 million cans of beer last year.

Andersen said he was concerned that, without the stores, some people on the reservation would drive

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into Sheridan County to buy alcohol and drink behind the wheel on their way home.

He said those who argue about the large number of beer sales in Whiteclay don't consider that it's 2 miles south of Pine Ridge, South Dakota, a reservation town with roughly 3,300 people. The full reservation, which is geographically larger than Delaware and Rhode Island combined, has an estimated population of about 28,000.

The three-member commission isn't expected to act until at least Tuesday, but will decide whether to make a recommendation to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission about whether the stores' licenses should be renewed.

In November, the liquor commission ordered the Whiteclay stores to reapply for their liquor licenses amid public pressure to reduce panhandling, public drunkenness and violence and concerns about adequate law enforcement in the area. The stores now have to demonstrate that they can meet state requirements such as providing adequate law enforcement.

Cliff Rininger of Rushville, a retired science teacher who worked on the reservation, said he was concerned that closing the stores could lead to an increase in people driving intoxicated on county roads. It also could give more power to bootleggers on the reservation, he said. Rininger said the tribe should legalize alcohol, as it has attempted to do in the past.

"It's a bad situation, but I don't know that closing Whiteclay is going to solve anything," he said.

John Maisch, an Oklahoma law professor who advocates closing the stores, said the argument about highway dangers is "speculative, at best" and cited studies that say traffic fatalities decline when access is restricted.

Commissioner James Krotz said the hearing was scheduled after the liquor commission announced that it would require the Arrowhead Inn, D&S Pioneer Service, the Jumping Eagle Inn and State Line Liquor to renew their liquor licenses. Normally, the licenses are renewed automatically.

Krotz said he wouldn't discuss the commission's decision until after it was finalized.

A spokesman for the reservation's tribal government said no one in his office had been told about the hearing. Kevin Yellow Bird Steele, the Oglala Sioux Tribe's public relations director, said tribal leaders have appealed to state and local officials to close the beer stores numerous times in the past and saw no changes.

"They're going to give them those licenses," Yellow Bird Steele said. "Nothing's going to change. It's always the same."

Follow Grant Schulte on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/GrantSchulte>

Zenner brushes off comments about being NFL's best white RB

By LARRY LAGE, AP Sports Writer

ALLEN PARK, Mich. (AP) — Zach Zenner brushed off comments made by Seattle's Michael Bennett, who said the Detroit Lion was the best white running back in the NFL, insisting he wasn't bothered by the eyebrow-raising comments.

"Everyone's entitled to their opinion," Zenner said. "It sounded like he said some pretty nice stuff, so I'm appreciative of that."

A lot of people are saying nice stuff about Zenner these days, keeping his race out of the conversation.

The undrafted, second-year pro from South Dakota State has emerged as a No. 1 running back for the Lions, entering their NFC wild-card game Saturday night on the road against the Seahawks.

Zenner has set career highs the past two games with 110 yards of offense in a loss to Green Bay and 92 yards from scrimmage in a setback to Dallas. He had career highs with 20 carries for 69 yards rush-

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ing against the Packers after having 12 attempts for 67 yards against the Cowboys.

"There's not many white running backs in the NFL, but he has to be the best right now," said Bennett, a standout defensive end for Seattle. "He's doing such a great job of cutbacks and hitting the hole. He's a really good back."

Detroit running back Joiqie Bell, who also earned a spot in the league as an undrafted player, said he has talked to Zenner about Bennett's comments.

"He doesn't feed into that stuff," Bell said Thursday. "He just wants to play ball."

And with Ameer Abdullah and Theo Riddick out of the lineup with season-ending injuries, Zenner is getting a chance to play a lot of ball.

Zenner was on the field for 64 of 66 snaps in a 31-24 loss to the Packers and played extensively in a 42-21 loss at Dallas.

In both games, he was very effective in the first halves — helping the Lions lead each game at half-time — before barely getting the ball after halftime.

Zenner had 10 carries for 64 yards and two touchdowns along with two catches for 25 yards in the first half against the Cowboys before having just two carries for 3 yards and no receptions in the second half against them. He ran the ball 16 times for 63 yards and a score and had three receptions for 35 yards over the first two quarters against the Packers, then had just four carries for 6 yards and one catch for 6 yards over the last two quarters against them.

Lions coaches have not provided a clear explanation for why Zenner hasn't gotten the ball in the second halves of the last two games after performing so well in each game before halftime.

Detroit receiver Golden Tate is glad to see Zenner's hard work pay off.

"He comes in early, leaves late," Tate said. "He keeps his head down and does whatever the coach needs him to do. When he's been on the field, he's been balling lately. Hats off to the scouting department and the guys who brought him in as well. The next-man-up mentality has definitely worked in his favor and he's earned respect every single time he steps on the field. He's helping us. And, I can't wait to watch him light it up on Saturday."

Just don't expect Zenner to lash out at Bennett during the game, or to praise himself much if he helps Detroit pull off an upset.

That's just not his style.

Zenner was overlooked out of high school at Eagan High School in Minnesota, where he had more than 1,300 yards of offense and scored 17 touchdowns as a senior, leading to him settling for an offer to play at South Dakota State. In college, he proved a lot of people wrong by becoming the first Division I running back to run for 2,000 yards in three straight seasons.

Those stats, though, could not overcome his relatively small size and lack of blazing speed.

Detroit didn't draft him, but gave him a shot to make the team as an undrafted free agent and he did with an impressive preseason last year. His rookie season ended after six games because of cracked ribs and a partially collapsed lung. Zenner recovered well enough to earn a spot on the team again this season, but was inactive for Week 1 and 2 games back when both Abdullah and Riddick were healthy.

Instead of saying a lot of colleges and NFL teams missed out on having him on their team, he simply takes the high road.

"Personally, I don't believe I've had many doubters," Zenner said. "If I have, I haven't heard them."

For more NFL coverage: www.pro32.ap.org and http://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Follow Larry Lage at <http://www.twitter.com/larrylage>

Prosecutors drop sex charge against incoming state senator

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Prosecutors say they're dropping a misdemeanor sexual conduct without consent charge against an incoming Democratic state senator.

The Minnehaha County State's Attorney's Office said Thursday that officials concluded after further investigation that criminal charges against Reynold Nesiba (NESS'-ih-buh) aren't warranted.

The office says that prosecutors found inconsistencies in evidence previously given to authorities after receiving additional information from the defense and law enforcement.

Officials didn't offer additional details because of restrictions in the Marsy's Law crime victims' rights amendment and the confidentiality of law enforcement records.

Nesiba tells the Argus Leader that he's thankful to be "vindicated." He was arrested in November after being accused of unwanted sexual advances on a woman in September.

Lawmakers gather Tuesday in Pierre for the start of the 2017 legislative session.

Smoke, fire and explosions to cost shows more in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — It's getting more expensive to liven up concerts and other shows in Sioux Falls with smoke, fire and explosions.

The city plans to raise the fees it charges for fire inspectors who review plans for pyrotechnics and monitor shows to ensure that fire suppression systems like sprinklers and smoke alarms are working.

Sioux Falls charges \$55 per hour for each fire inspector on site, usually no more than two. But Fire Marshal Dean Lanier tells the Sioux Falls Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2hVUuR0>) the fee isn't keeping up with the overtime and benefits that the city pays its fire inspectors. His department is proposing \$90 per hour per inspector.

While that fee would be higher than some comparable Midwestern cities, Lanier says other fees that promoters pay are lower in Sioux Falls.

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

South Dakota officials: 'gold card' permits seeing delays

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Firearms enthusiasts are facing delays getting a new type of state concealed carry permit meant to speed up gun shopping, South Dakota authorities said Thursday.

The "gold card" law went into effect Sunday, but state and local authorities said that permits currently can't be issued because required federal fingerprint background checks can't be completed.

The new permit would allow customers to bypass a background check for each firearm purchase from a licensed dealer. Instead, shoppers would simply be able to present the permit, which requires completing the FBI fingerprint background check on top of the standard obligations necessary to get a concealed carry permit.

But those checks are stalled because South Dakota lacks a necessary FBI number for submitting fingerprints, Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead said. The state needs the identifier before the permits can get issued, Attorney General Marty Jackley said.

An FBI spokesman said in an email that South Dakota's request is under review and that the state Division of Criminal Investigation will be informed through an official letter once a determination has been made.

In order for permit holders to avoid background checks at the store, the permit also needs approval from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. An ATF spokeswoman didn't immedi-

ately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

South Dakota would join more than two dozen states with such an option if it is approved. The bill creating the gold card permit sailed through the Legislature during the 2016 session with only one vote against it.

Republican Rep. Mark Mickelson, the measure's main sponsor, said he's optimistic the issues will be resolved.

Milstead said his office received a significant number of phone calls earlier in the week about the new permit. For the most part, people have asked for a call back when the kinks are worked out.

"We're all kind of holding our breath waiting for that number," he said.

Sioux Falls law firm seeks fees over Dakota Access land deal

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota law firm claims a Minnesota couple is trying to duck out of paying attorney's fees from the sale of their land to the Dakota Access pipeline.

The lawsuit says the pipeline company initially offered Bradley and Kerry Williams, of Mendota Heights, \$101,000 for an easement on 3.41 acres in South Dakota. Meierhenry Sargent LLP says the price jumped to \$750,000 after the couple hired it.

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reports (<http://argusne.ws/2iN3NSW>) the firm alleges the couple later fired it to get out of \$216,000 in fees. That's a third of the extra money the firm says it secured for them. The lawsuit, which was moved to federal court last week, seeks arbitration.

The Williamses attorney, Edward Sheu (shoo), says they'll respond in court and declined further comment.

Mines honors program helps community and teaches leadership

By Jim Holland, Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Jim Bussell couldn't say enough about the help provided by a pair of South Dakota School of Mines & Technology students in the Rushmore Little League's quest to improve its baseball fields and the east Rapid City neighborhood that it has called home for decades.

Two civil engineering seniors, Cameron Luna and Nicholas Kasanke, provided help with improving safety for the low- to middle-income central Rapid City neighborhood that has seen more than its share of crime issues, including drug use, vandalism, vagrancy and even prostitution, in and around the Roosevelt Park baseball field.

Luna and Kasanke looked at drainage and building material issues with the aging baseball field and provided information that proved vital to the league's getting city Vision Funds for a new lighting system.

The \$25,000 to improve lighting in and around the Rushmore Little League complex was one of 10 Vision Fund requests approved along with grants for nine other projects by the Rapid City Common Council at its meeting on Dec. 5.

"They wrote a comprehensive document outlining the steps that needed to be taken, and we provided that information to the Vision Fund committee to help them make a decision," said Bussell, a Rapid City firefighter and volunteer league leader.

"It's fair to say that without their help, we wouldn't have come this far in the Vision Fund request," Bussell said.

The Rushmore Little League project is one of many community improvement projects performed by School of Mines senior engineering and science students over the years, but now a new undergraduate

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honors program will provide younger students with learning and leadership experience, while helping to solve community problems.

The new SDSM&T Honors Program, announced by the university on Dec. 5, will accept about 30 students, or roughly 5 percent of each incoming freshman class, along with a few sophomore students, each year, starting in the fall of 2017, the Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2hjxxCF>) reported.

Students accepted into the Mines program starting next fall will tackle one or more community projects during the course of studying for their degrees.

"It's a tremendous opportunity for young engineers and scientists to engage with each other and solve problems that matter to someone else," said Mines president Heather Wilson.

Mines senior students from the gamut of engineering and science disciplines have long tackled community projects, among them developing adaptive equipment for people with disabilities; assessing and fixing the drainage around the Black Hills Playhouse; and designing and building a greenhouse.

"It's very common for us to do projects like this," Wilson said. "We wanted to build on this and get more students engaged, starting from their freshman year on."

Wilson said the Mines honors program is unique in engaging the community to provide projects to be completed and problems to be addressed and connecting those projects with students who show potential for leadership.

"It's easier to do an honors program that just has a harder freshman seminar course or something," Wilson said. "We're doing something very different that requires very close participation with the community to identify problems that young engineers and scientists might be able to help solve."

Among projects senior students have recently helped or are currently helping with are design facilities and developing a site plan that focuses on problem areas such as drainage issues, road/trail access and maintenance of a fruit tree orchard for Youth and Family Services Fullerton Farm in Box Elder.

Mines graduate student Kristen O'Connor of Gillette, Wyoming, took on the YFS farm project as part of her senior-year project. O'Connor worked on assessing water quality for a fruit tree orchard project at the YFS facility in Box Elder.

O'Connor helped identify water quality issues, such as high iron content in water obtained from a well, and suggested possible solutions.

"I actually really enjoyed the project and thought it was really well associated with my major," O'Connor said.

Luna, a scholarship athlete with the Hardrockers' football team, said he and Kasanke became caught up in helping the league improve not only its facilities but also the overall atmosphere of the neighborhood northwest of the campus.

"It's been a very engaging thing and something that has enhanced my education, because you have to get in touch with groups outside of engineering for that engineering purpose, whether it be environmental groups or safety groups," Luna said. "This project really has all of that tied into it."

Honors program graduates will be required to complete four semesters of community-based project experiences and participate in four honors experiences intended to help student understand difficult current problems.

The graduates must also serve at least two semesters in an elected or appointed leadership position in a campus club, team, organization, professional society, fraternity or sorority, or hold a more significant leadership position as determined by the dean of students.

Wilson said the university has established a community advisory board, which will meet for the first time on Dec. 20, to help identify suitable problems for Mines students to tackle.

"We have to have enough of those projects to engage students year after year," she said.

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All students applying as freshmen for the fall semester in 2017 will have an opportunity to apply for the honors program.

Those students will have the option of living in the honors section of the university dormitories and will also receive a preference for on-campus housing as upperclassmen.

Wilson said selection to the honors program will be competitive and based on academic excellence, commitment to service and leadership potential.

"It has a lot to do with their potential for leadership, their passion for service and their desire to be with other students who are like-minded who care about the world around them," she said. "We're not just looking for bookworms."

Bussell said the nonprofit Rushmore Little League could not have budgeted for the professional engineering help provided by the School of Mines, along with off-season and spring training camps hosted by Mines baseball players.

"I don't know where we would be without their help and the help of the Mines organization," Bussell said.

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

Moving company: South Dakota, Vermont top destinations in US

ST. LOUIS (AP) — One of the nation's largest moving companies says South Dakota is first on its list of top moving destinations.

United Van Lines has tracked customer state-to-state migration for the past 40 years. For 2016, South Dakota was the state with the highest percentage of inbound moves, which the suburban St. Louis-based company says is part of a trend of retirees moving to states in the Northwest.

Oregon had been No. 1 the previous three years and dropped to third. Vermont was second, Idaho fourth and South Carolina fifth.

Many Southern and Western states had more people moving in than moving out, while several Northeastern states saw high rates of outbound moves.

States with the highest percentage of outbound moves were, in order, New Jersey, Illinois, New York, Connecticut and Kansas.

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, Jan. 5

Governor should back ethics reform

Normally, our governor is a measured and reasonable man who for the past six years has steered our state on a steady course by primarily focusing on fiscal matters while finding more money for education, roads and bridges.

But when it comes to the voter-approved Initiated Measure 22, or the Anti-Corruption Act, he seems to lose all objectivity about the merits of ethics legislation or understand why 180,580 South Dakotans voted for it, including 24,638 in Pennington County.

In fact, more people voted for IM 22 than Amendment R, which was placed on the ballot by the Legislature and supported by the governor. Now, the amendment that allows the state to oversee its technical schools in new ways is part of the Constitution. It received 178,187 votes.

Daugaard has repeatedly stated that he believes the voters were misled by IM 22 proponents and has supported the efforts of GOP leaders in the Legislature who asked the courts to declare the measure

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unconstitutional. Circuit Judge Mark Barnett, a former attorney general and Republican candidate for governor, has since issued a preliminary injunction that has prohibited it from becoming state law.

Daugaard recently told The Associated Press that he expects the Legislature to repeal the entire measure. The governor also said he is open to working with the Legislature to make changes in the initiative system that has been with the state since 1898. Those changes will almost certainly be focused on making it more difficult for citizens to get measures on the ballot.

The governor and the Republican-dominated Legislature should, however, hold their ears a little closer to the ground before they repeal IM 22 in its entirety and revamp the initiative process.

On Monday night, some House Republicans in the nation's capital voted for a proposal to gut the independent Office of Congressional Ethics in their first official action of the 115th Congress. The next morning they awoke to a firestorm of criticism that included President-elect Trump, who criticized them for putting their aversion to being scrutinized ahead of so many other issues of legitimate national interest and how it conflicted with his desire to "drain the swamp."

A few hours later, the House Republicans backed down and the ethics office remains intact.

South Dakota Republican leaders need to understand that Donald Trump was elected president for many of the same reasons that IM 22 was approved by state voters — many people no longer feel that lawmakers really represent their interests and that politicians benefit more than they do from the status quo.

If the governor and the Legislature continue to dismiss the will of the voters or worse yet suggest they don't possess the tools to make informed decisions, they could find themselves at odds with the public.

The Journal editorial board did not endorse IM 22, which is a lengthy bill and included a provision to publicly fund campaigns. However, the board does respect the will of the voters and sees few problems with a measure that requires lobbyists to report expenditures, caps gifts to lawmakers and creates a state ethics commission.

The Legislature and governor should do the same rather than change the initiative system and question the intelligence of the voters.

The Daily Republic, Mitchell, Dec. 28

Enacted holiday break rule was much-needed

Relax.

We all need time to do it, but too often we push kids and young adults so hard they rarely get time to rest.

The South Dakota High School Association (SDHSAA) has stepped in to help with that issue for student-athletes and those who participate in other SDHSAA-sanctioned events.

Earlier this year, the SDHSAA set a mandatory four-day break, called a moratorium, over the holiday break from Dec. 23 to Dec. 26 starting the 2018-19 school year.

The break ensures athletes will not travel to competitions, practice or participate in games or events on those dates. Students who are in fine arts activities such as band or chorus will also be on break for the four-day period.

What a relief this will be to those students who participate in SDHSAA-sanctioned winter events, which is why we're pleased about the new rule.

While it's not the case for everyone, many students are jam-packed with athletics, school work, part-time jobs and other extra-curricular activities. Aside from managing their time around those events, students are also tasked with preparing for college-prep tests like the SAT and ACT.

Too much is getting thrown at kids and teenagers too early.

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Multiple studies, including those conducted by American Academy of Pediatrics, have shown kids simply feel too busy.

We realize having a full schedule helps students prepare for college and life after graduation, but it's safe to say that over scheduling students could lead to burnout, stress and anxiety.

Coaches from many high school teams in our area already had a self-imposed policy to set aside a holiday break for student-athletes, but we're pleased it's now mandated.

The holidays are a perfect season to set the four-day break to allow students time with family, and it also allows athletes a period to rest, recoup and heal.

For some athletes who participate in multiple sports, they get little to no rest — jumping straight from fall into winter activities.

Our only knock on this rule is it wasn't passed earlier.

We applaud the SDHSAA Board of Directors for enacting the moratorium and know it will lead to much-needed relaxation for everyone.

Capital Journal, Pierre, Jan. 4

The Christmas Bird Count is important

There was a great scientific undertaking going on in Pierre and Fort Pierre last weekend.

It passed largely unnoticed. A small group of dedicated citizen scientists took to the streets and backyards of our fair community to count the number and type of our feathered cohabitants. It was the 47th time the Christmas Bird, this year held on New Year's Eve, has been conducted in the area.

Our community's count was just one 404 counts so far held during the 117th annual national Christmas Bird Count. It's organized by the national Audubon Society every year as a way to keep tabs on the myriad bird species that call North America home. It is the longest running citizen science program in North America and has even spread to other countries.

The Christmas Bird Count also has created one of the longest running databases of bird population information in North America. This is an invaluable resource for understanding long-term trends in bird movements and populations.

That's pretty important when it comes to getting a handle on how things such as climate change or the use of pesticide affect birds. We think those are pretty important things to understand. What affects birds can affect a wide range of other species, including human beings.

We hope the Christmas Bird Count continues for another 47 year here in Pierre and Fort Pierre.

Judge allows defendant's statements in child assault case

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City woman charged with assaulting a 4-year-old girl in her care has failed in her attempt to exclude statements she gave to law enforcement and the victim's family.

Seventh Circuit Judge Robert Mandel denied Ashlee Goldsmith's request to exclude those statements in the case against her. The 27-year-old Goldsmith is charged with two counts of first-degree rape. Prosecutors say Goldsmith assaulted the daughter of friends when she was caring for the child in October 2015.

The Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2iTnhm4>) reports Goldsmith's attorney says she is trying to resolve the case with prosecutors.

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

Trump on border wall: Mexico will pay us back

By ERICA WERNER and JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump on Friday tweeted that Mexico will reimburse American taxpayers for a new border wall and that U.S. money spent will be for the “sake of speed.”

His tweet came as top aides consider a plan to ask Congress to ensure money is available in U.S. coffers for the wall, but to rely on existing law that already authorizes fencing and other technology along the southern border.

The potential approach was confirmed Thursday by two congressional officials and a senior transition official with knowledge of the discussions; all spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Trump said in a tweet early Friday: “The dishonest media does not report that any money spent on building the Great Wall (for sake of speed), will be paid back by Mexico later!”

During his campaign, Trump repeatedly told voters if elected he would build a wall along the U.S. southern border and make Mexico pay for it.

Trump transition spokesman Sean Spicer said putting U.S. money up-front “doesn’t mean he’s broken his promise.” In an interview Friday on ABC’s “Good Morning America,” Spicer said: “I think he’s going to continue to talk to them (the Mexican government) about that.”

The approach could also stave off a legislative fight that Trump might lose if he tried to get Congress to pass a measure authorizing the kind of border wall he promised during the campaign.

It’s not clear how much could be done along the 2,000-mile border without additional actions by Congress. Lawmakers passed the Secure Fence Act of 2006, but most of those 700 miles have already been built. Some areas are in much better shape than others, though, and long stretches are made up of fencing that stops vehicles but not pedestrians.

But whatever steps might be taken without Congress’ approval would be likely to fall short of the extravagant new wall on the border that Trump repeatedly said Mexico would pay for during his campaign for the White House. And despite Congress’ involvement in approving any spending, such an approach might also open Trump to charges of circumventing the House and the Senate to take unilateral actions, something he repeatedly criticized President Barack Obama for doing. A spending bill including money for border construction could also provoke a legislative showdown given potential opposition from Senate Democrats.

Still, several lawmakers and congressional officials said the administration could have significant flexibility in taking additional steps without Congress’ approval.

“There’s a lot of things that can be done within current law,” said Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Fla., a longtime proponent of comprehensive immigration reform, though he emphasized that a lasting solution on immigration would take action by Congress. “You cannot minimize the potential impact of the administration doing what they can do under the law,” he said.

However, some immigration hard-liners have already expressed the desire to see Congress take a vote, given how prominent the wall was during Trump’s presidential campaign, and their desire to act on the issue.

Trump’s vow to build an impenetrable, concrete wall along the southern border was his signature campaign proposal. “Build the wall!” supporters would chant at his rallies. “Who’s going to pay for it?” Trump would ask them. “Mexico!” Trump often promised the wall would be built of hardened concrete, rebar and steel as tall as his venues’ ceilings, and would feature a “big, beautiful door” to allow legal immigrants to enter.

Most experts viewed such promises as unrealistic and impractical, and Trump himself sometimes allowed that the wall would not need to span the entire length of the border, thanks to natural barriers like rivers. After winning the election, he said he'd be open to stretches of fencing.

Classified report on Russia, election hacking going to Trump

By JULIE PACE and DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's top intelligence officials are making their most detailed and persuasive case yet to President-elect Donald Trump that Russia interfered in this year's U.S. political process.

The officials — Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, CIA Director John Brennan and FBI Director James Comey — are preparing to point to multiple motives for Moscow's alleged meddling as they brief Trump on their classified report Friday in New York. President Barack Obama received a briefing on Thursday, and a declassified version of the report is expected to be released at some point.

Since winning the election, Trump has repeatedly questioned intelligence officials' assessments that Russia was behind the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and individual Democrats like Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta.

Trump remained dubious about the assertion even on the eve of his intelligence briefing, asking how officials could be "so sure" about the hacking if they had not examined DNC servers.

"What is going on?" he wrote on Twitter.

A senior law enforcement official said the FBI repeatedly stressed to DNC officials the importance of obtaining direct access to the servers "only to be rebuffed until well after the initial compromise had been mitigated." The official said the FBI had to rely on a "third party" for information, but did get access to the material it needed.

The Washington Post, citing anonymous U.S. officials, reported Thursday that intelligence agencies have identified parties who delivered stolen Democratic emails to WikiLeaks. The officials also said there were disparities between efforts to infiltrate Democratic and Republican networks, and said the U.S. intercepted communications in which Russian officials celebrated Trump's victory. It was not clear which of those details were included in the classified report.

Sean Spicer, whom Trump has chosen as White House communications director and press secretary, said the billionaire business will go into Friday's meeting "prepared to listen and understand how they got to the conclusions." Asked on ABC's "Good Morning America" if Trump would have an open mind, Spicer replied, "100 percent."

"The president-elect, I think, has a healthy skepticism on everything," the spokesman said, adding that "a rush to judgment is not in the country's best interest."

"I think the idea that he's approaching this in a very logical, very methodical way ... is the right way to go about it," Spicer added.

Ahead of the briefing, Trump moved to fill out his own intelligence leadership team, tapping former Indiana Sen. Dan Coats to lead the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, according to a person with knowledge of the decision.

Coats served as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee before retiring from Congress last year. If confirmed by the Senate, he would oversee the umbrella office created after the 9/11 attacks to improve coordination of U.S. spy and law enforcement agencies. The person with knowledge of Trump's decision, as well as others who spoke to The Associated Press about intelligence matters involving Trump, were not authorized to discuss the matters publicly and spoke on condition of anonym-

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ity.

Coats, a 73-year-old Capitol Hill veteran, served eight years in the House before moving to the Senate in 1989 to take Dan Quayle's place when he became vice president. He stayed in the Senate until 1998, then left to become a lobbyist. After a stint as ambassador to Germany under President George W. Bush, he returned to Indiana for a Senate comeback bid in 2010. He did not seek re-election last year.

Coats was a harsh critic of Russia and pushed the Obama administration to punish Moscow for its annexation of Crimea in 2014. When the White House levied sanctions, the Kremlin responded by banning several lawmakers, including Coats, from traveling to Russia.

Coat's nomination is likely to quell concerns that the president-elect is seeking a sweeping overhaul of intelligence agencies. Trump's transition team has also been considering ways to restructure agencies to streamline operations and improve efficiency. Transition officials have been looking at changes at both ODNI and the CIA, but those plans are said not to be aimed at gutting the intelligence agencies or hampering their capabilities.

The person with knowledge of the discussions said they reflected the views of intelligence officials who have told Trump's team that there is room for streamlining within the multi-agency intelligence community.

The Wall Street Journal first reported Wednesday night that Trump was considering changes at the intelligence agencies. Trump transition spokesman Sean Spicer disputed the report Thursday morning.

"There is no truth to this idea of restructuring the intelligence community infrastructure. It is 100 percent false," Spicer said.

The scope of the changes discussed by some in Trump's transition team was unclear. But the prospect of a sweeping overhaul still created blowback, contributing to former CIA Director James Woolsey's decision to step aside as a senior adviser to the president-elect.

A person with direct knowledge of Woolsey's decision said the former CIA chief had not been significantly involved in the Trump team's discussions on intelligence matters and became uncomfortable being labeled as an adviser. In an interview on CNN, Woolsey said he did not want to "fly under false colors."

In other recent television appearances, Woolsey — he was CIA director under President Bill Clinton — said he believed Russia was involved in the election-related hackings, though he also said others may have been as well.

The CIA declined to comment on the potential changes. Clapper told a Senate panel Thursday that his office has not been engaged in such discussions with the Trump transition team. He noted that lawmakers created his office.

"Congress, I think, gets a vote here," said Clapper, who was testifying on Russia's election interference.

Associated Press writers Eileen Sullivan, Eric Tucker and Josh Lederman in Washington, Tom Davies in Indianapolis and Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC> and Deb Riechmann at <http://twitter.com/debriechmann>

Police: Beating on video began after friendly encounter

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and DON BABWIN, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The two 18-year-olds had been schoolmates, police say. After meeting at McDonald's, they spent two days together, driving around visiting friends. Then a pretend fight between them escalated into a brutal beating of a mentally disabled teenager that has stirred racial tensions and outrage after being broadcast on Facebook Live.

How the white suburban teen ended up beaten by four black people, threatened with a knife and taunted with profanities against white people and President-elect Donald Trump is among the puzzles authorities are still trying to piece together after the four were charged with hate crimes on Thursday.

The alleged attackers will make their first appearance in court Friday. They also face charges of kidnapping and battery for the assault, which was captured on cellphone video by one of the assailants and viewed millions of times on social media.

"This should never have happened," David Boyd, the victim's brother-in-law, said at a brief news conference in suburban Chicago. He said the victim was traumatized but doing as well as could be expected.

Neal Strom, who is acting as a family spokesman, told The Associated Press that the victim has had "profound emotional and physical disabilities throughout his life." He did not elaborate.

The uproar over the beating has intensified the glare on Chicago after a bloody year of violent crime and protests against Mayor Rahm Emanuel and a police department that has been accused of brutality and hushing-up wrongdoing. The department has also been the subject of a long civil-rights investigation by the Justice Department, which is expected to report its findings soon.

The incident also stirred emotions still raw after a nasty presidential election campaign that split the nation. The case heightened political tensions on social media, with some conservatives suggesting it was linked to the Black Lives Matter movement. Police said there was no indication of any connection.

The cruelty of the attack and the intense social media exposure prompted President Barack Obama to respond, calling it "despicable."

"I take these things very seriously," he told Chicago's WBBM-TV on Thursday. But he said the incident does not mean that race relations have gotten worse.

"We see visuals of racial tensions, violence and so forth because of smartphones and the internet and media ... a lot of the problems that have been there a long time," he said.

Chicago police initially said the youth was singled out because he has "special needs," not because he was white. But authorities later said the charges resulted from both the suspects' use of racial slurs and their references to the victim's disability.

Cook County prosecutors identified the suspects as Brittany Covington and Tesfaye Cooper, both of Chicago, and Jordan Hill, of suburban Carpentersville. All are 18. A fourth suspect was identified as Covington's 24-year-old sister, Tanishia Covington, also of Chicago.

Excerpts of the video posted by Chicago media outlets show the victim with his mouth taped shut and slumped in a corner of a room. At least two assailants are seen cutting off his sweatshirt, and others taunt him off camera. The video shows a wound on the top of the man's head. One person pushes the man's head with his or her foot.

A red band also appears to be around the victim's hands. He was tied up for four to five hours, authorities said.

The incident began Dec. 31, when the victim and alleged assailant Jordan Hill, met at a suburban McDonald's to begin what both the victim and his parents believed would be a sleepover, police said.

Instead, Hill drove the victim around in a stolen van for a couple of days, ending up at a home in Chicago, where two of the other suspects lived, Detective Commander Kevin Duffin said.

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The victim told police what began as playful fighting escalated. A downstairs neighbor who heard noises threatened to call police. When two of the suspects left and kicked down the neighbor's door, the victim escaped. A police officer later spotted the bloodied and obviously disoriented man wandering down a street.

The grandmother of Brittany Covington said the granddaughter she raised from infancy is "not this person."

"I'm so upset, my head is about to bust open," said Priscilla Covington of Chicago. "I don't know if someone influenced her ... She had her ups and down. (She) was a good person. I'm so confused."

Winter storm: South braces for snow, sleet and freezing rain

By TOM FOREMAN Jr., Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — With a winter storm bearing down on the South, Stuart Hall's regular run for groceries looked like something out of the just concluded holiday shopping season.

Hall said the parking lot of the store near his home in Cary, North Carolina, is usually fairly empty when he shops so late in the week. But across the South, many were stocking up on eggs, bread, milk and other staples ahead of the storm's expected arrival late Friday amid threats of snow, sleet and freezing rain across the Southeast.

"Today, it was like mall shopping during the holidays. People going up and down the lanes looking for a spot," he said. "As I walked in, I jokingly asked if there was any food and the clerk just laughed."

Sherrill Suitt Craig went shopping at a store near her home in north Raleigh, but she had to leave for a grocer in nearby Wake Forest because her initial stop was too crowded.

"I have no idea why, but people are acting like complete jackasses when they hear that there is snow in the forecast," Craig said. "I was just doing my regular shopping."

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for part of Friday and Saturday from eastern Alabama through north Georgia, including Atlanta, and into the Carolinas and part of Virginia.

Schools canceled classes in several states and Alabama and Georgia issued emergency declarations ahead of the storm, which was already being blamed for one road fatality Thursday in Kentucky.

Authorities said a man died after his pickup truck slid off a snow-slickened road. Daniel Noble, 55, rounded a curve in his pickup truck and slid off into a rail fence about 14 miles south of the city of Jackson, authorities said, adding there was about an inch of new snow on the road.

School districts in Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia either closed or called off classes early as snow began falling there Thursday and more cancellations were planned Friday, including by school systems in central Alabama amid the threat of up to 3 inches of snow and sleet.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley issued a state of emergency that will open its emergency operations center Friday morning and put 300 Alabama National Guard soldiers at the ready to help if needed.

In North Carolina, Saturday's ceremonies formally marking the inauguration of Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper have been canceled. Activities scheduled for Friday will go on as planned.

Some parts of North Carolina could receive 4 inches or more of snow and there's a "slight risk" of 8 inches or more of snow in eastern North Carolina and southeast Virginia, according to the advisory of the federal government's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

Its forecast called for 4 inches or more of snow for parts of Georgia, South Carolina and the Piedmont region and foothills of central and western North Carolina. The warning for central North Carolina called for a mixture of snow and sleet with up to 5 inches locally and as much as 7 inches from the central piedmont to the northern coastal plain.

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Mike Schichtel, lead forecaster at the Maryland center, said the storm threat is significant for the Southeast.

"If you have a four-wheel-drive vehicle and you think you're safe, you're not," Schichtel said. "Take it very seriously and adjust your travel plans accordingly."

To the west, heavy snow and strong winds have raised the danger of avalanches in the Colorado high country. A storm tracking across central California is dumping significant snow on the mountains, while a winter storm has already coated northern Utah with 9 inches of snow, forcing officials to cancel or delay classes Thursday.

The National Weather Service said snow accumulating for several weeks in Boise, Idaho, reached 15 inches Thursday and broke the previous snow-depth record of 13 inches set twice in the mid-1980s.

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. TRUMP TO BE SHOWN HACKING EVIDENCE

The president-elect has questioned intelligence assessments about Russian involvement in election hacking for weeks — but now the nation's top intelligence officials are making their case directly to him.

2. LIVE-STREAMED ATTACK LEADS TO HATE CRIME CHARGES

Four black people accused in the brutal beating of a mentally disabled white man that was streamed on Facebook Live are scheduled to make their first court appearances.

3. MOSCOW SCALES BACK IN SYRIA AFTER BLOODY ALEPPO FALL

Russia says it is withdrawing its aircraft carrier and some other warships from the waters off Syria as the first step in drawing down forces in the war-torn Mideast country.

4. WHERE NASTY WEATHER IS ON ITS WAY

Snow, sleet and freezing rain are forecast for the U.S. Southeast, with many people hastening to stock up on eggs, bread, milk and other staples.

5. FINAL JOBS REPORT FOR OBAMA PRESIDENCY EXPECTED TO BE SOLID

The U.S. has gained 15.4 million jobs over 74 consecutive months — the longest streak of job gains on record — and December is sure to extend the streak.

6. FRICTION SURFACES ANEW OVER WARTIME SEX SLAVES

Japan is recalling its ambassador to South Korea in response to the placing of a "comfort-woman" statue in front of its consulate in the Korean city of Busan.

7. WHY TRUMP'S FEELING HEAT SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Cancellation of a \$1.6 billion Ford plant stuns workers in a north-central Mexican town, with many blaming the U.S. president-elect — though the company says the decision was based on supply and demand.

8. WHICH ICONIC SPECIES FACES THREAT OF EXTINCTION

The seahorse, a victim of illegal fishing, may be spiraling toward annihilation after surviving beneath the waves for some 40 million years.

9. IN HOLLYWOOD, AN INTIMATE MEMORIAL

Friends and family gather at the next-door homes of Debbie Reynolds and daughter Carrie Fisher to mourn the late actresses.

10. BLUE JACKETS COME UP ONE WIN SHORT

Columbus falls to Washington and ends a 16-game winning streak — one shy of the NHL record.

Dylann Roof cold to victims, but apologized to his parents

By JEFFREY COLLINS, Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Before Dylann Roof was arrested for killing nine black church members, he scribbled a note to his mother, apologizing for all the repercussions his actions would cause. Weeks later, in a jailhouse journal, he wrote that he had no regrets.

The evidence, along with his manifesto, hundreds of photos and a confession to the FBI, draw a portrait of a young white man consumed by racial hatred who carefully planned the killings, picking out meek, innocent black people who likely wouldn't fight back.

Jurors who convicted Roof of hate crimes and other charges will decide whether he should be executed or face life in prison.

ROOF AND RACISM

Roof has pointed out that there was no dramatic confrontation that led him to begin hating blacks. Instead, when the Trayvon Martin case made the news, Roof went to Wikipedia to read about the black teenager who was shot to death in 2012 by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, who was acquitted. That led Roof to research black on white crime and to websites that offer false statistics inflating how often those crimes happen.

Roof was careful in his writings to say his beliefs came just from himself, not his parents. But one of Roof's old friends suggested otherwise.

"I don't think his parents liked his decisions, the choices that he made to have black friends," said Christon Scriven, who is black.

Roof would go between partying with black friends and spewing racist diatribes to his white buddies, Scriven said shortly after the shootings.

Roof also believed the false claims that blacks were better off as slaves and are inferior at their cores to whites. He compared African-Americans to dogs, saying everyone feels bad when a man beats a dog, but no one is surprised when a dog bites a man.

As he sat in jail after his arrest, Roof mused about adopting a white child someday and sought to explain his thoughts on other races, according to a journal found in Roof's cell.

Lauren Knapp of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office read the journal aloud in court Thursday. In it, Roof wrote that he felt he would probably eventually be pardoned if he were sentenced to life in prison and believed Adolf Hitler would eventually be canonized as a saint.

He also ranted that Jewish people made America worse by pushing desegregation, that the Hispanic population was growing too quickly and introducing more crime to the nation and Muslims were just as bad as blacks and perhaps more dangerous.

"The Muslim's violent behavior is increased exponentially by their sick religion," Roof wrote.

THE SON

When authorities searched Roof's car, they found birthday cards from his mom and dad, who were divorced, and what appeared to be suicide notes to each of his parents.

Roof's writings to his mom show a son worried about how she would feel.

"At this moment I miss you very much," he wrote. "And as childish as it sounds, I wish I was in your arms."

Roof's mom suffered a heart attack in court shortly after prosecutors called him a cold and calculated killer in their opening statement.

Roof worked for his contractor father for a time.

"I love you and I'm sorry," Roof wrote. "You were a good dad."

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In Roof's birthday card, his father promised to buy him a gun.

THE FRIEND

Roof had a few friends he would hang out with when he got tired of his parents. One of them, Joey Meek, pleaded guilty to lying to federal agents about what he knew about Roof's plans.

Meek is awaiting sentencing. His guilty plea included an offer to testify against his friend if asked, but he hasn't been called to the stand.

Meek and Roof were good friends until Roof dropped out of high school. They reconnected in the months before the shooting, drinking and smoking marijuana. Scriven also would hang out with them at Meek's house.

Both friends said he talked about a mass shooting. Scriven said Roof wanted to target the College of Charleston, which Roof denied in his jailhouse journal. Meek said Roof talked about killing blacks.

Meek insisted to reporters he had no idea of Roof's exact plan and was stunned to see his friend in a surveillance photo on TV the morning after the shooting. "I didn't THINK it was him. I KNEW it was him," Meek said.

THE LONER

In Roof's opening statement to jurors to start the penalty phase of his trial, he said there was nothing wrong with him psychologically except "I'm probably better at constantly embarrassing myself than anyone who's ever existed."

Agents recovered hundreds of photos from Roof's cameras. Some were of him posing with the Confederate flag, others were at historic sites across South Carolina. They appeared to be taken with a tripod and a timer, and he is the only person in almost all of them. There are even a few of Roof with a cat in his bedroom.

Roof wrote in his jailhouse journal that he enjoyed being sad and having pity on himself because sadness was such a strong emotion.

Roof told agents when he confessed he reached out to no other white supremacy groups and spoke to no one else about his plans.

His journal ends with another lament: "One of my only regrets is that I was never able to fall in love."

Associated Press writer Meg Kinnard contributed to this report from Charleston, South Carolina.

Follow Jeffrey Collins on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/JSCollinsAP> . His work can be found at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/jeffrey-collins> .

Kinnard can be reached at <http://twitter.com/MegKinnardAP> . Read more of her work at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/meg-kinnard/> .

GOP has Trump's back as he questions US intelligence

By ERICA WERNER, AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — A few years ago President Barack Obama came under conservative fire for choosing, at times, to read his daily intelligence briefings, rather than receive them in-person. Republican Rep. Paul Ryan was among those piling on.

"I have a hard time comprehending that, because the primary job of the commander in chief is to keep the country safe," Ryan said in an October 2014 interview on Fox News Channel. "And you need

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to get from your intelligence community, your defense community — especially when we have troops in harm's way — what's going on."

Yet now, as President-elect Donald Trump refuses daily intelligence briefings, questions U.S. spy agency conclusions about Russia interfering in the 2016 presidential election, praises Russian President Vladimir Putin and appears to side with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Ryan and other Republicans have Trump's back. Far from strongly defending the U.S. intelligence community, they're siding with the new leader of their party, even when he makes comments or takes stances that would seem anathema to the GOP.

It's a remarkable turnabout for a political party that cheered President Ronald Reagan's hard-line stance against the "evil empire" of the Soviet Union, unfailingly supports the military and joined with European allies in blistering Putin after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Asked at a press briefing Thursday whether he had full confidence in U.S. intelligence agencies, now-Speaker Ryan offered a tepid endorsement that began and ended on a note of criticism.

"Well, they don't always get everything right. We've seen that clearly," Ryan said. "But I do have faith that our men and women in our intelligence community are doing an incredible job, sacrificing for our country. But there's always room for improvement."

Earlier Thursday, in an interview with WTAQ radio in Wisconsin, Ryan passed up the chance to distance himself from Trump's elevation of Assange in a tweet earlier this week, when Trump cited Assange's claim that Russia had not been the source of Democratic Party documents that WikiLeaks revealed.

Instead, even while criticizing Assange, Ryan defended Trump, saying that what the president-elect is "rightfully concerned about is partisans are trying to use the Russian hacking incident to ... call into question the legitimacy of his victory."

And Ryan endorsed Trump's claim, disputed by intelligence officials, that intelligence leaders had delayed a briefing for Trump on the hacking issue. In dismissing the intelligence on Russia, Trump highlighted a glaring intelligence failure — the claims that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion and war.

With a couple of exceptions — most notably Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina — other GOP lawmakers and leaders have also stayed largely quiet as Trump lauds Putin and derides U.S. intelligence.

During a hearing Thursday with intelligence agency officials on the alleged Russian election meddling, Republicans on the panel largely avoided making comments that would contradict Trump's well-publicized skepticism that Russia had anything to do with hacking Democratic emails. The exceptions were McCain and Graham.

Republican Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas even appeared to try to build the case for Trump, ticking off several Trump proposals, from increasing defense spending to accelerating nuclear weapons modernization, to challenge the notion that Putin would favor Trump over Hillary Clinton.

"There is some contrary evidence, despite what the media speculates, that perhaps Donald Trump is not the best candidate for Russia," Cotton argued.

The hearing provoked an angry outburst from Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri.

"The notion that the soon elected leader of this country would put Julian Assange on a pedestal compared to the men and women of the intelligence community and the military ... no matter whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, there should be howls," McCaskill said. "And mark my word, if the roles were reversed, there would be howls from the Republican side."

In most cases, Republicans haven't actually embraced Trump's stances, they've just declined to call

him out on them, noted Gary Schmitt, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute who worked as a Democratic Hill staffer before serving as executive director on the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board during Reagan's second term.

"It's a normal situation in which the nominal head of your party, you don't want him to be undercut," Schmitt said. "But my view is if it looks like the substance is clearly on the side of the intelligence community, you're not doing anybody any favors by protecting him."

Tide-Tigers II: The matchups that will decide national title

By RALPH D. RUSSO, AP College Football Writer

Every defensive meeting at Clemson this week might as well have started with coordinator Brent Venables passing around a photo of Alabama's O.J. Howard with the caption "Know where 88 is at all times."

For the second straight season, the Tigers and Crimson Tide will meet for the College Football Playoff championship. Howard is the talented tight end who came into last season's title game with 33 catches for 394 yards and no touchdowns. He then went off for 208 yards on five catches with two scores as Clemson's defense seemed unaware that Howard was an eligible receiver.

While it's safe to assume quarterbacks Deshaun Watson and Jalen Hurts will play pivotal roles in Monday's game at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida, you never know who will emerge as a star on the big stage — especially with the most talented rosters in college football facing off.

With the help of some coaches who have played each team and the scouting website Pro Football Focus, these are some of the matchups that could determine Tigers-Tide II.

Watson vs. Alabama's scoring defense

Watson is probably going to throw an interception at some point against Alabama. He has thrown 17 on the season after throwing 13 last season, including one in his magnificent championship game performance.

The junior Heisman Trophy runner-up is a confident passer who will try to make difficult throws. He is also able to escape trouble with his mobility and strength. Add those up and he occasionally courts trouble.

As everyone who has been paying attention knows by now, Alabama's defense scores a lot. Twelve touchdowns to be exact. Alabama's athletes are so crazy good — from defensive end Jonathan Allen to linebacker Ryan Anderson to safety Minkah Fitzpatrick — that they become dynamic ball carriers when running through fast guys who can't tackle and big guys who aren't fast enough to keep up.

Purdue coach Jeff Brohm, who faced Alabama when he was coach at Western Kentucky this season and lost 38-10, said the touchdowns are no fluke. Most defenses provide some opportunities for safe throws. Not Alabama's.

"They're going to press you," he said. "They're going to get up on you. So there's not a whole lot of separation unless you want to hold onto the ball." And holding on to the ball usually doesn't end well against the best pass rush in college football — a pass rush that does not rely on much blitzing.

Troy coach Neal Brown, whose team lost 30-24 at Clemson on Sept. 10, said Clemson usually tries to set up Watson for easy throws early in the game to get him comfortable.

"They did a great job schematically of getting him into the flow of the game," Brown said.

Brohm said Clemson's offense, which is heavy on misdirection and gets Watson involved in the running game, matches up as well as possible against Alabama's defense.

Alabama's offense, with an inconsistent passer in Hurts, is not necessarily built to match scores with

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Watson. Clemson's path to victory includes forcing the Tide's offense to provide all of Alabama's points.

Clemson WR Mike Williams vs. Alabama CB Marlon Humphrey

Williams, at 6-foot-3 and 225 pounds, gets compared to all those big, impossible-to-cover receivers that play in the NFL : Alshon Jeffrey (6-3, 216), Demariyus Thomas (6-3, 235) and even former great Calvin Johnson (6-5, 237).

The junior is Watson's security blanket — almost to a fault. The Tigers have so many effective weapons that at times this season they almost became too reliant on Williams and limited an offense that does so much well. Then again, it's easy to want to force feed Williams, who has the speed to get deep and size and strength to catch passes when covered.

Physically, Humphrey is about as good a matchup for Williams as you'll find. The junior is 6-1 and 196. His problem has been getting beat down the field. He has allowed 16.3 yards per catch this season, according to Pro Football Focus, after allowing 17.4 last year.

Hurts vs. Clemson's pass rush

The Tide's pass rush is ferocious (50 sacks), but the Tigers get after passers almost as well (49 sacks).

Pressure has been a problem for Hurts. According to Pro Football Focus, Hurts' completion percentage drops to 31 percent when he is under pressure. Incompletions are not the worst thing. Better than interceptions. Hurts has thrown four of his nine picks when facing pressure, according to PFF. Hurts (891 yards rushing) can also turn a near sack into a big gain.

So Clemson needs to force hurried throws, but also be disciplined enough to not allow Hurts room to take off.

LSU defensive coordinator Dave Aranda said Lane Kiffin, now the former Alabama offensive coordinator, turned the Tide's offense into one that morphs from week to week to attack an opponents' weakness.

"The biggest thing with Alabama, you had to look at yourself before you looked at them. What hurt you in the past?" said Aranda, whose team lost 10-0 to Alabama on Nov. 5. Now with Steve Sarkisian calling plays : "I'm wondering how much that changes," Aranda said.

Aranda said Alabama gets Hurts involved in the running game when defenses get overly aggressive.

"The quarterback run cancels out a lot of aggression for aggression sake," Aranda said.

Alabama center Bradley Bozeman vs. Clemson DT Dexter Lawrence

The Tigers got 17 sacks from tackles Carlos Watkins (10.5) and Lawrence (6.5), the 340-pound freshman freak. Venables is going to make it hard for Alabama to double-team the big guy.

"Venables does a great job creating Bear fronts, which, in a Bear front, all five offensive linemen are covered. Which creates one-on-one matchups," Brown said.

The good news for Hurts is Alabama's offensive line is as good as any in the country at protecting the passer. The Crimson Tide allowed 24 sacks but that's a little misleading because it counts running plays where Hurts was caught behind the line. In 434 passing plays, Alabama allowed six sacks, according to PFF.

Bozeman is the rock in the middle of that line, a 319-pound junior. Guards Ross Pierschbacher and Korren Kirven will also get their chances to deal with the Clemson's man-child. In fact, don't be surprised if Venables tries to get Lawrence matched up on the guards who are not as good as Bozeman.

Prediction

Alabama is better or at worst equal to Clemson everywhere but one spot: quarterback. Watson and the nature of Clemson's offensive scheme give the Tigers answers for Alabama's smothering defense that few teams have. But the combination of Nick Saban's preparation and planning and the most tal-

ented roster in college football means nothing less than another all-time performance from Watson will be needed for Clemson to win. It wasn't enough last year and it won't be this year.

Alabama 33-21.

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

More AP college football: www.collegefootball.ap.org and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

With winning streak over, Blue Jackets' work just beginning

By STEPHEN WHYNO, AP Hockey Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — John Tortorella has been waiting for this.

The Columbus Blue Jackets coach enjoyed riding a 16-game winning streak, but when it ended with a 5-0 clunker against the Washington Capitals on Thursday night, Tortorella was ready to really begin evaluating his players.

Knowing from years of experience that losing reveals more than winning, Tortorella is anxious to see how players respond Saturday against the New York Rangers and in the coming post-streak weeks.

"You cannot exhale," Tortorella said. "We have so much hockey to be played. I still don't know who we are. ... We have a long ways to go here to really define who we are."

For the past five weeks, the Blue Jackets were defined by the winning streak that fell one short of the 1992-93 Pittsburgh Penguins' NHL record. Their power play continued to lead the league, 2013 Vezina Trophy-winning goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky was on top of his game and hype built up around a club that missed the playoffs the past two seasons.

After replacing Todd Richards early last season, Tortorella said the Blue Jackets had to rid themselves of the stench of entitlement and earn his respect. The streak went a long way toward doing that — and getting Columbus back into the playoffs.

But even now, the Blue Jackets only lead the Rangers and Stanley Cup champion Penguins by three points and the Capitals by five in the absurdly difficult Metropolitan Division. There's no breathing room to be found.

"We're going to have a lot of divisional games coming up, a lot Eastern Conference games, a lot of four-point nights and I think we're ready for the challenge," center Brandon Dubinsky said. "Really proud of this group and I know this group can handle it, so I'm excited to see where we go from there."

After outscoring opponents 64-27 in 16 consecutive wins, the Blue Jackets were skated out of the building by the Capitals as Bobrovsky was chased with five goals on 23 shots. Tortorella acknowledged he "stretched" Bobrovsky by playing him too much during the streak, and he would like to balance the playing time more with backup Curtis McElhinney moving forward.

"I can just get back to kind of just looking at our situation with the season and figure out the goal-tending situation, which is very important," Tortorella said. "I think it's going to be very important for us — the decisions we make there as we go through the second half of the year."

Troy Loney of the '92-93 Penguins felt the emotional toll of that winning streak late in the season contributed to their second-round postseason exit, and the Blue Jackets should expect at least a lull. The Philadelphia Flyers, who the Blue Jackets host Sunday, are 1-5-2 since a 10-game winning streak.

With 45 games left in the season and their focus on the playoffs this spring, Tortorella is giving the Blue Jackets the day off Friday before facing the Rangers while hoping players learn from the streak. That process is already underway.

We figured out "how to carry ourselves in pressure situations and also what it feels like to win," cap-

tain Nick Foligno said. "You expect to win every time you step on the ice and that's something that hasn't been the case here on this team for a long time. We're building that culture and that identity that we talked about, but it's how we go about our business and how we play the game."

Follow AP Hockey Writer Stephen Whyno at <http://www.twitter.com/SWhyno> .

VP Biden to President-elect Trump: 'Grow up'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Joe Biden told President-elect Donald Trump Thursday to "grow up."

Biden dismissed Trump's complaint on Twitter about how the Obama administration has handled the transition. The vice president told "PBS NewsHour" in an interview that it's time for Trump "to be an adult."

Biden said to Trump: "You're president. You've got to do something. Show us what you have."

The vice president also said that Trump as president will have to propose legislation that Congress and the public can then assess. He said that it'll be "much clearer what he's for and against" once he's in the position of governing.

Vice President Joe Biden says it's "dangerous" for President-elect Donald Trump to publicly criticize the U.S. intelligence community.

Biden also said it's "absolutely mindless" for a president not to have confidence in or listen to the intelligence agencies. The vice president said it would be legitimate to question intelligence and ask for more detail or disagree. But he said that's different than Trump claiming he knows more than the intelligence agencies.

Biden said that's like saying, "I know more about physics than my professor." He says that's worrisome, but he assumes Trump's behavior will change. He said that Trump is surrounding himself with "very smart people" like retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, the billionaire businessman's pick for defense secretary.

Final jobs report for Obama presidency expected to be solid

By CHRISTOPHER S. RUGABER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The last major economic report card for President Barack Obama arrives Friday with the release of the December jobs figures. The report will cap a long record of robust hiring after the Great Recession, though one that left many people feeling left out.

When Obama took office in January 2009, the economy was hemorrhaging jobs from employers who were panicking in the face of plummeting demand and a financial crisis that froze credit. When the bleeding finally stopped in February 2010, 8.7 million jobs had vanished.

The unemployment rate peaked at a quarter-century high of 10 percent in October 2009. Just over seven years later, it has reached a nine-year low of 4.6 percent.

Hiring was slow at first but soon accelerated and has been consistently solid through most of the recovery. The U.S. has gained 15.4 million jobs over 74 consecutive months — the longest streak of job gains on record.

December is sure to extend the streak, though likely at a more modest pace than prevailed a couple of years ago: Economists have forecast that employers added 173,000 jobs in December, according to data provider FactSet. The unemployment rate is thought to have risen slightly to 4.7 percent.

Weak spots remain in the job market: A smaller share of Americans either have a job or are looking

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for one than before the recession. That is particularly true for men. Many men, especially those without a college education, have suffered as the job market has shifted away from blue collar work such as manufacturing and mining toward industries that either require higher skills, like information technology, or that pay less and are dominated by women, such as health care.

The unemployment rate is back to healthy levels. But the proportion of Americans in their prime working years who are either working or looking for work remains far below its pre-recession level. When people stop looking for a job, they're no longer counted as unemployed. Those "dropouts" have contributed to a declining unemployment rate over the past eight years.

President-elect Donald Trump spotlighted that trend as a shortcoming in Obama's record and charged during the election campaign that the unemployment rate was a "hoax." He now faces the steep challenge of bringing back men who have left the workforce.

Since the election, Trump has successfully pressured several manufacturers to keep some jobs in the United States, including Ford and United Technologies' air conditioning unit Carrier.

In the meantime, the number of factory jobs has continued to decline. Manufacturers are struggling to adapt to a strong dollar and weak overseas growth, which have combined to reduce exports. Factories have cut 54,000 jobs in the past 12 months.

According to payroll processor ADP, the bleeding continued in December, when factories shed 9,000 jobs.

The steady rise in restaurant, hotel and retail jobs has also increased the ranks of part-time workers who would prefer full-time work. Those industries disproportionately hire part-timers.

More than 5.6 million people worked part time in November but wanted full-time work, a big improvement since the recession. Yet seven years into the recovery, that figure is still well above pre-recession levels of about 4.4 million.

Other recent economic data have been more encouraging. Consumers and small businesses have become more confident since the election, which could lead to increased spending and hiring.

And purchases of costly items like homes and cars have been strong, though they're threatened by higher interest rates. But if hiring and wage gains continue, they could offset at least some of the depressive effects of higher borrowing costs.

Auto sales rose for a seventh straight year in 2016 to a record high. Industry analysts expect sales to slip a bit this year but to remain at a healthy level.

And home sales reached their highest point in nearly a decade in November. Mortgage rates have jumped since the election but dipped this week, suggesting that rates might level off.

Mexican Ford plant workers blame Trump for dashed dreams

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN, Associated Press

VILLA DE REYES, Mexico (AP) — Word spread quickly through cellphone messages and shouts between co-workers that Ford Motor Co. had canceled its new \$1.6 billion car plant at its sprawling 700-acre high desert site in north-central Mexico.

"When I saw it on the phone, (I thought), 'Well, no, it can't be,'" said Higinio Salazar, a security guard who spent the past five months logging traffic into and out of the site and hoped to have steady work for months to come. "It was on orders of Mr. Trump," he said bitterly.

That was not the case, Ford insists, but the perception here in Mexico's burgeoning auto assembly region was largely that President-elect Donald Trump, who had promised for months to bring manufacturing jobs back to the U.S. while at the same time disparaging Mexicans, had made good before even settling into the White House. Trump took a shot at Toyota on Thursday over its move to make Corollas in this region, though the Japanese company defended its plan.

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Ford's announcement sent shockwaves across Mexico, which has become tightly meshed with the U.S. economy since the advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement, sending 80 percent of its \$532 billion in exports across the border in 2015. The U.S. government says \$100 billion of that was in vehicles and parts, making Mexico the biggest exporter of automotive products to the United States. Mexico's auto plants now account for 20 percent of all light vehicles built in North America, industry figures say.

State officials in San Luis Potosi did not find out much earlier than Salazar that plans had been scrapped for the long-awaited plant, which promised 2,800 direct jobs and more than 10,000 indirect ones through Ford's supply chain. State Economic Development Secretary Gustavo Puente Orozco said Ford told state officials about an hour before CEO Mark Fields made the announcement Tuesday.

Puente said Ford made very clear it was a "definitive cancellation," citing supply and demand rather than politics.

"They told us that it was a market issue — the issue that the Ford Focus that was the vehicle they thought to build, this light vehicle they planned to build in San Luis Potosi, they say the demand had dropped," Puente said.

Low gas prices have Americans turning again to larger vehicles and Focus sales have fallen victim to that trend. Fields said Ford will produce the Focus at an existing plant in Hermosillo, Mexico, and use some of the savings to invest \$700 million in an existing Michigan plant to make hybrid, electric and autonomous vehicles.

The San Luis Potosi plant was well past the theoretical stage and there were high hopes the state would see further economic growth from the opening of its third auto plant — General Motors Corp. has been producing the small Aveo and Trax vehicles up the road since 2008 and a BMW plant nearby is scheduled to begin production in early 2019.

The steel bones of Ford's plant had begun to rise and signs designated the future spots for each part of the operation, from "stamping" to "final warehouse."

On Wednesday, Fernando Rosales Ortuno, who deals in hydraulic hoses for Parker Hannifin Corp. was pacing the site's perimeter with cellphone pressed to his ear trying to arrange for a trailer to get hauled away. It's essentially a portable store that had been set up to service the big machines preparing the site.

He had hoped that once Ford was up and running, the plant might become a long-term client.

"It hit us like a bucket of cold water," Rosales said. "Everyone here was hoping for a lot of growth in the state and this region, too."

Four clustered states in central Mexico — San Luis Potosi, Queretaro, Aguascalientes and Guanajuato — have seven auto assembly plants that are operating or will be within the next two years. Around them are nearly 800 auto parts suppliers, Puente said.

In San Luis Potosi alone, between 50,000 and 60,000 jobs depend on the auto industry. An average worker in Mexico costs automakers \$8 an hour, including wages and benefits, compared to the \$60 an hour that Ford said it was spending on an auto worker in the U.S. at the end of 2015.

In Villa de Reyes' town square, residents said the younger generation would be hurt most by the cancellation.

Retiree Ignacio Segura Rocha said fewer people from town are migrating to the U.S. now because the crossing has gotten harder than when he went in 1977 and 1978. He said the auto industry offers good alternatives for kids growing up on the region's isolated ranches.

"They were already dreaming of going there (to Ford), and at the last minute there's nothing," he said.

Construction worker J. Refugio Waldo Contreras feels Trump is putting Mexicans in an impossible situ-

ation.

"This Trump, he doesn't want people there, so where is he going to send them?" Contreras asked. "And he doesn't want work to open here? So then he's going to close the doors."

Trump also sent tweets this week threatening to impose heavy tariffs on General Motors and Toyota cars produced in Mexico for the U.S. market. GM said it exports only a small number of Cruze hatchbacks it makes in Mexico. Toyota stood by its plan to produce Corollas in Guanajuato, while stressing that its production and employment in the U.S. will not be affected.

There were some notes of optimism among Mexicans. As security guard Juan Gonzalez watched contractors haul away giant earth movers on flatbed trailers, he said he didn't expect the site to stay vacant for long.

"If it's not the United States it could be Japan, China," he said. "This is going to continue."

Jorge Alvarez, who spent five months at the site working on perimeter roads, said his company had already told him his next project will be at the airport, so work would continue for him at least.

Another option could be that Mexico turns inward and focuses more on developing its internal market, said Roy Campos, president of the Mexico City-based Mitofsky consulting group. According to industry figures, 82 percent of vehicles manufactured in Mexico are exported now.

"Sooner or later, because of the nearness and the border, the personal relationships, the human relationships, the Mexico-United States relationship is going to return to what it was or even better than before," Campos said. "So meanwhile, develop the other markets that could be very beneficial to Mexico."

Billboards welcoming Ford had been sprinkled around San Luis Potosi in recent months. But only a day after the company's announcement, the welcome sign across the highway from the plant was already down.

Associated Press writer Peter Orsi in Mexico City contributed to this report.

Trump selects former Sen. Coats for top intelligence post

By JULIE PACE, DEB RIECHMANN and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump has selected former Indiana Sen. Dan Coats to lead the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, a role that would thrust him into the center of the intelligence community that Trump has publicly challenged, a person with knowledge of the decision said Thursday.

Coats served as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee before retiring from Congress last year. If confirmed by the Senate, he would oversee the umbrella office created after 9/11 to improve coordination of U.S. spy and law enforcement agencies.

The person with knowledge of Trump's decision, as well as others who spoke to The Associated Press about intelligence matters involving Trump, were not authorized to discuss the matters publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Since winning the election, Trump has repeatedly challenged intelligence officials' assessments that Russia interfered with the election on his behalf, setting up an unusually public battle with the spy agencies. On Friday, senior intelligence officials will try to justify their claims when they brief Trump on the findings of a full report into the Russian hacking of Democratic groups. The report was ordered by President Barack Obama, who was informed of the conclusions Thursday.

On the eve of his briefing, Trump continued to challenge the intelligence community's assertion that Russia was behind the hacking of the Democratic National Committee. He questioned how officials

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could be “so sure” about the hacking if they had not examined DNC servers.

“What is going on?” he wrote on Twitter.

A senior law enforcement official said in a statement released by the FBI that the bureau repeatedly stressed to DNC officials the importance of obtaining direct access to the servers “only to be rebuffed until well after the initial compromise had been mitigated.” The official said the FBI had to rely on a “third party” for information, but did get access to the material it needed.

Against that backdrop, Trump’s transition team has been considering ways to restructure intelligence agencies — part of an effort to streamline operations and improve efficiency, not as retribution. Transition officials have been looking at changes at both ODNI and the CIA, according to a person familiar with the discussions. The person said they reflect the views of intelligence officials who have told Trump’s team that there is room for streamlining within the multi-agency intelligence community.

The Wall Street Journal first reported Wednesday night that Trump was considering the changes. Trump transition spokesman Sean Spicer said the report was “100 percent false” and said transition activities were “for information-gathering purposes.”

The scope of the changes discussed by some in Trump’s transition team was unclear. But the prospect of a sweeping overhaul still created blowback, contributing to former CIA Director James Woolsey’s decision to step aside as a senior adviser to the president-elect.

A person with direct knowledge of Woolsey’s decision said the former CIA chief had not been significantly involved in the Trump team’s discussions on intelligence matters and became uncomfortable being labeled as an adviser. In an interview on CNN, Woolsey said he did not want to “fly under false colors.”

In other recent television appearances, Woolsey — who was CIA director under President Bill Clinton — said he believed Russia was involved in the election-related hackings, though he also said others may have been as well.

The CIA declined to comment on potential changes to the intelligence community. Outgoing National Intelligence Director James Clapper told a Senate panel Thursday that his office has not been engaged in such discussions with the Trump transition team. He noted that lawmakers created his office.

“Congress, I think, gets a vote here,” said Clapper, who was testifying on Russia’s election interference.

Coats’ nomination is likely to soothe those who fear Trump will significantly overhaul the intelligence community. The 73-year-old is a Capitol Hill veteran who served eight years in the House before moving to the Senate in 1989 to take Dan Quayle’s place when he became vice president. He stayed in the Senate until 1998, then left to become a lobbyist.

After a stint as ambassador to Germany under President George W. Bush, Coats joined the high-powered Washington firm of King & Spalding. He helped lead the company’s government affairs division and lobbied for pharmaceutical, defense and energy companies.

Coats, who earned \$600,000 in his final 13 months at King & Spalding, downplayed his lobbying work when he returned to Indiana for a successful Senate comeback bid in 2010. He served one term and did not seek re-election last year.

Coats was a harsh critic of Russia and pushed the Obama administration to harshly punish Moscow for its annexation of Crimea in 2014. When the White House levied sanctions, the Kremlin responded by banning several lawmakers, including Coats, from traveling to Russia.

Trump has called for improving the relationship between the U.S. and Russia, and has also spoken favorably about Russian President Vladimir Putin. His refusal thus far to accept the intelligence community’s assessment that Russia was meddling in the 2016 election has sparked concern among lawmakers.

ers in both parties.

Intelligence agencies have concluded that there is no question that Russia was behind hacking of political computer systems — something they say could only have occurred with the approval of top Kremlin officials. That conclusion is detailed in the classified report Obama ordered up on Russia and other foreign influence in U.S. elections dating back to 2008.

AP writers Tom Davies in Indianapolis and Eric Tucker and Josh Lederman in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC> , Deb Riechmann at <http://twitter.com/debriechmann> , and Jonathan Lemire at <http://twitter.com/jonlemire>

Attorney general pick Sessions has dueling images **By BILL BARROW, KIM CHANDLER and ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press**

CAMDEN, Ala. (AP) — Upperclassmen on the Wilcox County High School football team sometimes harassed the freshmen of 1964. But linebacker Jeff Sessions, a senior who was barely bigger than his younger schoolmates, didn't join in.

"One of my friends was a football manager and they were picking on him. Jeff stood up and said, 'Leave him alone,'" recalled fellow student George Alford, laughing as he remembered the 140-pound player who went on to represent Alabama in the U.S. senate and is now President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for attorney general.

"It's not like he had any physical presence," Alford said, "but he stood up."

That's the man Sessions' backers want the nation to see on Tuesday when the 70-year-old Republican appears before his colleagues for a confirmation hearing: a polite but tenacious little guy fighting for other little guys.

Yet critics question whether Sessions, whose confirmation would mark a profound change from the Obama administration's Justice Department, can universally apply that sense of fairness to the divisive policy matters that buffet the agency each day. Opponents have already signaled concern over his hard-line views on immigration and national security, and they are likely to use statements he's made as a prosecutor and senator to cast doubt on his commitment to civil rights, an enforcement priority of the two most recent attorneys general, Eric Holder and Loretta Lynch.

Such questions of fairness first dogged Sessions three decades ago as a young U.S. attorney up for a federal judgeship. The Judiciary Committee rejected his nomination amid accusations at his 1986 confirmation hearing that he had called a black attorney "boy" — which he denied — and the NAACP and ACLU "un-American." His positions since then have repeatedly raised alarm among civil liberties advocates.

"When we look at Mr. Sessions' record as a whole, there are some gaping holes and some grave questions ... about his commitment to fair and even enforcement of the law," said Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a legal advocacy group.

Sessions has said the 1986 proceedings and allegations of racism were hurtful. His principal accuser is dead, and longtime friends from Alabama insist it's an unfair caricature of a devoutly religious man who came of age in the segregated South.

"The man I know is an upright individual, who is honest, who is forthright," said Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson, who first met the senator as a fellow United Methodist Church parishioner before either held elected office.

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Greg Griffin, a black Alabama judge who worked as a state attorney when Sessions was Alabama attorney general, said Sessions "always treated me with respect" and called him "one of the best bosses I ever had."

Confirmation hearings that open Tuesday will pull back the curtain on a roughly 45-year career that saw Sessions go from Republican Party foot soldier to prosecutor to politician and ultimately one of Trump's leading champions — and architect of some of his policies.

Democratic senators are promising a thorough vetting next week, with Patrick Leahy of Vermont — who voted against Sessions' confirmation 30 years ago — saying "the American people deserve to learn" about his record. But he's almost certain to get the support of his Republican peers, who hold the majority and who praise the fierce critic of President Barack Obama for his conservative credentials.

Sessions was a leading opponent of the Senate's 2013 immigration overhaul, which he called too permissive, and has advocated broad presidential powers to curtail immigration — an issue that drew him to Trump before any of his colleagues.

He connects terrorism to lax border enforcement and has questioned whether terrorism suspects captured abroad deserve the protections of the civilian criminal justice system. He opposed efforts to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has supported expanded government surveillance and may endorse more aggressive scrutiny of Muslims.

Sessions has alarmed civil liberties advocates with his criticism of the Voting Rights Act, which he has said placed an unfair burden on states such as Alabama. He's raised concerns about voting fraud, which experts and current Justice Department leaders say is rare in U.S. elections. He pushed controversial cases himself as a prosecutor, including one against black civil rights activists that ended in a swift acquittal, and his emphasis on that issue could make him less inclined than the Obama administration to contest strict state voter identification laws.

He'd also inherit a Justice Department grappling with a surge in hate crimes, particularly against Muslims. But he's suggested local authorities can adequately investigate those offenses and, in 2009, opposed expanding the federal definition of a hate crime to encompass violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity when those same protections were not afforded to the elderly or members of the military.

Sessions' supporters, bracing for renewed scrutiny of his record, point to bipartisan legislative efforts that they say show he is not an ideologue. They note that some Democrats critical of his nomination have spoken favorably of him in the past. William Smith, who was chief counsel to Sessions in the Senate, called him a man "of the highest character."

"Jeff Sessions has dedicated his career to upholding the rule of law, ensuring public safety and prosecuting government corruption," spokeswoman Sarah Flores said in a statement. "Many African-American leaders who've known him for decades attest to this and have welcomed his nomination to be the next Attorney General."

Though he opposed Lynch's confirmation, Sessions voted to confirm Holder, Obama's first attorney general and the first black man to lead the Justice Department.

He and the late Sen. Ted Kennedy, who had castigated him at the 1986 hearing, later sponsored a law to combat rape in prison, and he also worked with Democrats to expand Justice Department jurisdiction over military contractors who commit crimes overseas.

He also joined a bipartisan push to reduce federal sentencing disparities that treated crack cocaine offenses much more harshly than crimes related to powder cocaine. That discrepancy disproportionately affected those in minority communities where crack was the common form of the drug.

"I think we are at a point now where this 100-to-1 disparity that does fall heavier on the African-

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American community simply because that is where crack is most often used has got to be fixed," Sessions said.

Still, he opposed the most recent criminal justice overhaul effort in the Senate, warning it could lead to the early release of violent offenders, and as attorney general could undo a 2013 policy known as Smart on Crime that discouraged prosecutors from seeking harsh mandatory minimum prison sentences for low-level drug offenders.

The tough-on-crime Republican who has said "good people don't smoke marijuana" seems likely to be less enthusiastic about the court-enforceable improvement plans favored by Holder and Lynch for police agencies accused of racial bias.

There's little question Sessions' record on civil rights will dominate the Judiciary Committee's attention. It's already been heavily scrutinized by civil liberties advocates, who've seized on his voting record and his appearances before groups that espouse harsh views on Muslims and immigrants. NAACP protesters staged a sit-in at a Sessions office in Alabama on Monday, and more than 1,100 law professors signed a statement opposing his nomination.

Hank Sanders, a Democratic state senator who represents the area where Sessions grew up, points specifically to cases Sessions pursued against Alabama civil rights activists in the 1980s. In one, Sessions accused Albert Turner, a former adviser to Martin Luther King Jr., and two other civil rights activists of tampering with absentee ballots. The three defendants were acquitted within hours.

"They called them voter fraud cases," said Sanders, who represented the defendants. "I called them voter persecution cases."

Sessions' spokeswoman noted Wednesday that Sessions has been endorsed by Turner's son, Albert Turner Jr.

Yet it was also during Sessions' tenure as a federal prosecutor that his office investigated and helped secure convictions in the 1981 murder of Michael Donald, a black teenager found hanging from a tree with his throat slashed. Two Ku Klux Klan members, Henry Hays and James Knowles, were arrested and convicted, Knowles in federal court, Hays in state court. Hays eventually died in Alabama's electric chair.

Barry Kowalski, a retired Justice Department civil rights attorney in Washington, worked with Sessions during that investigation. "He couldn't have been more helpful, more cooperative," Kowalski said, crediting Sessions with helping secure an agreement for Knowles to testify against Hays.

Sessions' work on the Donald case produced the most direct allegations of racism.

An assistant U.S. attorney, Thomas Figures, contended that Sessions referred to him as "boy," among other racially charged comments. Kowalski said he worked alongside Sessions and Figures, who died in 2015, and never heard anything to corroborate Figures' account. Flores, his spokeswoman, said many of the allegations against Sessions "have been thoroughly rebuked and discredited."

For his part, Sessions appears girded for another round of inquiry. The questionnaire he submitted to the Judiciary Committee noted his work on the Donald case and efforts to ensure minority representation on a county school board. It devoted more space to the Turner voting fraud prosecution, suggesting he sees the case as potential ammunition for his opponents.

Alford, Sessions' family friend from his high school days, said the scrutiny is understandable given Sessions' biography, right down to his Southern accent and given name: Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III.

"That sounds like a Confederate general," Alford said. "And any fella from Wilcox County in our generation, with that accent? Of course you're going to get those questions."

Barrow reported from Mobile, Alabama. Tucker reported from Washington. Follow the reporters on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BillBarrow> , <https://twitter.com/StatehouseKim> and <https://etuckerAP> .

Somber stars attend memorial for Reynolds-Fisher at compound

By LINDSEY BAHR, AP Film Writer

Friends and family members gathered at the next-door homes of Debbie Reynolds and daughter Carrie Fisher on a gloomy Thursday in the Hollywood Hills for an intimate memorial to mourn the late actresses.

The service was held at Fisher's home and the eulogies were delivered by her daughter, Billie Lourd, and friends like Meryl Streep, Tracey Ullman and Stephen Fry, while the 125 guests dined on fried chicken, collard greens, and cornbread, according to People magazine.

Streep, who starred in the adaptation of Fisher's semi-autobiographical novel "Postcards from the Edge," carried white flowers as she walked up the long driveway to the wooded compound, choosing to ignore questions from reporters gathered on the street. Inside, People reported that Streep sang Fisher's favorite song, "Happy Days Are Here Again," and everyone joined in.

Streep knew both mother and daughter — she had presented Reynolds with the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award at the film academy's Governors Awards in 2015.

Outside, Meg Ryan, Ellen Barkin and Ed Begley Jr. were among those entering the property in the tony Coldwater Canyon area of Los Angeles, just north of Beverly Hills. According to People, other celebrity guests included Penny Marshall, Richard Dreyfuss and Gwyneth Paltrow.

Also visiting the compound Thursday were Jamie Lee Curtis, who stars with Fisher's daughter, Billie Lourd, on TV's "Scream Queens," and Eric Idle, a friend of Fisher's who rented her his home during the filming of "The Empire Strikes Back."

Fisher and Reynolds died last week, one day apart, casting a pall over Hollywood's annual holiday break. Fisher, 60, an actress and writer who starred as Princess Leia in the original "Star Wars" trilogy, died Dec. 27 after suffering a medical emergency Dec. 23 aboard a flight from London. Reynolds, 84, an Oscar-nominated actress who shot to fame after starring in "Singin' in the Rain" at age 19, passed away Dec. 28 after being briefly hospitalized.

"She said, 'I want to be with Carrie,'" Reynolds' son, Todd Fisher, told The Associated Press. "And then she was gone."

Fisher and Reynolds will be buried together at Forest Lawn-Hollywood Hills, reportedly on Friday. The sprawling location is the resting place of numerous celebrities, including Lucille Ball, Dick Van Patten, Liberace, Florence Henderson, David Carradine and Bette Davis.

Todd Fisher and other family representatives did not immediately respond to requests for further details about the memorial and burial services.

Lourd, 24, made her first public comment on the deaths of her mother and grandmother on Instagram Monday.

"Receiving all of your prayers and kind words over the past week has given me strength during a time I thought strength could not exist," Lourd wrote under a picture of the three women. "There are no words to express how much I will miss my Abadaba and my one and only Momby."

People inside and outside of show business have continued to mourn the two Hollywood legends. Last week, fans created an impromptu star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame for Fisher, and peers like "Star Wars" Mark Hamill have written heartfelt tributes.

HBO bumped up plans to air the new Fisher Stevens-directed documentary about the mother, daugh-

ter duo, "Bright Lights," which is now set to air on Saturday.

Elsewhere Thursday, Broadway theaters announced plans to dim their marquee lights Friday night. The Broadway League says the lights will be dimmed for one minute at 7:45 p.m.

Reynolds and Fisher both made their Broadway debuts in 1973 in the musical comedy revival of "Irene," which earned Reynolds a Tony Award nomination. She also appeared on Broadway in "Woman of the Year" and the musical revue "Debbie."

Fisher's Broadway credits include her one-woman show "Wishful Drinking," "Agnes of God" and "Censored Scenes From King Kong."

Photographers Scott Fain and Reed Saxon contributed to this report.

Hate-crime charges filed in attack on mentally disabled man

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and CARYN ROUSSEAU, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Four black people were charged with hate crimes Thursday in connection with a video broadcast live on Facebook that showed a mentally disabled white man being beaten and taunted, threatened with a knife and forced to drink from a toilet.

The assault went on for hours, until Chicago police found the disoriented victim walking along a street, authorities said.

The suspects, who were jailed, can be heard on the video using profanities against white people and President-elect Donald Trump.

Police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said investigators initially concluded that the 18-year-old man was singled out because he has "special needs," not because he was white. But authorities later said the charges resulted from both the suspects' use of racial slurs and their references to the victim's disability.

It's also possible that the suspects were trying to extort something from the victim's family, police said. The man's parents reported their son missing Monday and told authorities they later received text messages from people who claimed to be holding him captive.

The victim was a classmate of one of the attackers and initially went with that person voluntarily, police said.

"He's traumatized by the incident, and it's very tough to communicate with him at this point," police Cmdr. Kevin Duffin said.

Excerpts of the video posted by Chicago media outlets show the victim with his mouth taped shut and slumped in a corner of a room. At least two assailants are seen cutting off his sweatshirt, and others taunt him off camera. The video shows a wound on the top of the man's head. One person pushes the man's head with his or her foot.

A red band also appears to be around the victim's hands. He was tied up for four to five hours, authorities said.

The victim does not appear to make any attempt to defend himself or to escape his attackers. He is a suburban Chicago resident described by Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson as having "mental health challenges."

"There was never a question whether or not this incident qualified as being investigated as a hate crime," Johnson said. But "we need to base the investigation on facts and not emotion."

The case heightened political tensions on social media, with some conservatives suggesting it was linked to the Black Lives Matter movement. Police said there was no indication of any connection.

The incident began Dec. 31, when the victim and one of the suspects, 18-year-old Jordan Hill, met at

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a suburban McDonald's to begin what both the victim and his parents believed would be a sleepover, police said.

Instead, Hill drove the victim around in a stolen van for a couple of days, ending up at a home in Chicago, where two of the other suspects lived, detective Cmdr. Kevin Duffin said.

The victim told police what began as playful fighting escalated, and he was bound, beaten and taunted with racial slurs and disparaging comments about his mental capacity.

A downstairs neighbor who heard noises threatened to call police. When two of the suspects left and kicked down the neighbor's door, the victim escaped. A police officer later spotted the obviously disoriented man wandering down a street.

The man was bloodied and wearing a tank top that was inside-out and backward. He had on jean shorts and sandals, despite freezing weather, officer Michael Donnelly said.

Most hate crimes are connected to the victim's race, but hate-crime charges can be sought in Illinois if a victim's mental disability sparked an attack, though it is rare.

In addition to hate crimes, the four were charged with kidnapping, aggravated battery and aggravated unlawful restraint. Three were also charged with burglary. It was unclear whether any of the suspects had attorneys. They were to appear in court Friday.

Family members of the victim spoke briefly to reporters Thursday at a suburban hotel but declined to comment on the allegations or the investigation.

Neal Strom, who is acting as a family spokesman, told The Associated Press that the victim has had "profound emotional and physical disabilities throughout his life." He did not elaborate.

Cook County prosecutors identified the suspects as Brittany Covington and Tesfaye Cooper, both of Chicago, and Hill, of suburban Carpentersville. All are 18. A fourth suspect was identified as Covington's 24-year-old sister, Tanishia Covington, also of Chicago.

The grandmother of Brittany Covington said the granddaughter she raised from infancy is "not this person."

"I'm so upset, my head is about to bust open," said Priscilla Covington of Chicago. "I don't know if someone influenced her ... She had her ups and down. (She) was a good person. I'm so confused."

In Washington, White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the beating demonstrated "a level of depravity that is an outrage to a lot of Americans." He said he had not yet spoken to President Barack Obama about the attack in the president's hometown.

The video emerged at a time when police dealings with Chicago's black community are being closely watched. Less than a year ago, the nation's third-largest police force was sharply criticized by a task force for using excessive force and honoring a code of silence.

The department has also been the subject of a long civil-rights investigation by the Justice Department, which is expected to report its findings soon.

Official: Train traveling twice speed limit when it crashed

By DEEPTI HAJELA and MICHAEL BALSAMO, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A packed rush hour commuter train erratically sped up and slowed down before it crashed at a rail terminal this week while traveling double the speed limit, injuring more than 100 people, federal officials said Thursday.

Passengers were hurled to the floor and slammed into one another when the Long Island Rail Road train crashed into the end of a platform at Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn on Wednesday morning. National Transportation Safety Board investigator Ted Turpin said the train had been traveling at least 10

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mph when it crashed; the terminal's speed limit is 5 mph.

A U.S. official briefed on the investigation said the train had erratically changed speeds in the three minutes before the crash, accelerating and decelerating between 2 and 10 mph. The official, who was briefed on the investigation but was not authorized to speak publicly about it and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the train was traveling at allowable speeds as it approached the station.

Federal investigators will test the train's engineer for sleep apnea because he exhibited "typical risk factors" for the disorder, the official said, describing the engineer as overweight and adding his wife had complained he snores at night.

The 50-year-old engineer, whose name wasn't released, told investigators he has no memory of the crash and wasn't using a cellphone at the time, Turpin said.

"The engineer was unable to recall striking the end of the track," Turpin said. "He does recall entering the station and controlling the speed of the train."

Turpin said the man has been an engineer with the LIRR since 2000 and has been working nights for 12 years. Turpin said he's been on this particular route, which starts shortly after midnight, for the last year and had just come back from three days off.

The engineer was given a drug test, Turpin said, but the results are not yet known.

Authorities said the front of the train slammed into a bumping block as it pulled into the station, leaving the tracks and barreling through a small structure in an apparent work area before a piece of track pierced through a train car. About 100 people were treated for injuries after the morning crash, though the most serious injury appeared to be a broken leg, said Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat.

The bumping block is designed only for very low speed, Turpin said, adding "there's nothing that would cushion a train collision" like Wednesday's.

The terminal is beneath a shopping mall in downtown Brooklyn, next to the Barclays Center, home to Brooklyn Nets basketball, New York Islanders hockey and major concerts.

In September, a New Jersey Transit commuter train plowed off the end of a track at a station in nearby Hoboken, New Jersey, killing a woman and injuring dozens of other people. The engineer of that train had undiagnosed sleep apnea, and federal investigators are examining whether a more modern bumper or other barriers could have made a difference.

The train in Wednesday's wreck originated in Queens and was carrying around 450 people.

Western skiers flock to mountains during powerful snowstorm

By COLLEEN SLEVIN and BRADY McCOMBS, Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — As the Southeast prepared for treacherous winter weather, skiers in the West flocked to resorts Thursday to take advantage of deep, fresh snow.

At Deer Valley in Utah, Emily Summers said her boss kicked her and her co-workers out of the office and told them to hit the slopes and take advantage of a winter that only comes once a decade.

"This is the snow we dream of," said Summers, a spokeswoman for the resort.

The storms pounded parts of California, Utah, Colorado and other states as they made their way east, creating difficult driving conditions and closing roads. Small avalanches and white-outs were reported in some areas.

More than 6 feet of snow had fallen in the upper elevations of the Sierra Nevada since Sunday. In Idaho, snow accumulating for several weeks reached 15 inches in Boise.

Uber driver Jesse Lowman said the record snowfall has been good for business in the city.

"We've got a lot of people stuck, calling in to get rides all the time. It's pretty fun," he said.

Most of the side streets in the city haven't been plowed because the highway district is focusing on

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keeping main roads and feeder streets open. Some neighborhoods were tough for Lowman's pickup to traverse.

In Sandy, Utah, A.J. Simmons took advantage of his day off to go sledding with his 2-year-old son for the first time.

His son, Everett, mostly cried as his father pulled his sled slowly down a small hill at a park in frigid temperatures. After one run, Simmons put his son in the warm car with his wife and took a few trips down the hill himself.

The turbulent weather was expected to spread a wintry mix of rain, sleet and snow across large swaths of Alabama, the Carolinas and Georgia, with 2 inches of snow forecast for Atlanta.

Ski resorts in the West used their social media accounts to spread the news of the snow and to lure skiers who have been anxiously waiting to hit the slopes.

But some encountered problems, and the storm proved to be deadly.

A skier was rescued Wednesday after dangling from a Colorado chairlift after his backpack got caught. Luckily, a professional slackliner — a type of tightrope walker known for acrobatic tricks — climbed the lift tower and slid across the cable to reach him.

Mickey Wilson was able to cut the strap, sending the skier falling about 10 feet into the snow below, where a paramedic and ski patrollers waited at the Arapahoe Basin Ski Area. He was taken to a hospital and released.

"Just seeing a person get the life sucked out of them. I kind of stopped thinking and just starting acting," Wilson, who works as a part-time ski instructor for the resort, told The Denver Post about the rescue that was captured in images posted online.

On Thursday, one of two missing backcountry skiers found in the central Colorado mountains died while he was being treated for hypothermia.

The Lake County Office of Emergency Management posted on its Facebook page that Brett Beasley and a boy he was skiing with were found near Turquoise Lake west of Leadville. The boy, whose name and age have not been released, was uninjured and was taken from the area on a snowmobile to be reunited with his family. Beasley was treated for hypothermia but did not survive.

The two had not been heard from since Wednesday.

The storm also brought heavy snow and strong winds that raised the avalanche danger in much of Colorado's high country. Some passes were shut down so crews could reduce the chance of slides.

The National Weather Service reported that Salt Lake City International Airport saw nearly 5 inches of snow overnight.

With a threat of freezing rain in parts of the Deep South, forecasters urged residents to be on guard and avoid driving if conditions deteriorate.

"If you have a four-wheel-drive vehicle and you think you're safe, you're not," said Mike Schichtel, lead forecaster at the federal government's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

Associated Press writers Rebecca Boone in Boise, Idaho, Michelle Price in Salt Lake City, Jeff Martin in Atlanta and Thomas Peipert in Denver contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to say the storm is moving toward Southeast, not Southwest

No doubt Russia interfered in election, US intel chief says

By EILEEN SULLIVAN and RICHARD LARDNER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Brushing aside Donald Trump's dismissiveness, the nation's intelligence chief insisted Thursday that U.S. agencies are more confident than ever that Russia interfered in America's recent presidential election. And he called the former Cold War foe an "existential threat" to the nation.

Did Russian hacking sway the results? There's no way for U.S. agencies to know, said James Clapper, the director of national intelligence.

Asked about the possible effect of the disclosure of private information stolen by hackers, Clapper said, "The intelligence community can't gauge the impact it had on the choices the electorate made." But he did say Russian hacking "did not change any vote tallies."

Clapper's testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee was short on concrete evidence of Russian activities, but it raised the stakes in the intelligence community's standoff with Trump. Clapper indicated the agencies he leads would not back down in their assessment, even if that threatens a prolonged crisis of confidence with their next commander in chief.

That puts the pressure back on Trump, who has raised the possibility of more positive relations with Russia and has repeatedly disparaged the U.S. intelligence agencies. He will be briefed Friday on the classified evidence concerning Russian interference.

Shortly after Thursday's hearing, news leaked that Trump would soon name former Republican Sen. Dan Coats of Indiana to replace Clapper after the new president takes office.

The intelligence agencies' classified report, which was shared with President Barack Obama on Thursday, identifies multiple motives for Russia's interference, Clapper said, but he did not provide details.

The Washington Post, citing anonymous U.S. officials, reported Thursday that intelligence agencies have identified parties who delivered stolen Democratic emails to WikiLeaks. The officials also said there were disparities between efforts to infiltrate Democratic and Republican networks, and said the U.S. intercepted communications in which Russian officials celebrated Trump's victory. It was not clear which of those details are included in the classified report.

In a joint report that roiled the presidential campaign last fall, the Homeland Security Department and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said the U.S. was confident about foreign meddling, including Russian government hacking of Democratic emails.

"We stand actually more resolutely on the strength of that statement," Clapper said Thursday. He declined to discuss whether Russia's interference was aimed at helping Trump win.

An unclassified version of the report will be released next week, Clapper said. That version, expected to be a fraction of the length of the classified one, is not likely to answer all the questions about Russia's actions. Exactly how the U.S. monitors its adversaries in cyberspace is a closely guarded secret, since revealing such details could help foreign governments further obscure their activities.

"I think the public should know as much about this as possible," Clapper told the senators. "And so we'll be as forthcoming as we can, but there are some sensitive and fragile sources and methods here."

Clapper was less shy about declaring Russia "an existential threat to the United States." That's strong rhetoric that harkens back to the Cold War between the U.S. and Soviet Union, language Obama has avoided. For his part, Trump has embraced the possibility of warmer U.S.-Russian ties.

Republican John McCain of Arizona, chairman of the Senate panel, pressed Clapper as to whether Russia's actions constituted an "act of war." The intelligence director said that was "a very heavy policy call," more appropriate for others in the government to decide.

Obama announced sanctions against Russia late last year, a move Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said was akin to throwing a pebble.

"I'm ready to throw a rock," Graham said.

The GOP is divided over how to deal with Russia. Once Trump takes office, he is certain to face opposition from Democrats as well as some in his own party regarding his posture toward Russia.

Trump has criticized U.S. intelligence findings, even citing WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's contention that Russia did not provide him with hacked Democratic emails.

But in new tweets early Thursday, he backed away and blamed the "dishonest media" for portraying him as agreeing with Assange, whose organization has been under criminal investigation for its role in classified information leaks. "The media lies to make it look like I am against 'Intelligence' when in fact I am a big fan!" Trump wrote.

In fact, Trump has been skeptical to the point of dismissive about the certainty of the assessment of Russian hacking, bringing up past failures, specifically intelligence reporting the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in the lead-up to the war there.

Trump has derided the intelligence community on Twitter, his comments widely reported by The Associated Press and other news organizations.

Clapper said Thursday, "I think there is an important distinction here between healthy skepticism, which policymakers — to include policymaker No. 1 — should always have for intelligence, but I think there's a difference between skepticism and disparagement."

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Obama is confident that the intelligence assessment on Russia is "unvarnished."

"The president has insisted that the intelligence community should not hesitate to present to the president what could be considered bad news, because a whitewashed assessment doesn't serve anybody well," Earnest said. He added that anyone who consumes intelligence "using rose-colored reading glasses is not going to be able to make good decisions."

Follow Eileen Sullivan and Richard Lardner on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/esullivanap> and <http://twitter.com/rplardner>

Coast Guard: Fire extinguished on platform in Gulf of Mexico

By JEFF MARTIN and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, Associated Press

A fire broke out on an oil production platform in the Gulf of Mexico early Thursday, forcing four workers to evacuate by lifeboat before the blaze was extinguished. There were no injuries and inspectors found no sign of pollution, authorities said.

The blaze was reported about 2:30 a.m. on a platform about 80 miles south of Grand Isle, Louisiana, and was extinguished nearly four hours later, the Coast Guard said in a statement.

The four workers were rescued by the crew of the 130-foot Mary Wyatt Milano, a supply vessel, the Coast Guard said. They were flown to a hospital in Houma to be evaluated, the Interior Department's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement said in a statement.

The company that owns the platform, Renaissance Offshore LLC, has suspended oil production on it and a second platform it owns, the statement said, adding that 17 oil wells associated with the two platforms were similarly "shut in" before the workers were evacuated.

Company and government inspectors confirmed that no oil is leaking into the water from either the platform or the wells, said Renaissance spokesman Oliver Marsh.

"Initial efforts were made by the crew to extinguish the fire, (but) the decision was made to discontinue those efforts and abandon the platform due to heavy smoke," Marsh wrote in an email.

Crew members aboard the Mary Wyatt Milano and three other vessels battled the blaze. An HC-144

Ocean Sentry airplane from Mobile, Alabama, also responded, said Coast Guard Petty Officer Third Class Travis Magee.

Clean Gulf, a nonprofit oil industry cooperative that responds to spills and provides equipment to help clean them up, was on its way to the platform Thursday.

An oil platform exploded and sank in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, killing 11 workers. Millions of gallons of oil spewed into the Gulf for weeks before the oil well could be capped.

Associated Press Writer Bernard McGhee in Atlanta contributed to this report.

This story has corrected the rank of Magee to petty officer third class.

Turkey: Cease-fire violations in Syria are obstacle to talks

By EDITH M. LEDERER, Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Turkey's foreign minister said Thursday that cease-fire violations in Syria are the main obstacle to holding peace negotiations later this month and he called on the U.N. Security Council to impose sanctions on those continuing the violence.

Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters at U.N. headquarters where he discussed Syria with new Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that if the talks go ahead in Kazakhstan's capital Astana they will be based on a roadmap to peace agreed to by key powers in Geneva in 2012. It starts with the establishment of a transitional government with full executive powers agreed to by both sides and ends with elections.

Turkey, a strong supporter of Syria's moderate opposition, and Russia, which backs President Bashar Assad, brokered the cease-fire which came into effect on Dec. 30, and has mostly held but not altogether halted fighting in the country. The government and opposition have blamed each other for violations.

Cavusoglu said monitoring centers in Ankara and Moscow have been collecting and reporting violations and the latest list which he received Thursday is "worrying me."

While the government and opposition have various groups supporting them, the Turkish minister said, "when I look at the list today there is no single violation by the opposition."

"All the violations, including the bombardments, are by the regime or its supporters or other groups," Cavusoglu said. "This is not acceptable. So this is the main obstacle."

Nearly a dozen rebel groups announced on Monday they were suspending talks about the negotiations because of cease-fire violations.

Cavusoglu said another obstacle is the composition of negotiating teams for the Astana talks, which under the deal that was signed, is up to the regime and the opposition to decide.

The Turkish minister said he discussed the U.N.'s role with Guterres and "the U.N. will have a leading role in Astana," assuming the meeting goes ahead.

He said U.N. special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, will be there. De Mistura has set Feb. 8 for the next round of U.N.-mediated talks on Syria in Geneva.

Cavusoglu said both sides, but especially the Syrian government, must respect the cease-fire agreement they signed.

He said there is work taking place on sanctions against violators.

"There should be sanctions because otherwise you cannot control this and you cannot go to the political talks, Astana or Geneva," he said.

Cavusoglu said nothing has been finalized yet about sanctions, but "maybe we need another Security

Council resolution.”

A premonition, a dream: Church slaying victims remembered

By MEG KINNARD, Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — One by one, friends and family members walked up to the witness stand and testified about the nine black church members gunned down during a Bible study in Charleston on June 17, 2015. They described personalities, future plans and final conversations.

The testimony came during the sentencing phase of Dylann Roof’s death penalty trial. The same jury that convicted the 22-year-old white man of hate crimes and other charges will decide whether to sentence him to life in prison or death. Here are highlights from the testimony Wednesday and Thursday.

A PREMONITION AND A DREAM

Myra Thompson seemed to know something would happen to her. A month before the shootings, daughter Denise Quarles says her mother talked about being confident she’d raised her children with strong morals that would serve them after her death. She also made it clear what she wanted, and didn’t want, for her funeral: Use red nail polish and don’t let the funeral home dye her hair gray or cake-on the makeup.

On the night of the shooting, Quarles said she woke suddenly after a dream about watching her mother drown and hearing a voice saying her mother was gone. Quarles picked up her phone, checked Facebook and learned of the shooting - and her mother’s likely fate.

“I just feel like that was God who spoke to me,” she said. “That’s why I know where my mom is. She’s in heaven, with everybody else. She’s fine.”

‘DADDY’S DEAD?’

Jennifer Pinckney huddled under a desk with her 6-year-old daughter, her hand clasped over the girl’s mouth to keep her quiet, as Roof opened fire.

Not knowing for certain if the danger had passed, Pinckney dialed 911 and breathlessly told an operator she had heard shots inside the church.

“I think there’s been a shooting. I’m in the closet, under a desk,” Pinckney told the operator. “Please hurry.”

On the call, Pinckney tries to comfort her daughter Malana, who had been watching cartoons in her father’s office as he participated in Bible study.

“Daddy’s dead?” Malana says.

“No, baby, no,” the mother says. But at that moment, Pinckney said she knew her husband, church pastor Clementa Pinckney, had been killed.

A FUTURE IN THE CHURCH

The Rev. Anthony Thompson said his wife, Myra, was a dedicated person of faith who did her best to enjoy life.

Thompson cried as he described a conversation with his wife about their future plans to move and pursue studies and careers in the church.

“She was my world, and she was gone,” he said. “I’m just glad to know she’s somewhere ... where somebody can take care of her better than I ever could.”

DEVOTED FRIEND

Sharonda Coleman-Singleton was a high school track coach. But the ministry was her calling. She was able to relate to a room full of people like they were talking one-on-one.

“She wanted to teach you,” said friend Rita Whidbee.

Coleman-Singleton's daughter told jurors her mother would pray over her children before they went to sleep.

"Before I went to her with all my problems, and now I go to God," Cam'Ryne Singleton said.

AN ANGEL

Bethane Middleton described her sister, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, 49, as a tender woman who took care of her. She had a beautiful voice.

"I consider her a borrowed angel," Middleton said.

THE OPEN ROAD

Daniel "Dapper Dan" Simmons, 74, was so nicknamed for his shiny shoes and fine hats. His son, Dan Simmons Jr., said his father adored his grandchildren and spoke with them often, always willing to travel wherever was necessary to spend time with people he loved.

One of the first black drivers hired by Greyhound, Simmons loved to drive, up until the day of his death, his son said.

"He just loved everything about life," Simmons said.

OTHER VICTIMS

Cynthia Hurd, 54, was a librarian. Ethel Lance, 70, was the church sexton who kept the bathrooms and building immaculately clean.

Susie Jackson, 87, sang in the church choir and Tywanza Sanders, 26, was Jackson's nephew and an aspiring poet.

Kinnard can be reached at <http://twitter.com/MegKinnardAP>. Read more of her work at <http://big-story.ap.org/content/meg-kinnard/>

Chicago police describe chronology of alleged hate crime

CHICAGO (AP) — The Latest on the beating of a white man in Chicago that was broadcast live on Facebook (all times local):

4 p.m.

Chicago police say they believe the white victim of an alleged hate crime broadcast live on Facebook was tied up in a corner for "about four or five hours."

Police on Thursday laid out a chronology of events that led to four black suspects facing hate crime and other charges. They say the victim, an 18-year-old suburban man with mental health problems, knew 18-year-old Jordan Hill, one of the alleged attackers, and willingly spent time with him starting on New Year's Eve.

The victim's parents dropped him off at a McDonald's that night and thought he was spending the night with friends.

Police in Streamwood, Illinois, say the parents reported their son missing Monday, and later the parents received text messages from people who claimed to be holding their son captive.

Chicago police say the victim got into "a play fight," which escalated and included racial slurs and references to the victim's mental capacity. The victim was able to escape after a downstairs neighbor threatened to call police and two of the attackers retaliated by kicking in the neighbor's door.

3 p.m.

Chicago police say there was never any doubt the beating of a white man broadcast live on Facebook would be investigated as a hate crime.

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They say the four black suspects face hate crime charges because they were shouting racial slurs at the victim and because they referred to his mental capacity.

At a news conference on Thursday afternoon, police also said the victim had been friends with one of the suspects, 18-year-old Jordan Hill of suburban Chicago. They say on New Year's Eve, Hill and the victim met up at a suburban McDonald's to begin what both the victim and his parents believed was going to be a sleepover.

Police say Hill drove the victim around in a stolen van for a couple days. They ended up at a home in Chicago, where police say Hill and the three other suspects taunted the victim and beat him.

1 p.m.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest says the beating of a mentally disabled man that was broadcast live on Facebook demonstrates "a level of depravity that is an outrage to a lot of Americans."

Earnest says he has not yet spoken to President Barack Obama about the incident in the president's hometown of Chicago but says he's confident Obama "would be angered by the images that are depicted on that video."

Cook County prosecutors have filed hate crime and aggravated kidnapping and battery charges against four black suspects in the incident that police say went on for as many as 48 hours.

1 p.m.

Prosecutors have filed hate crime and aggravated kidnapping charges against four black suspects accused of beating and taunting a white man during an attack streamed live on Facebook

Cook County prosecutors on Thursday announced charges against three 18-year-olds — Jordan Hill of Carpentersville, Brittany Covington of Chicago and Tesfaye Cooper of Chicago — and 24-year-old Tanishia Covington of Chicago.

Prosecutors say the four are also charged with aggravated unlawful restraint and aggravated battery with a deadly weapon. Three have also been charged with residential burglary.

The charges stem from an incident that went on for as many as 48 hours. Police have said the victim has "mental health challenges."

10:30 a.m.

The grandmother of a young woman associated with a live video on Facebook of a beating says her granddaughter "had her ups and downs," but is "a good person."

Priscilla Covington of Chicago says she raised the young woman "since she was a baby." She says her granddaughter no longer lives at the family home but still lives in Chicago.

The grandmother says the video doesn't reflect the young woman she raised.

She says she's worried because her family, including the woman's younger sisters, have been threatened since the video was posted online.

She says she saw and talked to her granddaughter about four days ago, and "she was OK."

9:20 a.m.

Chicago police say authorities are considering whether an attack on a white man that was broadcast live on Facebook falls under hate crimes statutes.

Chicago Police Department spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said Thursday morning that the four black suspects made "terrible racist statements" during the assault but that police believe the victim was targeted because he has "special needs," not because of his race.

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Still, Guglielmi says investigators are looking at whether the assault falls under hate-crime laws. Guglielmi says charges are expected later Thursday. He says the four suspects are all adults.

7:45 a.m.

Chicago police say they don't believe a man beaten in an assault broadcast live on Facebook was targeted because he was white.

Police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said Thursday morning that charges are expected soon against four black suspects. Guglielmi says the suspects made "terrible racist statements" during the attack, but that investigators believe the victim was targeted because he has special needs, not because of his race.

Guglielmi says it's possible the suspects were trying to extort something from the victim's family.

Video from Chicago media outlets appears to show someone off-camera using profanities about "white people" and President-elect Donald Trump. Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson said Wednesday that the victim has mental health challenges, and he called the video "sickening."

Guglielmi said police are working with prosecutors "to build the strongest case."

6 a.m.

Chicago police say charges are expected against four people who police say beat a man in an assault that was broadcast live on Facebook.

The victim is a suburban resident who Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson says has "mental health challenges."

Johnson called the attack and the video "sickening" at a news conference Wednesday. Johnson questioned why individuals would treat someone so harshly.

Police Cmdr. Kevin Duffin said Wednesday that he anticipated charges within 24 hours.

While police officials did not confirm the races of the suspects or victim, video from Chicago media outlets appeared to show someone off-camera using profanities about "white people" and President-elect Donald Trump.

Police say it's too soon to determine whether the attack was racially motivated.

Police haven't identified the individuals in custody, but say three are Chicago residents and one is from suburban Carpentersville.

Shhh, your washing machine might overhear you

By BREE FOWLER and MAE ANDERSON, AP Technology Writers

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Alexa, are you spying on me?

It's a fair question in light of attempts by authorities investigating the slaying of an Arkansas man to obtain voice recordings collected by an Amazon Echo speaker and its Alexa digital assistant.

Yet the popularity and capabilities of voice-enabled products such as the Echo continue to grow. At the CES gadget show in Las Vegas, which opened Thursday, Whirlpool, Samsung and other manufacturers are unveiling new ways to use voice services to control laundry machines, refrigerators and other home systems.

Consumers are apparently willing to trade a certain amount of privacy for convenience.

So what exactly is being collected, stored or shared ?

To work, the Echo is always listening. Once it hears someone utter a keyword, such as "Alexa," it shares what it hears with Amazon's servers to process a response. Those conversations are then stored indefinitely. Google's Home speaker works in a similar fashion.

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The Echo "has to listen to everything. That's kind of disturbing," said Ryan O'Leary, vice president of WhiteHat Security's threat research center. "It doesn't capture voice until it hears the keyword, but it could. You're trusting the devices to not do that, but it's entirely possible."

In the Arkansas case, authorities investigating the death of a man found floating face-up in a hot tub at a friend's home requested the contents of the home's Echo and Amazon's stored recordings in hopes they might contain evidence. The friend is charged with murder.

A judge has signed off on the search, but Amazon has balked. Amazon has declined to comment specifically on the case but said the company objects to "overbroad or otherwise inappropriate demands as a matter of course."

Some experts worry that allowing such a search would erode people's privacy.

"It's not necessarily a direct threat for the average person, but the same thing can be said with any kind of privacy concern," O'Leary said. "People say you shouldn't be concerned if you're not doing anything wrong, but that's a dangerous precedent to set."

Meanwhile, companies keep asking consumers to invite them into their homes.

Whirlpool is adding Alexa voice control to its smart-home appliances, including a washing machine, a stove and a refrigerator. Someone can instruct the oven to pre-heat to 400 degrees by speaking a command to an Alexa-enabled device, such as the Echo.

Simplehuman has a voice-activated trash can, and GE Lighting has a table lamp using Alexa voice control.

For now, voice control is mainly an add-on feature rather than a core component of gadgets. It's there for those who want to use it, but it's not essential for the product to function.

Many manufacturers are opting to use Amazon's Alexa service for now, though some are embracing voice systems from Google, Apple or Samsung.

Nvidia's Shield TV streaming device, for instance, employs Google's Assistant service so viewers can control video playback or find out the weather with just a voice command.

Meanwhile, Samsung's new Family Hub lets people use their voice to add items to shopping lists and order groceries online.

CES chief economist Shawn DuBravac said as many as 700 companies could announce Alexa-integrated products during the gadget show, on top of more than 1,500 existing ones.

As the smart home becomes more entrenched, DuBravac said, voice control could change the way we interact with technology in much the way the mouse did in the 1980s.

"Connected microphones are starting to appear in everything from cars to children's toys," said James Plouffe, lead solutions architect at mobile-security company MobileIron. "Consumers should think carefully about how comfortable they are with the prospect of a live mic in common household items."

Because Amazon says it uses information gathered by the Echo to improve its voice technology, that information has the potential to "live forever" online, Plouffe said.

The issue first grabbed headlines a couple of years ago, after Samsung said sensitive conversations could be captured by its voice-controlled smart TVs.

Based on the flood of new voice-controlled gadgets headed to market, tech companies are betting that consumers will get over their fears.

Derrick Dicol, executive director of Comcast's Xfinity home, which uses voice controls in its home automation products, noted that people had to get used to sharing their banking information online.

"This is less invasive than that," he said. "It's just a different thing people have to feel comfortable with."

Bree Fowler reported from New York.

After verdict, Israeli military at odds with politicians

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli military, which has battled foes on all of the country's borders, is now facing a challenge from within: nationalist politicians who are openly disagreeing with army commanders and bickering with the security establishment.

This growing rift was underscored by angry reactions from inside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition to Wednesday's manslaughter conviction of an Israeli soldier who fatally shot an already wounded Palestinian attacker. Netanyahu and other senior Cabinet ministers quickly called for Sgt. Elor Azaria to be pardoned, in effect undercutting the authority of the military court that convicted him.

The swift reactions, coming before Azaria has even been sentenced or filed an appeal, were the latest in a series of squabbles between Israel's hard-line leadership and military commanders. It is uncharted waters for the military, which has traditionally seen itself as being above politics and is widely regarded as the country's most trusted institution.

But it also reflects a wider and increasingly visible schism. In a country that seems to grow more divided by the day, the security establishment is at loggerheads with the Netanyahu government and its nationalist base of supporters — aligning instead in subtle but noticeable ways with more liberal opposition forces.

"I think we are witnessing a very dangerous phenomenon where the division in Israeli society is trickling into the army," retired Maj. Gen. Gadi Shamni, who held some of the military's most senior posts, told Israel Radio. "This is a very severe trend that is being exacerbated by irresponsible, unrelenting politicians."

On one level, this is about relations with the Palestinians and what to do with the West Bank and its more than 2 million occupied Palestinians.

Netanyahu's coalition seems content to maintain this indefinitely, despite warnings it is leading to a bi-national state and constant friction with the Palestinians, Western allies and the Arab world. If anything, the incoming administration of Donald Trump seems to be emboldening Israel's hard-liners, who believe he will be much more tolerant of their policies and continued settlement of occupied lands.

But the debate is also about the nature of the country. Military commanders still tend to reflect Israel's founding class — mostly secular, pragmatic Zionists who believed that they could ultimately build a model society in which equal rights and the rule of law prevailed.

In recent years, this part of Israel has been on the defensive. To a degree, Netanyahu's Likud Party and its allies represent another side of the country: one that is more religious, deeply conservative, supportive of the West Bank settler movement and committed to democracy and liberal values in a far more tenuous way.

The coalition has tried to block the court-ordered evacuation of an illegal West Bank settlement outpost built on private Palestinian land. It has pushed legislation to retroactively legalize dozens of similar outposts. It has imposed regulations on dovish advocacy groups. And Culture Minister Miri Regev, a Netanyahu ally, has threatened to cut funds to theaters that refuse to perform in West Bank settlements.

"The settler leadership wants to fashion the military anew as part of its plan to impose its religious-political vision on all of Israel ... to reject the founding principles upon which Israel was established and to replace them with a reactionary and messianic vision," wrote Liat Schlesinger, executive director of Molad, a leftist think tank.

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Azaria was tried after a human rights worker filmed him in March fatally shooting a badly wounded Palestinian assailant in the West Bank city of Hebron. The assailant had already been shot after stabbing an Israeli soldier and was lying on the ground.

Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot, the head of the military, was among the first to condemn Azaria, saying his actions ran counter to its ethics and values.

But instead of getting support from political leaders, the army's decision to prosecute was called into question. Hard-line politicians, led by Education Minister Naftali Bennett, accused the army of abandoning a soldier on the battlefield. After initially defending the army, Netanyahu changed tack, even calling Azaria's parents to offer support.

The dispute helped lead to the removal of Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon, a former army chief who had backed his commanders. Avigdor Lieberman, a hard-liner who visited Azaria in court, subsequently became the defense chief.

Netanyahu, Bennett and others quickly called for a pardon of Azaria.

"This is a difficult and painful day for all of us, first and foremost for Elor and his family," Netanyahu said in a statement posted on Facebook. "I support granting a pardon to Elor Azaria."

Added Bennett: "The mothers and fathers of IDF fighters are watching, and they want to know that there is a system here that is supportive."

Eizenkot, meanwhile, was excoriated on social media in ways that would have been unthinkable a few years ago. A small crowd of extremists demonstrating outside military headquarters called for his assassination. Bodyguards were assigned to the judges who convicted Azaria, media reported.

The anger over the verdict reflects the place of soldiers in Israeli society. Military service is compulsory for Israeli Jews, so most have relatives in the service and soldiers are seen as "our boys and girls." Opinion polls in Israeli media showed 70 percent of the Jewish public supports a pardon.

"How populist can our politicians be?" columnist Sima Kadmon wrote in the Yediot Ahronot newspaper. "They say with one side of their mouths that they respect the court and demand with the other something that negates, cancels and disparages the verdict."

This trend has been in the making for years. One of the first signs was a 2012 documentary called "The Gatekeepers," in which all six then-living former chiefs of the Shin Bet internal security agency agreed the occupation of the West Bank is not sustainable.

Last year, the deputy military chief, Maj. Gen. Yair Golan, sparked controversy by appearing to compare the nationalist stirrings in Israel to 1930s Germany. Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, an ex-military chief, accuses the government of planting "seeds of fascism."

Meir Elran, who heads the program on the military and Israeli society at the Institute for National Security Studies, said the rift is "quite serious." He said that politicians were undercutting the authority of the chief of staff, and they could raise questions among troops on how to handle certain situations in the field.

"The military enjoys traditionally a very high rate of support of the overall public," said Elran, a retired brigadier general. "We do not want that to be diminished, and degraded."

Trump is using campaign-style name-calling on Congress

By LAURIE KELLMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump is shifting the name-calling that helped drive his campaign victories over "lyin,'" "low energy" and "crooked" opponents to the legislative arena, where he's now mocking Democrats as "clowns" trying to escape blame for a troubled health care law.

"The Democrats, led by head clown Chuck Schumer, know how bad Obamacare is and what a mess

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they are in," Trump tweeted Thursday. The GOP-led Congress is seeking to overturn President Barack Obama's signature policy but is far from unified behind a replacement.

It was the second time in as many days that Trump directed the insult at Democrats, and a clear sign he doesn't intend to conform to the often, but not always, polite decorum of Washington-speak.

Democratic Senate leader Sen. Chuck Schumer, an adept message crafter and negotiator in his own right, retorted:

"Republicans should stop clowning around with America's health care. Don't #MakeAmericaSickAgain."

The exchange comes as the new Republican Congress queues up other proposed policy changes on taxes, regulations and more. Democrats are the potential obstacles, with Schumer, a New Yorker who has known Trump for years, their Senate leader.

Trump is not the first candidate and won't be the first president to bestow other names on people. George W. Bush, for example, nicknamed people he knew from the campaign trail and elsewhere — from White House staff to foreign leaders to journalists.

But Trump's name-calling is much shorter on affection. His taunts are his calculated, signature technique for speaking the way some Americans outside Washington speak, especially about widely distrusted politicians. But it's not clear the approach that helped drive his campaign success will work in the new-to-him legislative arena after he becomes the nation's 45th president on Jan. 20. "This is not a time for calling names," Schumer told reporters Thursday.

Alliances in the finicky Congress can be fleeting even in collegial circumstances. And campaigning and governing involve different skills. In Congress, opponents — or "enemies," as Trump has tweeted — don't just drop out of contention for an office. They represent constituents and tend to stick around until at least the next election — the 2018 midterms this case.

Republicans now hold a 52-48 advantage in the 100-member Senate, but Democrats retain a somewhat limited power to hold up the chamber's business by filibuster. Ten Senate Democrats are up for re-election in states that Trump won — meaning some of them could break ranks with their party on some issues. Trump may need them, given that he's not aligned with fellow Republicans on every issue.

To be sure, Trump has shown an uncanny precision for branding his campaign opponents and eventually vanquishing them.

During the crowded GOP primary, Trump labeled former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush "low energy," and the tag for the studious policymaker stuck. Sen. Ted Cruz was "Lyin' Ted." Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, 45 to Trump's age 70, was "little Marco." And in speech after speech, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, whose candidacy already suffered from the mistrust of many voters, was "Crooked Hillary."

Follow Laurie Kellman on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>

After soldier's conviction, Israel acts against 'incitement'

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli authorities said on Thursday they were taking action to contain a backlash against military officials following the rare conviction of a soldier who killed an already badly wounded Palestinian assailant in the West Bank last year.

The case has deeply divided Israelis and also cast the government in a dispute with the Israeli military. A military court on Wednesday convicted Sgt. Elor Azaria of manslaughter charges in the March shooting, a verdict that could deliver up to 20 years in prison.

The proceedings have also sparked an unprecedented campaign of support for Azaria and against the

military establishment, long the country's most admired body.

In protests outside the courtroom, demonstrators chanted veiled death threats against military chief Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot. The trial's three military judges and the lead prosecutor have also faced threats and according to Israeli media have been assigned bodyguards.

Israel's Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit said on Thursday he was launching a probe into the chants on suspicion that they amounted to incitement to violence.

The protesters had chanted: "Gadi be careful, Rabin is looking for a friend" — a reference to slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by a Jewish extremist in 1995.

Police said on Thursday that they arrested an Israeli man for inciting on Facebook against military judges who convicted Azaria. Police spokeswoman Luba Samri said another Israeli woman was also questioned over Facebook posts. She said police will act against those inciting to violence against public officials.

New advice: Peanuts in baby's diet can prevent scary allergy

By LAURAN NEERGAARD, AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — New parents, get ready to feed your babies peanut-containing foods — starting young lowers their chances of becoming allergic.

The National Institutes of Health issued new guidelines Thursday saying most babies should regularly eat those foods starting around 6 months of age, some as early as 4 months. It's a major shift in dietary advice for a country fearful of one of the most dangerous food allergies.

"We're on the cusp of hopefully being able to prevent a large number of cases of peanut allergy," said Dr. Matthew Greenhawt of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, a member of the NIH-appointed panel that wrote the guidelines.

The recommendations are based on landmark research that found early exposure is far more likely to protect babies from developing peanut allergies than to harm them. The guidelines spell out exactly how to introduce infants to age-appropriate peanut products depending on whether they're at high, moderate or low risk of becoming allergic as they grow.

Babies at high risk — because they have a severe form of the skin rash eczema or egg allergies — need a check-up before any peanut exposure, and might get their first taste in the doctor's office.

For other tots, most parents can start adding peanut-containing foods to the diet much like they already introduced oatmeal or mashed peas.

No, babies don't get whole peanuts or a big glob of peanut butter — those are choking hazards. Instead, the guidelines include options like watered-down peanut butter or easy-to-gum peanut-flavored "puff" snacks.

"It's an important step forward," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which appointed experts to turn the research findings into user-friendly guidelines. "When you do desensitize them from an early age, you have a very positive effect."

Peanut allergy is a growing problem, affecting about 2 percent of U.S. children who must avoid the wide array of peanut-containing foods or risk severe, even life-threatening, reactions.

For years, pediatricians advised avoiding peanuts until age 3 for children thought to be at risk. But the delay didn't help, and that recommendation was dropped in 2008, although parent wariness of peanuts persists.

"It's old news, wrong old news, to wait," said Dr. Scott Sicherer, who represented the American Academy of Pediatrics on the guidelines panel.

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The guidelines, published Thursday in several medical journals, make that clear, urging parents and doctors to proactively introduce peanut-based foods early.

"Just because your uncle, aunt and sibling have an allergy, that's even more reason to give your baby the food now," even if they're already older than 6 months, added Sicherer, a pediatric allergist at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

In Columbus, Ohio, one doctor told Carrie Stevenson to avoid peanuts after her daughter was diagnosed with egg allergy. Then Stevenson found an allergy specialist who insisted that was the wrong advice — and offered baby Estelle a taste test of peanut butter in his office when she was 7 months old.

"I was really nervous," Stevenson recalled, unsure which doctor to believe. But "we didn't want her to have any more allergies."

Now 18 months old, Estelle has eaten peanut butter or peanut-flavored puffs at least three times a week since then and so far seems healthy. Stevenson, pregnant again, plans early exposure for her next child, too.

The guidelines recommend:

—All babies should try other solid foods before peanut-containing ones, to be sure they're developmentally ready.

—High-risk babies should have peanut-containing foods introduced at age 4 to 6 months after a check-up to tell if they should have the first taste in the doctor's office, or if it's OK to try at home with a parent watching for any reactions.

—Moderate-risk babies have milder eczema, typically treated with over-the-counter creams. They should start peanut-based foods around 6 months, at home.

—Most babies are low-risk, and parents can introduce peanut-based foods along with other solids, usually around 6 months.

—Building tolerance requires making peanut-based foods part of the regular diet, about three times a week.

What's the evidence? First, researchers noticed a tenfold higher rate of peanut allergy among Jewish children in Britain, who aren't fed peanut products during infancy, compared to those in Israel where peanut-based foods are common starting around age 7 months.

Then in 2015, an NIH-funded study of 600 babies put that theory to the test, assigning them either to avoid or regularly eat age-appropriate peanut products. By age 5, only 2 percent of peanut eaters — and 11 percent of those at highest risk — had become allergic. Among peanut avoiders, 14 percent had become allergic, and 35 percent of those at highest risk.

What if an older sibling or someone else in the home already is allergic to peanuts? The new baby needs a chance at prevention so talk to your doctor about how to do so while keeping the allergic family member safe, with extra care in washing hands and keeping food separate, said Greenhawt, an allergy specialist at Children's Hospital Colorado.

Whether the dietary change really will cut U.S. peanut allergies depends on how many parents heed the new advice, and the guidelines urge doctors to follow up, even offer lower-risk tots an in-office taste, to reassure them.

"We would encourage everybody to get on board with this," Greenhawt said.

'Obama Out': President ending reign as pop culture king

By NANCY BENAC, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — From his campaign fist bump to his theatrical mic drop at the last White House correspondents' dinner, Barack Obama ruled as America's pop culture president.

His two terms played out like a running chronicle of the trends of our times: slow-jamming the news with Jimmy Fallon, reading mean tweets with Jimmy Kimmel, filling out his NCAA basketball bracket on ESPN, cruising with Jerry Seinfeld on "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee."

"I'm appreciably cooler than I was two minutes ago," Obama declared after taking the wheel of a 1963 Corvette Stingray with Seinfeld in 2015.

And, months before the end of his term, he delivered what could be his with-it farewell line as he ended his remarks at the correspondents' dinner by embracing a gesture popularized by rappers and comedians.

"Obama out," he deadpanned, as he dropped his microphone and left the lectern.

Michelle Obama matched the president on-trend moment for on-trend moment: She strapped on a seatbelt for "Carpool Karaoke" with James Corden, beat Ellen DeGeneres in a push up contest and rapped with a turnip.

It wasn't just frivolity.

In an increasingly fragmented media world, the Obamas turned niche pop culture platforms to serious ends.

There he was in Alaska, warning about the dangers of climate change on "Running Wild with Bear Grylls." There she was on the "Tonight Show," pushing exercise by challenging Fallon to a sack race in the East Room.

The president turned up on "Between Two Ferns with Zach Galifianakis" to get millennials to sign up for his health care law.

"OK, let's get this out of the way, what did you come here to plug?" Galifianakis groused.

"I think it's fair to say that I wouldn't be with you here today if I didn't have something to plug," Obama shot back. "Have you heard of the Affordable Care Act?"

Some conservatives called that appearance undignified. But within days, it had snagged 18 million views, on par with Justin Bieber. And health care signups ticked upward.

The president tossed a "Mad Men" reference into his 2014 State of the Union address — calling out wage disparities between men and women — and Twitter went wild.

He paid a 2015 house call to comic Marc Maron's garage in California to talk terrorism, racial politics and gun control on Maron's "WTF" podcast.

For all the fascination with Obama's pop culture finesse, there was a downside.

Eric Dezenhall, a Washington crisis management consultant and former Reagan administration official, contends that Donald Trump's election "can be traced almost solely to the domination of the popular culture that Obama and Obama-ism had." Obama's cultural identity was intertwined with a liberal agenda that was a turnoff to many voters.

"A lot of Trump's supporters said, 'I'm tired of hearing about this,'" says Dezenhall. People "got sick and tired of hearing that Islam is a peace-loving religion and that there's nobody braver than Kaitlyn Jenner."

Of course Trump, too, is in large part a product of pop culture, with decades of movie cameo credits as a billionaire businessman and a long run as the Richie-Rich "Apprentice" boss.

"But he spoke more to the heartland, whereas Obama's success was very coastal," says Dezenhall.

The president's melding of policy and pop culture started early, when he promoted his economic

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stimulus plan to Jay Leno (remember him?) on NBC's "Tonight Show" in 2009.

Past presidents had done late-night shows, but only as candidates, not after they took office.

Think of Bill Clinton, in sunglasses, wailing "Heartbreak Hotel" on his sax on Arsenio Hall's show in 1992. Or Richard Nixon's labored "sock it to me" soundbite on "Laugh-In" in September 1968.

(It took six takes for Nixon to get the four-second quip right.)

George Schlatter, the show's creator, later said Nixon believed "appearing on 'Laugh-In' is what got him elected, and I believe that."

Obama caught flak for his Leno appearance — beneath the office, some said — but he shrugged it off as just part of the needling that comes with the presidency.

"It's a little bit like 'American Idol,' except everyone is Simon Cowell," he said.

The nation wasn't always sure what to make of this oh-so-hip president. When candidate Obama and his wife shared an affectionate fist bump on stage during the presidential campaign, a Fox News anchor later referred to it as a possible "terrorist fist jab."

The benefits of Obama's affinity for pop culture were clear: Hollywood's brightest stars stepped up to amplify his message and raise money for his causes.

"There also was a kind of reflective coolness" that rubbed off on the president, said Tevi Troy, a former Bush administration official who wrote a book about presidents and pop culture.

The president's cultural allusions worked for him, Troy says, because they were authentic. Obama watched more TV growing than up any other president, he said.

The same shtick didn't necessarily work for Hillary Clinton in her unsuccessful campaign to succeed him.

When Clinton turned up with Katy Perry or other pop stars, Troy says, "It seemed inauthentic. Nobody felt that she actually listened to their music."

Even Obama had his stumbles and may have taken it too far at times.

His attempt to maximize the messages from his 2016 State of the Union address went pretty far afield when he found himself being questioned by YouTube personality "sWooZie" on the rapping skills of Drake vs. Kendrick Lamar. (Obama went with Lamar.)

And then there was his 2013 offhand reference to a "Jedi mind-meld." That was an inadvertent mash-up of references to "Star Wars" and "Star Trek."

Follow Nancy Benac on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/nbenac>

Police: Texas man caught with cocaine hidden under belly fat

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Authorities say a Texas man tried to destroy cocaine hidden under his belly fat while being taken to jail after failing a field sobriety test early on New Year's Eve.

An Austin police officer pulled over Florentino Herrera early on the morning of Dec. 31 after he says he saw the 48-year-old run a stop sign and cross a solid white traffic line. Herrera was arrested after failing field sobriety tests and refusing to take a blood alcohol test.

In an affidavit, police say the squad car's camera recorded Herrera trying to destroy cocaine concealed under his stomach fat.

Herrera is being held on charges of evidence tampering and driving while intoxicated.

Deputy: Man stole work tools, then accidentally called boss

FAIRMONT, W.Va. (AP) — Authorities say a man stole tools from his workplace at an auto repair shop and then accidentally called his boss as he tried to sell them.

Citing an arrest report, the Times West Virginian (<http://bit.ly/2hWxGir>) says the owner of the repair shop in the community of Millersville told deputies that one of his employees recently called him about tools he was selling. The owner said the employee immediately hung up after he realized who he had called.

Deputies say they recovered the stolen tools after they obtained a warrant to search the vehicle and home of the worker, identified as 37-year-old Shawn Nelson Furner of Fairmont.

Furner is charged with felony breaking and entering, as well as conspiracy to commit a felony. It is unclear whether Furner has an attorney.

Information from: Times West Virginian, <http://www.timeswv.com>

Japan recalls envoy to S. Korea over 'comfort woman' statue

By KEN MORITSUGU, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan announced Friday that it would recall its ambassador to South Korea and suspend economic talks in response to the placing of a "comfort woman" statue representing wartime sex slaves in front of its consulate in the Korean port city of Busan.

Both Ambassador Yasumasa Nagamine in Seoul and the consul-general in Busan will be temporarily recalled, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters after a Cabinet meeting.

Many Korean and other women in Asia were forced into sexual slavery in front-line brothels for the Japanese military during World War II in what was called the "comfort woman" system.

Suga called the placing of the statue "extremely regrettable," since Japan and South Korea had reached what was supposed to be a final agreement to resolve long-standing differences over the issue in late 2015.

He said that Japan would suspend some ongoing negotiations with South Korea, including a proposed currency swap arrangement for times of financial crisis.

South Korean activists opposed to the 2015 agreement installed the statue in Busan late last month, one year after the pact was reached. A similar statue by the same sculptor has stood in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul since 2011.

The South Korean Foreign Ministry called Japan's decision to recall its ambassador "very regrettable," adding that both countries should work toward advancing bilateral relations based on trust "even when there are difficult problems."

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se later summoned Nagamine to protest Japan's decision to recall him.

At the time of the sex slave deal, Seoul said there were 46 surviving South Korean victims. As of this year, 28 surviving victims and the families of three victims who have since died received compensation, according to an official from Seoul's Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, who didn't want to be named, citing office rules.

Associated Press writer Kim Tong-hyung in Seoul, South Korea, contributed to this report.

A 3,000-year-old city wrecked by militants, left for looters

By LORI HINNANT, Associated Press

NIMRUD, Iraq (AP) — The giant winged bulls that once stood sentry at the nearly 3,000-year-old palace at Nimrud have been hacked to pieces. The fantastical human-headed creatures were believed to guard the king from evil, but now their stone remains are piled in the dirt, victims of the Islamic State group's fervor to erase history.

The militants' fanaticism devastated one of the most important archaeological sites in the Middle East. But more than a month after the militants were driven out, Nimrud is still being ravaged, its treasures disappearing, piece by piece, imperiling any chance of eventually rebuilding it, an Associated Press team found after multiple visits last month.

With the government and military still absorbed in fighting the war against the Islamic State group in the nearby city of Mosul, the wreckage of the Assyrian Empire's ancient capital lies unprotected and vulnerable to looters.

No one is assigned to guard the sprawling site, much less catalog the fragments of ancient reliefs, chunks of cuneiform texts, pieces of statues and other rubble after IS blew up nearly every structure there. Toppled stone slabs bearing a relief from the palace wall that the AP saw on one visit were gone when journalists returned.

"When I heard about Nimrud, my heart wept before my eyes did," said Hiba Hazim Hamad, an archaeology professor in Mosul who often took her students there. "My family and neighbors came to my house to pay condolences."

Perhaps the only vigilant guardian left for the ruins is an Iraqi archaeologist, Layla Salih. She has visited it multiple times in recent weeks, photographing the destruction to document it and badgering nearby militias to take care of it. Walking with the AP across the broad dirt expanse of the ruin, she was calm, methodical and precise as she pointed out things she'd seen on previous visits that were no longer in place.

Still, Salih does not despair. She searches out reasons for optimism.

"The good thing is the rubble is still in situ," she said. "The site is restorable."

To an untrained eye, that's hard to imagine, seeing the extent of the destruction that the Islamic State group wreaked in March 2015. Salih estimated that 60 percent of the site was irrecoverable.

The site's various structures — several palaces and temples — are spread over 360 hectares (900 acres) on a dirt plateau. A 140-foot-high ziggurat, or step pyramid, once arrested the gaze of anyone entering Nimrud. Where it stood, there is now only lumpy earth. Just past it, in the palace of King Ashurnasirpal II, walls are toppled, bricks spilled into giant piles. The palace's great courtyard is a field of cratered earth. Chunks of cuneiform writing are jammed in the dirt. Reliefs that once displayed gods and mythical creatures are reduced to random chunks showing a hand or a few feathers of a genie's wing.

During a Dec. 14 assessment tour by UNESCO, a U.N. demining expert peered at a hole leading to a tomb that appeared to be intact. It might be rigged to explode, the expert said, and the UNESCO crew backed away.

The militants boasted of the destruction in high-definition video propaganda, touting their campaign to purge their self-declared "caliphate" of anything they deemed pagan or heretical.

They dismantled the winged bulls, known as lamassu, as purposefully as any decapitation they carried out in in Mosul or the Syrian city of Raqqa. The bearded male heads of the statues are missing — likely taken to be sold on the black market as IS has done with other artifacts. They then wired the entire palace with explosives and blew it apart, along with the temples of Nabu and of the goddess Ishtar.

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It was a brutal blow to a site that gave the world a wealth of startling Mesopotamian art and deepened knowledge about the ancient Mideast.

Nimrud was a capital of the Assyrians, one the ancient world's earliest and most ferocious empires. Known at the time as Kalhu, the city was the seat of power from 879-709 BC, an era when Assyrian armies expanded out across the Levant, capturing Damascus and other cities, crushing the kingdom of Israel and turning its neighbor Judah into a vassal.

A British-Assyrian team first excavated Nimrud in 1945, then it was re-excavated in the 1950s by Max Mallowan. Though famous in his own right at the time, Mallowan is better known as the husband of Agatha Christie, who accompanied him and photographed and filmed the digs.

"It's just one of the most beautiful sites in the Middle East, or at least it was," said Georgina Herrmann, a British archaeologist who worked at Nimrud with Mallowan. "It used to be covered with wildflowers. You'd be there and there'd be bits of ancient sculptures sticking out."

Besides the reliefs and statues, archaeologists dug up hundreds of stone tablets written in cuneiform letters containing everything from treaties to temple and palace records. The tombs of queens yielded troves of gold and jewelry. Iraqi archaeologists also made a grisly find: more than 100 skeletons inside a palace well, including some with shackled hands and feet, possibly prisoners dumped in when Nimrud was sacked in 610 BC.

Salih, 40, came to Nimrud a few days after IS fighters were driven out in early November. So far, she is the only Iraqi antiquities official to visit. Ancient Assyria is not even Salih's field; she specialized in Islamic art and architecture. But there was no one else to do it. Half of the 50-odd government archaeologists in Mosul are still trapped there under IS rule.

She confirmed what satellite images had already shown: sometime between Sept. 1 and Nov. 4 as international forces closed in, IS bulldozed the ziggurat.

It had never been explored by archaeologists. "What exactly was inside it only ISIS knows," said Herrmann, using another acronym for the Islamic state group.

Touring the site, UNESCO's representative to Iraq, Louise Haxthausen, called the destruction "absolutely devastating."

"The most important thing right now is to ensure some basic protection," she said.

But the government has many priorities right now. It is still fighting IS in Mosul. Moreover, there is a long and expensive list of needs in rebuilding the country from the Islamic State group's legacy. Tens of thousands of citizens live in camps. Large swaths of the western city of Ramadi were destroyed in the offensive to wrest it from IS control. Mass graves are unearthed nearly every day in former IS territory, with more than 70 discovered already. Other ancient sites remain under IS control, including Nineveh — another ancient Assyrian capital — in the heart of Mosul.

Nimrud is in an active war zone, on the edge of the Tigris River valley south of Mosul. To reach it, one drives through checkpoints of multiple armed groups fighting IS — the Iraqi military, Shiite militias, Kurdish peshmerga and Christian fighters.

None of those forces is assigned to guard Nimrud. The first three times the AP visited, Sunni and Shiite fighters eventually showed up after an hour, apparently after hearing of the team's presence.

During the UNESCO tour, Salih noticed that some of the ancient bricks from the palace rubble had been neatly piled up as if to be hauled away. She questioned two Shiite militiamen about them.

"Both of them told me different stories," she said in exasperation. One said Islamic State extremists did it, intending to sell the bricks; the other said the militia members themselves stacked them to protect them. Salih believes neither story and thinks someone had hoped to take the bricks to repair homes damaged in fighting.

It's hard to say what's missing, because no one even knows what's in the piles of rubble to know if it's being stolen.

Two locals were recently arrested with a marble tablet and stone seal from Nimrud, presumably to sell. The men remain in custody.

The artifacts seized from them, however, are harder to track down. The police insisted they were at a lab in Irbil, the capital of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. The lab said it knew nothing about them. The Antiquities Ministry in Baghdad said they were safe in the Ninevah government offices, while an official in those offices said they were with the police awaiting transit to Baghdad.

It was a perfect circle of confusion — one that makes it easy for someone to simply steal items.

Salih is working to get international funding to pay someone to guard the site. But she recognizes that job will have to go to one of the militia factions. She has no illusions that the militias will provide full protection.

But she has grown used to compromises that once would have been unimaginable. Before she fled her home in Mosul soon after the IS takeover in 2014, she and other archaeologists pleaded with the militants to let them destroy the city's ancient tombs that the group so despised. At least that way, the buildings housing the tombs could be spared.

The plea was futile, and IS detonated the buildings and tombs.

So she will negotiate now with the militias to do as much as they can to preserve Nimrud. On the final visit with the AP, wind-whipped winter rains sent rivulets of water through the loose dirt, further dislodging the remains.

"There isn't another choice, as you see," she said.

Associated Press photographer Maya Alleruzzo and videographer Bram Janssen in Nimrud; and Salar Salim and Mohammed Nouman in Irbil, Iraq, contributed to this report.

Read previous reports in the AP's series "A Savage Legacy" chronicling the impact of the Islamic State group at: <https://www.ap.org/explore/a-savage-legacy/>

'Hee Haw' co-creator and producer Sam Lovullo dies at age 88

By ANDREW DALTON, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Sam Lovullo, who as producer and co-creator of "Hee Haw" brought country music and homestyle humor to millions of American homes, has died at age 88, his publicists said Thursday.

Lovullo died peacefully at his home in the Encino neighborhood of Los Angeles on Thursday, publicists the Brokaw Company said. No immediate cause of death was given, but Lovullo had been suffering from heart disease.

Lovullo worked on TV's "The Jonathan Winters Show" from 1967 and 1969. He and two writers from the show noticed that it enjoyed a ratings spike when country music guests were on.

They conceived of "Hee Haw," the variety show that ran for two years on CBS starting in 1969 and went on to a 21-year run in syndication. Lovullo was producer for all but the last five years.

The show affectionately made light of rural culture, featuring country bumpkins and scantily clad farmer's daughters, but was actually produced in Nashville and featured music from country legends like Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn, who usually donned the same overalls as the cast and got in on the jokes. Its hosts, Buck Owens and Roy Clark, were themselves country music luminaries before the

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show began.

He was an Italian-American native of Los Angeles, but "Hee Haw" made Lovullo a beloved hometown figure in Nashville. In 1974 the Academy of Country Music gave him its Jim Reeves Memorial Award, for people who contribute to the acceptance of country music.

Lovullo would write a memoir about his time on the show, "Life in the Kornfield My 25 Years at Hee Haw," which takes its name from the show's fictitious home Kornfield Kounty.

He is survived by his wife and four children.

His son Torey Lovullo is a former Major League Baseball player who was recently named manager of the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 6, the sixth day of 2017. There are 359 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 6, 1967, U.S. Marines and South Vietnamese troops launched Operation Deckhouse Five, an offensive in the Mekong River delta. The 10-day operation reportedly claimed the lives of 21 Viet Cong fighters along with seven Americans.

On this date:

In 1017, Cnut the Great was crowned King of England at Old St. Paul's Cathedral in London, just over a month following the death of his predecessor, Edmund II.

In 1540, England's King Henry VIII married his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves. (The marriage lasted about six months.)

In 1759, George Washington and Martha Dandridge Custis were married in New Kent County, Virginia.

In 1838, Samuel Morse and Alfred Vail gave the first successful public demonstration of their telegraph in Morristown, New Jersey.

In 1912, New Mexico became the 47th state.

In 1919, the 26th president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, died in Oyster Bay, New York, at age 60.

In 1945, George Herbert Walker Bush married Barbara Pierce at the First Presbyterian Church in Rye, New York.

In 1950, Britain recognized the Communist government of China.

In 1974, year-round daylight saving time began in the United States on a trial basis as a fuel-saving measure in response to the OPEC oil embargo.

In 1987, the U.S. Senate voted 88-4 to establish an 11-member panel to hold public hearings on the Iran-Contra affair.

In 1994, figure skater Nancy Kerrigan was clubbed on the leg by an assailant at Detroit's Cobo Arena; four men, including the ex-husband of Kerrigan's rival, Tonya Harding, went to prison for their roles in the attack. (Harding denied knowing about plans for the attack.)

In 2001, with Vice President Al Gore presiding in his capacity as president of the Senate, Congress formally certified George W. Bush the winner of the bitterly contested 2000 presidential election.

Ten years ago: At a Baptist church in Fort Worth, Texas, the Denver Broncos filed past the open casket of Darrent Williams, the promising cornerback who had been gunned down in a drive-by shooting on

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New Year's Day. A large avalanche pushed two cars off the heavily traveled road at Berthoud Pass in Colorado, but no deaths resulted.

Five years ago: A bomb exploded at a busy Damascus intersection, killing 25 people and wounding dozens in the second major attack in the Syrian capital in as many weeks. The Obama administration expanded the FBI's more than eight-decades-old definition of rape to count men as victims for the first time and to drop the requirement that victims physically resisted their attackers. Roger Boisjoly, a NASA contractor who had repeatedly voiced concerns about the space shuttle Challenger before it exploded in 1986, died in Nephi, Utah, at age 73. New England Patriots offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien agreed to become Penn State's new football coach. (O'Brien held the position for two seasons.)

One year ago: North Korea said that it had conducted a powerful hydrogen bomb test, a claim greeted with widespread skepticism. Ken Griffey Jr. and Mike Piazza were elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Actor-comedian Pat Harrington Jr., 86, died in Los Angeles.

Today's Birthdays: Country musician Joey, the CowPolka King (Riders in the Sky) is 68. Former FBI director Louis Freeh is 67. Rock singer-musician Kim Wilson (The Fabulous Thunderbirds) is 66. Singer Jett Williams is 64. Rock musician Malcolm Young (AC-DC) is 64. Actor-comedian Rowan Atkinson is 62. World Golf Hall of Famer Nancy Lopez is 60. Actor Scott Bryce is 59. Rhythm-and-blues singer Kathy Sledge is 58. TV chef Nigella Lawson is 57. Rhythm-and-blues singer Eric Williams (BLACKstreet) is 57. Movie director John Singleton is 49. Actor Aron Eisenberg is 48. Actor Norman Reedus is 48. TV personality Julie Chen is 47. Actor Danny Pintauro (TV: "Who's the Boss?") is 41. Actress Cristela Alonzo is 38. Actress Rinko Kikuchi is 36. Actor Eddie Redmayne is 35. NBA player Gilbert Arenas is 35. Actress-comedian Kate McKinnon (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 33. Rock singer Alex Turner (Arctic Monkeys) is 31.

Thought for Today: "What this generation was bred to at television's knees was not wisdom, but cynicism." — Pauline Kael, American movie critic (1919-2001).