

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, Jan. 19

Senior Menu: Oven fried chicken breast, mashed potatoes and gravy, New Brunswick blend vegetables, glorified rice, whole wheat bread.

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

School Lunch: Mini corndogs, baked beans, fruit, cauliflower and dip.

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

Boys' Basketball at Roncalli. C game at 5:15 p.m., JV at 6:30 p.m., varsity game to follow.

Friday, Jan. 20

Senior Menu: French dip sandwich, macaroni salad, seasoned cabbage, Waldorf salad.

School Breakfast: Mini pancakes, fruit, juice, milk.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, Italian vegetables, fruit, broccoli and dip.

Debate at Watertown

Girls' Basketball hosts Roncalli. C game at 5:15 p.m., JV at 6:30 p.m. with varsity to follow.

Saturday, Jan. 21

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court at 10 a.m.

Debate at Watertown

Robotics at GHS Gym

Wrestling at Arlington Tourney at 9:30 a.m.

Basketball Doubleheader with Potter County in Groton. Girls JV at 2 p.m., Boys JV at 3 p.m., Girls Varsity at 4:30 p.m., Boys Varsity at 6 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 22

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

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

Closed: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **Closed**

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Katie Koehler makes a solo layup on a fast break. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Jessica Bjerke runs up court with the ball. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Langford Game Stats

	2-pt	3-pt	FT	Pts	Rbs	Steals	Assists	TO	Fouls
Audrey Wanner	5-12	0-2	1-2	11	5	7	2	1	2
Katie Koehler	5-10	0-0	1-4	11	4	5	3	3	3
Jessica Bjerke	3-4	1-4	0-0	9	13	4	2	1	1
Harleigh Stange	0-4	0-2	2-2	2	0	1	0	0	0
Jennie Doeden	1-4	0-0	2-4	4	2	0	0	1	3
Taylor Holm	2-3	0-0	0-0	4	3	0	2	1	2
Alex Stange	1-5	0-0	0-0	2	1	0	0	2	2
Miranda Hanson	0-5	1-6	0-0	3	2	4	1	1	4
Payton Maine	0-1	1-5	1-2	4	6	0	2	2	0
TOTALS	17-48	3-19	7-14	50	36	21	12	12	17

Lady Tigers run pas Lady Lions

Groton Area scored 17 unanswered points in the first half to run past Langford Area in girls' basketball action played Monday in Langford.

Coverage of the game on GDILIVE.COM was sponsored by Hefty Seed with Justin Hanson and Kalen Kjellsen, Groton Ford, James Valley Seed with Doug Jorgensen, Ken's Food Fair, Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, Rosewood Court, Blocker Construction and First State Bank of Claremont with branches in Groton, Columbia and Langford.

The game was tied four times in the first quarter before the Tigers wen ton their big run to take a 26-10 lead at halftime. Langford Area closed to within seven, 27-20, midway in the third quarter as Groton Area led, 37-28 going into the fourth quarter.

Audrey Wanner and Katie Koehler each had 11 points to lead the Tigers followed by Jessica Bjerke with nine, Jennie Doeden, Taylor Holm and Payton Maine each had four, Miranda Hanson had three and Harleigh Stange and Alex Stange each had two points.

Ady Dwight led the Lions with 12 points which included eight of eight free throws, Chesney Olson had seven, Addy Taylor six, Alyssa Keough had three and Ashley Gustafson added two points.

Audrey Wanner had seven of the team's 21 steals, Katie Koehler had three of the team's 12 assists, Jessica Bjerke had 13 of the team's 36 rebounds, Groton Area had 12 turnovers and 17 fouls.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 48-15. Scoring for Groton Area: Kaycie Hawkins 12, Taylor Holm 10 first quarter points, Tadyn Glover 5, Eliza Wanner 5, Miranda Hanson 4, Payton Colestock 3, Nicole Marzahn 3, Payton Maine 2, Jennie Doeden 2, Caityln Barse 2.

Scoring for Langford Area: Katie Jensen 9, Janaeda Hesse 6.



Wednesday, January 18th
thru
Saturday, January 21st

CRAZY *Lori's Pharmacy*

DAYS

And

SALE



Lori's -

* Buy one gift item at full price, get another (of equal value or less) at 1/2 price!
*Christmas is now 75% off!

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Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Chipmunks 14, Shih Tzus 10, Coyotes 10, Cheetahs 10, Foxes 9, Jackelopes 7

Men's High Games: Brad Waage 258, 232, 225, Roger Spanier 244, Mike Wiley 202

Women's High Games: Darci Spanier 185, 174, Dar Larson 168, Sue Stanley 161

Men's High Series: Brad Waage 715, Roger Spanier 567, Mike Siegler 535

Women's High Series: Darci Spanier 513, Sue Stanley 449, Dar Larson 428

Shabazz, Schuring combine for 48 points in win over Ipswich

Groton Area scored 12 unanswered points in the first quarter and 14 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to beat Ipswich in boys' basketball action played Tuesday in Groton, 68-34.

Broadcast of the game on GDILIVE.COM was sponsored by Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, Groton Ford, James Valley Seed with Doug Jorgensen, Ken's Food Fair and Krueger Brothers Dirt & Gravel.

Seric Shabazz made five three-pointers to lead Groton Area with 27 points. Sean Schuring had four three-pointers and added 21 points. Anthony Sippel had eight points followed by Bennett Shabazz with seven and Brandon Keith added five.

Sean Schuring had four of the team's 11 steals, Bennett Shabazz and Seric Shabazz each had three of the team's three assists, Bennett Shabazz had seven of the team's 31 rebounds and Groton Area had 12 turnovers and 11 team fouls. Groton Area made 47 percent of its field goals and 75 percent of its free throws.

Ipswich was led by McQuarie with 13 points. Ipswich made 41 percent of its field goals, 43 percent of its free throws, had 31 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 11 steals and 12 assists.

Ipswich won the junior varsity game, 40-28. Scoring for Groton: Jonny Doeden 8, Darrien Shabazz 6, Anthony Sippel 4, Peyton Johnson 3, Austin Jones 3, Mitchell Thurston 2 and Marshall Lane 1.

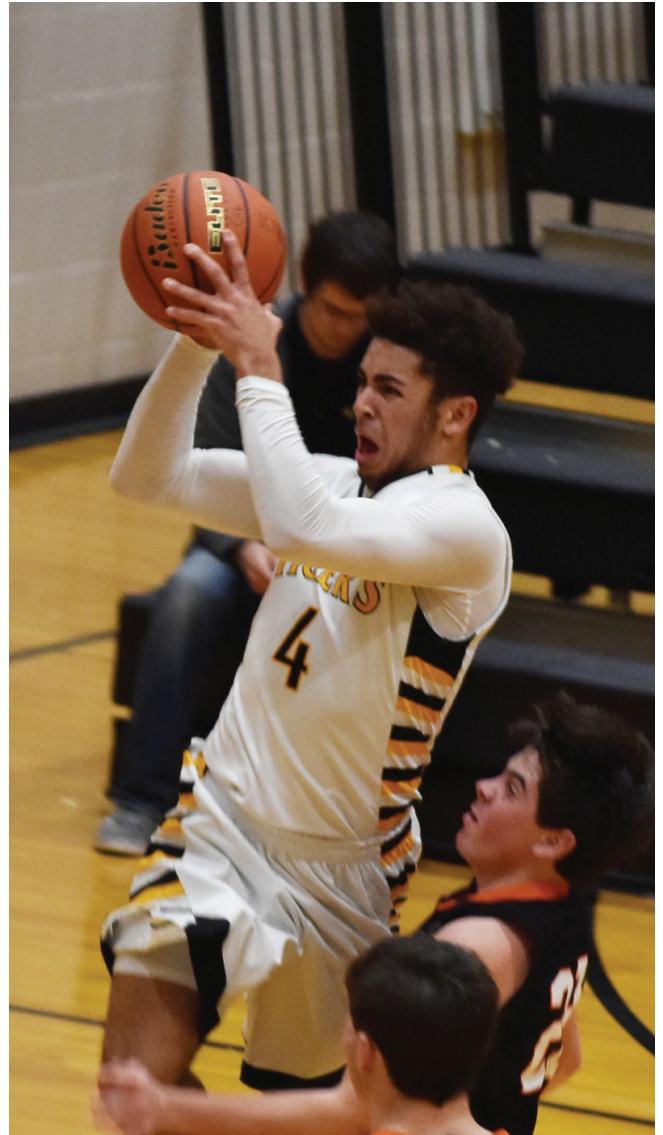
Ipswich also won the C game, 47-38. Scoring for Groton: Darrien Shabazz 14, Hunter Schaller 9, Cade Guthmiller 8, Anthony Schinkel 3, Alex Morris 3 and Chandler Larson 2.

Groton Garden Club

The Groton Garden Club met at the home Bev Sombke with Pat Larson assisting ten members answered role call with a winter memory. A lot of snow was involved. Eunice McCollister will take the Smokey Bear-Woodsey Owl poster contest information to their elementary school this week. The group gave a Christmas donation to the City Transit. Volunteers were sent to SD Volunteers from each member. The February 20th, meeting will be held at the home of Marj Overacker with Eunice McCollister assisting. Linda Anderson will give the program. Following the meeting Grace Albrecht gave the program on reseeding flowers and gardening tips.

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Top Left: Johnny Doeden
Above: Bennett Shabazz
Bottom Left: Seric Shabazz
(Photos by Julianna Kosel)

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livestream

Upcoming Events

Thursday, Jan. 19

Boys' Basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli

8 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 20

Girls' Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli

8 p.m.

gdilive.com

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A Peaceful Transition of Power

Every four years after a presidential election, Americans from all corners of the country flock to Washington, D.C., to attend the incoming president's inauguration ceremony. At noon on January 20, 2017, President-elect Donald Trump becomes President Donald Trump, after he is administered the oath of office by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts.

The oath of office of the President of the United States is only 35 words long, and is stated in the United States Constitution: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." The first president to take the presidential oath was George Washington at his inauguration on April 30, 1789, at Federal Hall in New York City, the temporary seat of government at that time.

President Washington also set the precedent of delivering an inaugural address following his swearing-in ceremony, a tradition that has led to some of the most renowned quotes from our presidents. Washington swore to preserve "the sacred fire of liberty" and uphold the "Republican model of Government." Other famous lines from inaugural addresses include John F. Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," and Ronald Reagan's "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." These remarks continue to inspire Americans today.

The entire ceremony takes place on the West Front Lawn of the U.S. Capitol, as it has since 1981. Attendees fill the National Mall from the Capitol steps to the Washington Monument, all to catch a glimpse of living history. Following the swearing-in and inaugural address, an inaugural parade and numerous balls take place throughout Washington, D.C.

While January 20th is the official day the president takes office, months of preparation have gone into the planning of the inauguration ceremony and official events, such as the parade and the formal balls. Since 1901, the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies has been in charge of setting up the swearing-in ceremonies. Thousands of men and women have been working behind the scenes to plan the ceremony and make sure the Capitol remains secure. I'd like to thank them for their hard work, as well as all the members of the law enforcement community who have been putting in long hours leading up to inauguration weekend. Their job protecting the attendees at the inauguration is incredibly difficult, and their dedication to the security of the attendees is deserving of praise. Without their commitment, this very special day for our nation could not run as effortlessly and with the dignity it deserves.

In his inaugural speech, Thomas Jefferson said, "But every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle...We are all republicans. We are all federalists." His wise words ring true today. Though we may disagree with one another on certain policies, we are all Americans, and our presidential inaugurations reflect a decidedly American ideal: the peaceful transition of power from one administration to the next.

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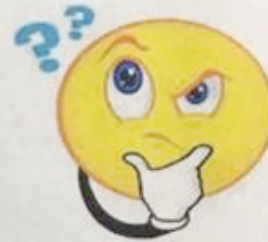
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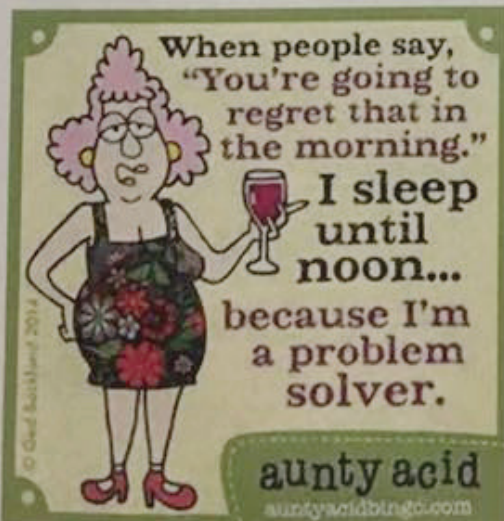
Leave all your money and worries at home as we have you covered unless you see something on the side of the road you just can't live without then your on your own. Pack your overnight bag and your ready to enjoy



Like Adventure and Fun? Then join Duenwald Transportation on our Two Day Mystery Tour, March 1st and 2nd. Cost is \$225 per person based on double occupancy \$290 for single. For information on how to get signed up for this exciting



trip call [Keri Kline](tel:605-233-0144) 605-233-0144 Seats are limited!! Bus will depart Clark at 8:30am and Watertown at 9:15am on Wednesday March 1st. It's going to be a trip of a lifetime and you will be doing things you have never done before???? So jump on the bus sit back and wonder where this bus will be taking me today and tomorrow.



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Today in Weather History

January 19, 1970: Extremely cold air was over the area on this day in weather history in 1970. After an extremely cold night, daytime high temperatures struggled to reach the single digits below zero. Overnight low temperatures across the area were from 25 below to 34 below zero with daytime highs from 3 above at Sisseton to 12 degrees below zero at Pierre. Record low temperatures were set at Wheaton, Watertown, Pierre, and Kennebec. The temperature fell to 32 degrees below zero at Pierre, 33 degrees below zero at Watertown and Wheaton, and to 34 degrees zero at Kennebec. Aberdeen fell to 35 degrees below zero, Sisseton fell to 26 degrees below zero, Mobridge fell to 25 degrees below zero, Sisseton fell to 26 degrees below zero, and Timber Lake fell to 27 degrees below zero.

1810 - The famous "cold day" in New England. Gale force winds wrecked homes, and accompanied a sudden overnight drop in temperature of 50 degrees. Tragedy struck Sanbornton NH where three children froze to death. (David Ludlum)

1933 - Giant Forest CA received 60 inches of snow in just 24 hours, a state record, and the second highest 24 hour total of record for the U.S. (David Ludlum)

1977 - Snowflakes were observed at Homestead and Miami Beach in extreme southern Florida. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm tracking toward the northeastern U.S. produced up to 14 inches of snow in northern Indiana. Peru IN reported a foot of snow. Six cities in Florida reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 88 degrees at Miami equalled their record for the month of January. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)


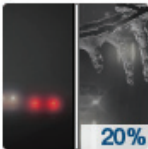





1988 - A powerful storm hit the central U.S. producing blizzard conditions in the Central High Plains, and severe thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Snowfall totals ranged up to 36 inches at Wolf Creek Pass CO, with 31 inches at Elsmere NE. Tornadoes claimed five lives in Tennessee, and a tornado at Cullman AL injured 35 persons. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)


1989 - The high temperature for the day at Fairbanks, AK, was a frigid 41 degrees below zero, and the morning low of 24 degrees below zero at Anchorage AK was their coldest reading in fourteen years. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in eastern Texas and Louisiana. Tornadoes at Garland TX and Apple Springs TX each injured one person. Heavy snow spread from the Southern and Central Rockies into the Great Plains. Storm totals in New Mexico reached 36 inches at Gascon. Totals in the Central Plains ranged up to 15 inches near McCook NE and Garden City KS. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)


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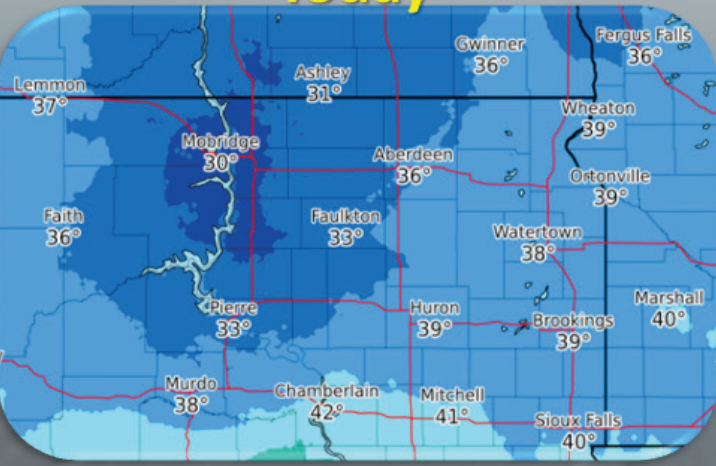
Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Areas Fog	Slight Chance Drizzle/Freezing Drizzle and Patchy Fog	Slight Chance Drizzle/Freezing Drizzle	Chance Snow	Chance Snow	Slight Chance Snow	Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow
High: 36 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 36 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 34 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 34 °F




Mild, But with Clouds And Fog



Today




Friday




Mid 20s to Mid 30s

Saturday



Low 30s to 40




Sunday



Low 30s to 40s

Above normal temperatures expected through the rest of the week

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD

 weather.gov/Aberdeen
 National Weather Service Aberdeen
 @NWSAberdeen
Updated: 1/19/2017 5:49 AM Central

Published on: 01/19/2017 at 5:52AM

Areas of fog, drizzle and freezing drizzle will affect the region through Friday, mainly in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Moisture will become more widespread Saturday ahead of a weak system. Light snow will be possible on Saturday with little to no accumulation expected.

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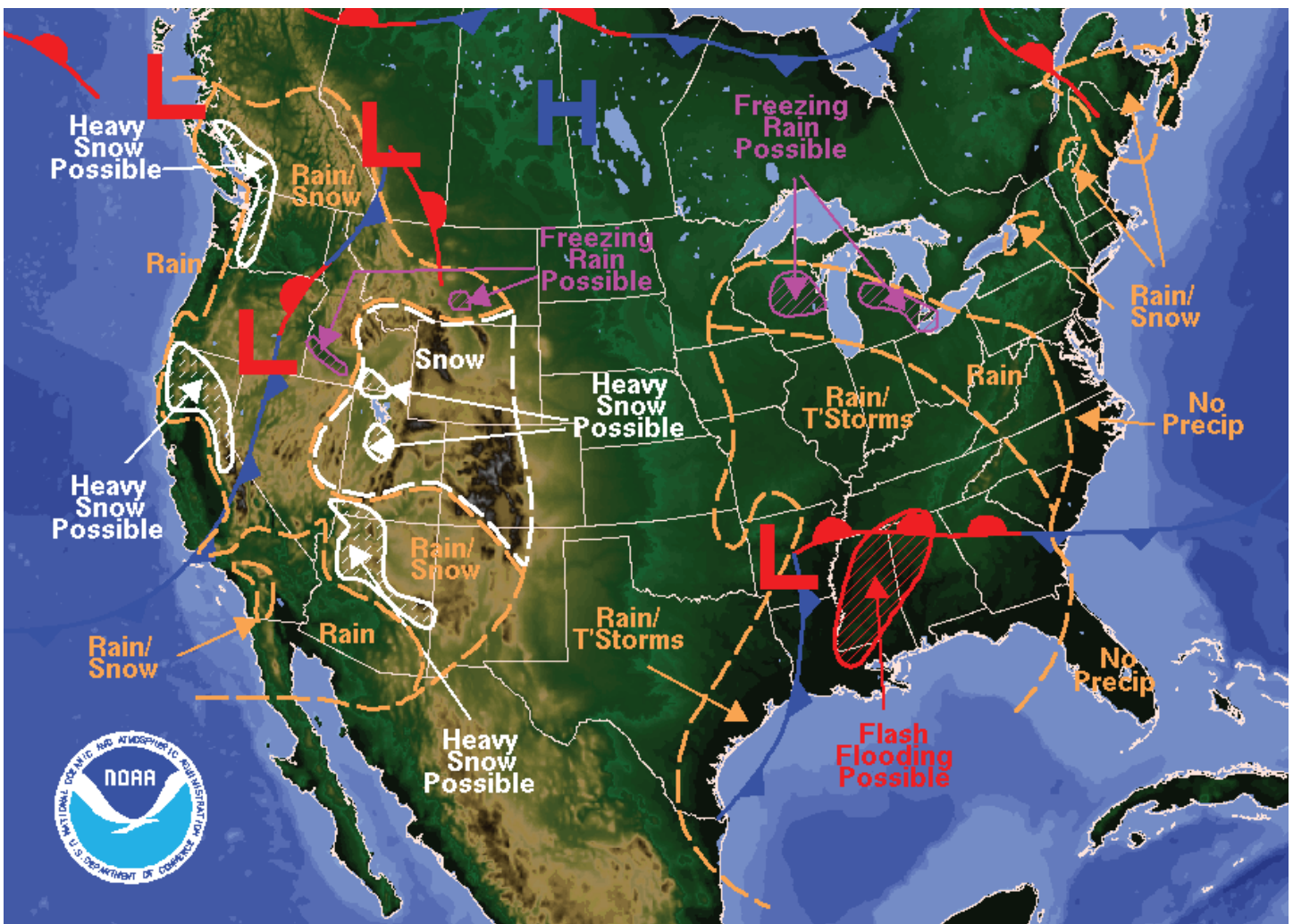
Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 34.3 F at 2:57 PM
Low Outside Temp: 18.5 F at 12:03 AM
High Gust: 23.0 Mph at 1:40 PM

Rain: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 60° in 1921
Record Low: -36 in 1943
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.31
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.31
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:22 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:06 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Thu, Jan 19, 2017, issued 4:57 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



YES, BUT DOES IT WORK?

A well-recognized inventor called his closest friends together to unveil the new electric motor he had just finished. He stood in front of the group with his new product displayed on an elegant black velvet tablecloth highlighted by a spot light.

"Gentlemen," he said in a voice that exposed his pride, "this is my most recent invention – a newly designed electric motor. What do you think of it?"

"Put it to work," said one of the engineers, "I can't tell a thing about it until I see it in action."

If we say that we are Christ's disciples then others will recognize us as His disciples when they see us "in action." In writing to the Ephesians, Paul said that we are to be "careful how you live...Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Do not act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what God wants you to do."

When Paul referred to "these evil days" he was emphasizing the urgency of presenting the Gospel message. Then, as now, "evil" has penetrated society in such a powerful manner that it is difficult to see good or goodness in the way so many Christians behave. What was once avoided as "unbecoming for Christians" has now become accepted as appropriate by many who consider themselves as His disciples.

As the engineer said, "Put it" (our faith) "to work."

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to be aware of our witness in this world and to "understand" how we ought to live as Your disciples in this fallen, sin-filled world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Ephesians 5:15-20 Be very careful, then, how you live...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

News from the Associated Press

Owens, Anderson power Oral Roberts past South Dakota, 90-80

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Albert Owens and Aaron Anderson combined to score 41 points and Oral Roberts turned away visiting South Dakota 90-80 in a Summit League battle Wednesday night.

Oral Roberts trailed by three points at intermission, but Anderson tied the game on a layup with 13:25 left, then gave the Golden Eagles the lead with his three-point play with 13:07 left, 61-58, as part of a 16-0 run. Anderson also added a 3-pointer to help fuel the run.

Owens scored 21 points and Anderson added 20 and grabbed 10 rebounds for Oral Roberts (6-14, 2-4), which shot 48.3 percent from the field (29 of 60), including 8 of 17 (47.1 percent) from 3-point range.

Matt Mooney scored 24 points for South Dakota (13-9, 4-3), with Trey Dickerson adding 17 and Trey Burch-Manning contributing another 15.

The Coyotes shot 29 of 60 from the field, but were 5 of 19 from long range.

IUPUI beats South Dakota State 85-83 in OT

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Darell Combs scored 18 points, including the final four in overtime, to give IUPUI an 85-83 win over South Dakota State on Wednesday night.

In overtime, the teams paced each other early on; then Combs made a layup to tie it at 83 with 1:54 to play, and sank a jumper at the buzzer to win it for the Jaguars (9-11, 3-3 Summit League).

Ron Patterson led the team with 19 points, Kellon Thomas had 11 and Matt O'Leary had 10 points and a team-high seven rebounds.

Thomas sank a layup to put IUPUI on top 78-77 with 14 seconds remaining in regulation but an Evan Hall foul sent South Dakota State's Chris Howell to the line where he made the second, tying the game at 78.

Michael Orris scored a career-high 20 points for the Jackrabbits (8-13, 1-5) who have lost four straight.

S. Dakota House to examine lawmaker's conduct with interns

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House decided Wednesday to investigate a Republican representative who said he had sexual contact with interns during the past two legislative sessions.

Lawmakers voted to form a select committee on discipline and expulsion to investigate the conduct of state Rep. Mathew Wollmann. House Majority Leader Lee Qualm said on the House floor that Wollmann told him he had consensual sexual contact with an intern in 2015 and 2016.

Wollmann told reporters after the vote that it occurred with two different interns, both over 21. He said he understood his actions were unacceptable and he would accept any punishment.

"I've tarnished the system, our title and this body as well as my name," Wollmann said. "This is the most difficult message that I could ever fathom giving, but tomorrow's a new day, and I just ask for forgiveness and I apologize for my actions."

When asked if he viewed his actions as sexual harassment, Wollmann said he felt the conduct was with consenting adults. But he said they were "employed by the state of South Dakota, so I understand completely how it could be perceived or seen as unprofessional and unbecoming of a legislator."

The select committee will have nine members: five Republicans and four Democrats. Lawmakers could decide to expel, censure, discipline or exonerate Wollmann.

The 26-year-old Wollmann, of Madison, was first elected to the House in 2014. He previously served in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Wollmann said he decided to come forward after he was approached Tuesday by a television station and asked about the situation. Qualm said Wollmann discussed the issue with him and in the House Republican caucus.

Qualm said he was first informed and started looking into the process of what lawmakers should do after

an email in recent days from Republican Sen. Stace Nelson.

A legislative committee last week voted down a joint legislative rules change proposed by Nelson that would have explicitly barred legislators from sexual contact with interns and pages. At least one lawmaker said he felt existing rules and the legislative code of conduct were sufficient. They prohibit sexual harassment and call on lawmakers in general to maintain "the highest of moral and ethical standards." Nelson said Wednesday that he intends to push again for a rule change.

Qualm didn't say whether he believes Wollmann violated House rules.

"I have my opinion, obviously, but we need to let it run through the process," Qualm said. "That's why we set up the committee."

Indian activist Peltier's supporters hope for clemency

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Supporters of American Indian activist Leonard Peltier, who has spent most of his life in prison in the killing of two FBI agents in South Dakota in 1975, hope President Barack Obama will grant him clemency and shorten his sentence to the four decades he has already served before Obama leaves office Friday.

Among those supporting Peltier's last-ditch bid for freedom is Pope Francis, who wrote to the White House on Tuesday, Peltier's attorney, Martin Garbus, said Wednesday.

"We'll see if that has any effect," Garbus said. "We have not had a denial of the clemency application."

The White House declined to comment on deliberations about clemency for Peltier or most people who have sought it in the closing days of his administration. Peltier was not on the list of 273 people granted commutations or pardons Tuesday. The White House has said Obama would grant more commutations Thursday, though officials said those would focus on drug offenders and would not likely include any other famous names.

Peltier's supporters argue he was wrongly convicted in the killings of FBI agents Jack Coler and Ronald Williams during a shootout on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation on June 26, 1975. He has exhausted his appeals and his requests for parole have been denied. The FBI maintains he is guilty, leaving presidential clemency as his last hope. Peltier's supporters presume he has no chance after Donald Trump becomes president.

Now 72, Peltier is incarcerated at the federal prison in Coleman, Florida. The International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee says he's in poor health.

"If the president doesn't grant clemency, he's condemning him to death in prison," said former U.S. Attorney James Reynolds, who oversaw post-trial actions in the case following Peltier's conviction in 1977 and wrote to Obama last year.

Peltier was a leader of the American Indian Movement, which grabbed headlines in 1973 when it took over the village of Wounded Knee on the reservation, leading to a 71-day standoff with federal agents. Tensions between AIM and the government remained high for years, proving the backdrop for the fatal confrontation, where both agents were shot in the head at close range. Peltier was sentenced to two consecutive life terms.

Online:

International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee: <http://www.whoisleonardpeltier.info>

FBI summary of the Peltier case: <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/resmurs-case-reservation-murders>

Clerk killed in Rapid City robbery identified

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified a gas station clerk stabbed to death during an apparent robbery in Rapid City.

Police say 45-year-old Kasie Lord, of Rapid City, died early Wednesday morning at Rapid City Regions Hospital after being stabbed several times.

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A 19-year-old man and a 17-year-old boy were arrested. Formal charges were pending. Police said the suspects were trying to walk out of a Loaf N' Jug with stolen beer around 4:45 a.m. when Lord followed them out.

Police Chief Karl Jegeris says she was "brutally stabbed and left to die."

Sioux Falls woman sentenced to 25 years in foster son death

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls woman has been sentenced to 25 years in prison in the death of her 2-year-old foster son.

A Minnehaha County judge gave 32-year-old Mary Beth Jennewein the maximum sentence Wednesday. Jennewein pleaded guilty in October to aggravated battery of an infant, and prosecutors dropped a second-degree murder charge and alternate counts of manslaughter.

Miles Stead was taken off life support in January 2016 after suffering a traumatic brain injury. The boy originally had been taken to the hospital for a breathing problem, but a radiologist detected a skull fracture.

KELO-TV (<http://bit.ly/2jp6nw8>) reports before the sentencing, the boy's biological family and friends marched for justice in his name.

Information from: KELO-TV, <http://www.keloland.com>

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, Jan. 15

Amazon's decision benefits all S.D. residents

On Tuesday, Gov. Dugaard hailed the decision by online retail giant Amazon to begin collecting sales taxes on purchases made by South Dakotans. By Tuesday evening, more than a few state residents made it clear they did not share the governor's enthusiasm for the news.

Some even went so far as to cry "foul" when they learned that a loophole created by a 1992 Supreme Court decision will be closed on Feb. 1 in the state. The decision in the Quill Corps. v. North Dakota case meant that online companies were not required to collect sales tax in states where they had no physical presence.

Clearly, a lot has changed since 1992 when the digital economy was in its infancy. In fact, it wasn't until 1994 that Amazon emerged as an online bookseller. Today, the company has 180,000 employees and plans to add another 100,000 over the next 18 months as it is on its way to becoming the second largest employer in the nation after Wal-Mart.

But Amazon's role in changing the retail landscape is hardly a secret. Many if not most of us have shopped on the company's website, which offers an endless array of merchandise to purchase. As an added bonus, South Dakotans have been able to skip paying sales tax when they made a purchase from Amazon even though there is a state law that says they are obligated to pay up.

The decision to circumvent that law, meanwhile, has cost the state millions in tax revenue, money that otherwise would have been collected if the products were purchased at a store in South Dakota.

The decline in sales tax revenue due to the internet economy is especially harmful to a state like South Dakota that does not have a state income tax, a corporate tax, and an inheritance tax. As a result, a decline in sales tax revenue will eventually have a huge impact on even basic government services like public safety and education.

In addition, the now antiquated Supreme Court ruling gave an unfair competitive advantage over local stores and retailers that not only collect sales tax but pay property taxes, employ local residents and in many cases re-invest into the community.

It's also important to note that Amazon is not the only online retail business that has agreed to collect sales taxes on items purchased by South Dakotans. As a result of a law passed last year in the Legislature that required certain online companies to collect the sales tax more than 100 businesses have started

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doing so, according to the governor.

The collection of sales tax should not be controversial. Everyone needs to pay their fair share or we all could suffer the consequences in the long run.

American News, Aberdeen, Jan. 18

Signals softly sound for better times for SD economy

Each state government has star performers when it comes to generating revenue.

In Minnesota, it is state income taxes. In North Dakota, it is oil and gas industry taxes.

In South Dakota, it is sales taxes. The state gets about \$1 billion of its \$1.6 billion in revenue from sales taxes.

State sales taxes are lagging in South Dakota. Revenues are likely to finish \$26 million below the estimate for the current fiscal budget year that runs through June 30, 2017.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard and state officials are working on the problem. In true Daugaard fashion of cautiousness and conservatism, the governor Monday told the American News editorial board he thinks things may slowly start to turn for the better.

Based on his track record, we took the governor's message as cautiously status quo rather than cautiously optimistic.

Wrapping up his next-to-last year as governor, Daugaard and his way of "promising less and delivering more" is just what this state needed at times during his two terms and what will be eight years in 2018.

On Monday morning, Daugaard talked about the state's new written contract with online retail giant Amazon to begin collecting state and local sales taxes on purchases in South Dakota. But how much it will help is up in the air until the state has a year's worth of history of the collections.

Amazon will begin voluntarily collecting state and local sales taxes Feb. 1 and will remit them starting in late March, Daugaard said.

This won't solve the state's lagging sales tax problems, but it is certainly a step in the right direction. The governor said statistics show Amazon has about a 30 percent share of the online retail market.

However, since Amazon will not share its history of sales numbers in South Dakota, the full impact won't begin to reveal itself until the state has 12 months of collections under its belt. The state also has been asking other online retailers to collect state and local sales taxes, and more than 100 have agreed to do so, Daugaard said.

State officials and South Dakota business owners hope more online companies will volunteer to begin collections as well. That will help level the playing field for competing South Dakota businesses who are sometimes at a 6.5 percent pricing disadvantage right out of the gate when they collect local and state sales taxes to purchases.

But there are some big-company holdouts on volunteer collections such as eBay, Wayfair, Newegg and others. Such companies can stand behind a 1992 U.S. Supreme Court decision that bans states from forcing out-of-state retailers to collect taxes if they don't have a physical presence in the state.

Daugaard hopes that will be an overturned Supreme Court decision in the future.

The governor also said some of the state's leading historical indicators are showing signs that the downward sales tax trend may turn around. One such indicator is non-farm employment.

"Since I've been governor, we have never had a year, with maybe one exception, where we have had a bunch of consecutive months (this year) where non-farm employment growth has been over 2 percent ... That is very unusual. You have to go back to 2006 to find that kind of non-farm employment growth."

Another leading indicator, non-farm income, has been strong as well. "So our economists believe that we will see some strengthening of our sales tax figures even though they have been weak so far," Daugaard said.

The governor also said there might be indications signaling good news eventually for the all-important state farm economy that has been slumping: Inventories of some farm goods have been going down, which usually creates a demand. Normally when there is a demand, prices increase.

The governor said current prices for some farm products are hovering around 2010 levels. But he said

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when prices later soared — like \$8 per bushel corn in 2012 — some farmers used the good times to pay down their operating debt and strengthen their balance sheets “until the good times return, and hopefully they will.”

The governor said in his talks with ag bankers, there are no major alarms going off. “There is an understanding in the ag community, that (these hard times) happen from time to time.”

The Daily Republic, Mitchell, Jan. 17

Self-assess screen time for children

Are parents today allowing tablets and TVs to raise their children?

Perhaps some are, and we hope those people take notice of a new recommendation released by the American Academy of Pediatrics that show the acceptable amount of screen time for young children.

Late last year, the American Academy of Pediatrics explained children younger than 18 months should not spend any time in front of a tablet, TV or smartphone. The recommendation went on to say that children 18- to 24-months-of-age should only spend time watching high quality programs with their parents, and media usage for children 2 to 5 years old should be an hour or less per day.

In today’s ever-advancing technological world, we’re worried that parents aren’t watching their children grow up. Rather, many parents are watching their young children bury their faces in iPads, computer screens and televisions.

There’s no doubt programs like Sesame Street and shows made by Disney can help the development of a young child. In fact, if parents choose to let their children spend time on a tablet or in front of the TV, we hope programs like those are the ones of choice.

But rather than banking on Elmo and Mickey Mouse to teach your child colors and shapes, here’s a thought: Spend some time with your kid.

Especially true is spending time reading to them. It’s widely accepted that reading aloud is the single most important activity leading to language development and promotes early literacy skills.

What kid doesn’t like coloring? Show us a child who doesn’t want to play with blocks. Expand your child’s imagination.

Certainly we’re not saying that screens are bad for children — there’s definitely educational value that comes from technology. And we want our children to keep up with the advances. It really is amazing to see how so many children 2 years old and younger can efficiently operate a tablet and the apps on it.

Instead, we’re recognizing a much-needed study done by the American Academy of Pediatrics and hoping parents utilize the recommendation. Children, if left alone, will stare at screens for hours on end.

That’s why we hope parents, at the very least, self-assess how much time they’re allowing their children to spend on tablets, iPads and other screens.

There’s so much more for children to do.

State officials hope ruling moves case to US Supreme Court

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota officials are optimistic that a 1992 Supreme Court ruling saying sales taxes can’t be collected from companies not physically present in the state can be overturned.

The Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2jZO0wS>) reports District Court Judge Roberto Lange ordered on Tuesday that a state-filed lawsuit requiring four out-of-state internet companies remit sales taxes to the South Dakota Department of Revenue be heard in state court. The order follows a legislative passage of a bill last year requiring some out-of-state internet companies to remit sales taxes on purchases in South Dakota.

The lawsuit was filed in state court against Wayfair, Inc. of Boston; Systemax, Inc. of Port Washington, New York; Overstock.com, Inc. of Salt Lake City; and Newegg, Inc. of City of Industry, California. But the companies asked Lange to move the proceedings to federal court, arguing that it belonged there because the issue dealt with a Supreme Court ruling and the Commerce Clause.

The state argued state court was the proper jurisdiction for a state tax issue, and Lange agreed.

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Gov. Dennis Daugaard's chief of staff, Tony Venhuizen, said that the administration was pleased with the ruling but that it didn't have any further comment on pending litigation.

Earlier this month, Daugaard announced that online retail giant Amazon agreed to begin collecting state and local sales taxes on purchases in South Dakota.

Lange's ruling could move the case more quickly to the U.S. Supreme Court, which would give the state an opportunity to overturn the 1992 ruling. Still, the U.S. Supreme Court only takes a small number of cases each year, and an even fewer percentage are heard from state courts, said Jonathan Van Patten, a law professor at the University of South Dakota School of Law.

The state has at least one thing in its favor. Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in a recent Supreme Court opinion about his desire to re-evaluate the 1992 decision, noting the evolution of consumer buying habits in the age of the internet.

"It's got a chance, particularly if one of the justices has signaled his interest in revisiting the issue," Van Patten said.

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

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

Senate panel passes bills to prevent prescription drug abuse

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A bill that would require people who prescribe or dispense controlled substances to register with South Dakota's prescription drug monitoring program advanced easily Wednesday through a Senate panel as part of a package of measures meant to prevent opiate abuse.

The Senate Health and Human Services Committee voted unanimously to approve the bill, which also would require pharmacists to report daily, rather than weekly, about the prescriptions for controlled substances they've dispensed.

Republican Sen. Jim White, who sponsored the measures, said the goal is to get providers that prescribe opioids to become members of the program. Right now, 60 percent of prescribers and 90 percent of pharmacists are registered, said Kari Shanard-Koenders, executive director of the South Dakota Board of Pharmacy.

The program was established in 2010 to improve patient care by giving doctors and pharmacists access to a drug-dispensing history for the patients they treat. The monitoring program works as a "key tool" to help curb drug abuse, Department of Health Secretary Kim Malsam-Rysdon said, adding that officials want to continuously improve the program and make it easier for prescribers to use.

"We can have the best things in the world, and if we don't use them, they're not all that valuable," Malsam-Rysdon said.

The proposals debated Wednesday came from a legislative study committee that examined opioid and methamphetamine abuse. In 2015, there were 710,000 prescriptions written in South Dakota for opioids, which totaled over 49 million pills, according the study committee's final report.

A second bill sent to the chamber's floor would require the Board of Pharmacy to report annually to lawmakers the number of opioid prescriptions in South Dakota from the past three years and any changes made to the drug monitoring program.

Lawmakers on the committee tabled two bills, including one that would have required prescribers to review patients' drug records through the program before handing out prescriptions for controlled substances.

Chris Dietrich, a doctor who represented the South Dakota State Medical Association on a different state prescription opioid abuse group, said that making prescribers review the patient records would be incredibly onerous without fully solving drug abuse problems. He also said the requirement would take time away from patient interaction, teaching students and working and communicating with staff.

Drone registration exemption flies through Senate committee

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota drone enthusiasts may be able to skip some expense and paperwork under a bill that flew through its first legislative test.

The Senate Transportation Committee voted unanimously Wednesday to send to the full chamber a bill that would exempt some unmanned aircraft from state registration requirements.

The measure introduced at the request of the state Department of Transportation would excuse the owners of drones weighing less than 55 pounds from being required to register them as aircraft.

Department Secretary Darin Bergquist says that would save drone owners an original registration tax of 4 percent of the purchase price and a \$25 annual registration fee.

He says drones currently must be registered with the Federal Aviation Administration. Bergquist says some estimates say there are up to 6,000 drones in South Dakota.

Mother, missing children could be in Black Hills

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Federal authorities say two children taken by their non-custodial mother in Wisconsin are thought to be in the Black Hills area.

U.S. marshals say the mother and children could be camping in a remote area and extreme weather conditions could be difficult to deal with.

Officials say Cathy Brown took the children — 9-year-old Dalton Brown and 11-year-old Averie Brown —

from Antigo, Wisconsin last month.

The Marshals Service says Brown is wanted by the state of Wisconsin for interfering with a custody order, a felony charge. Authorities say another adult, Amanda Hull, also known as Amy Clark, may be with Brown and the children.

The Argus Leader says (<http://argusne.ws/2jZym4A>) they are most likely driving a 2001 red Chevy Silverado pickup with a Wisconsin license plate of LV5652.

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

Former President George H.W. Bush and wife hospitalized

By MICHAEL GRACZYK, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Former President George H.W. Bush and his wife, Barbara, remain hospitalized in Houston, where he was in intensive care for pneumonia and she was being watched after complaining of fatigue and coughing.

The 92-year-old former president went into the ICU on Wednesday and underwent a procedure “to protect and clear his airway that required sedation,” family spokesman Jim McGrath said in a statement.

Bush was stable and resting comfortably at Houston Methodist Hospital, McGrath said.

The 41st president was placed in the ICU to address “an acute respiratory problem stemming from pneumonia,” McGrath said. He later told The Associated Press that doctors were happy with how the procedure went. Bush was first admitted to the hospital Saturday for shortness of breath.

“I don’t think there’s a whole lot of money to be gained betting against George Bush,” McGrath said. “We’re just kind of in a wait-and-see mode.”

McGrath said Barbara Bush, who is 91, had not been feeling well for a couple of weeks and decided “to take it out of committee and have the experts check it out.” He described the move as precautionary.

Physicians initially believed the former president would be released later this week following several days of treatment, but his stay has been extended, McGrath said. There is no timetable for his release.

Doctors want to see how the former first lady responds to treatment before allowing her to return home, he said.

The Bushes, who were married Jan. 6, 1945, have had the longest marriage of any presidential couple in American history. At the time of their wedding, he was a young naval aviator. She had been a student at Smith College.

After World War II, the pair moved to the Texas oil patch to seek their fortune and raise a family. It was there that George Bush began his political career, representing Houston for two terms in Congress in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Bush, who served as president from 1989 to 1993, has a form of Parkinson’s disease and uses a motorized scooter or a wheelchair for mobility. He was hospitalized in 2015 in Maine after falling at his summer home and breaking a bone in his neck. He was also hospitalized in Houston the previous December for about a week for shortness of breath. He spent Christmas 2012 in intensive care for a bronchitis-related cough and other issues.

Despite his loss of mobility, Bush celebrated his 90th birthday by making a tandem parachute jump in Kennebunkport, Maine. Last summer, Bush led a group of 40 wounded warriors on a fishing trip at the helm of his speedboat, three days after his 92nd birthday celebration.

Bush’s office announced earlier this month that the couple would not attend Donald Trump’s inauguration because of the former president’s age and health.

“My doctor says if I sit outside in January, it likely will put me six feet under. Same for Barbara. So I guess we’re stuck in Texas,” Bush wrote in a letter to Trump.

His son George W. Bush, the 43rd president, still expects to attend the inauguration and does not plan to travel to Houston, spokesman Freddy Ford said.

Trump and President Barack Obama sent their well wishes — via Twitter and a news conference respectively. Former President Bill Clinton also tweeted: “41 and Barbara — thinking about you both and sending wishes for a speedy recovery. Love, 42.”

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George Herbert Walker Bush, born June 12, 1924, in Milton, Massachusetts, also served as CIA director and Ronald Reagan's vice president.

George W. Bush was elected president in 2000 and served two terms. Another son, Jeb, served as Florida governor and made an unsuccessful bid for the GOP nomination in 2016. Only one other U.S. president, John Adams, had a son who also became president.

Bonds, Clemens making slow gains with changing electorate

By NOAH TRISTER, AP Baseball Writer

Hall of Fame voters are still sharply divided on Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens.

The electorate is changing, however, and that could be good news for both.

Bonds and Clemens inched past the 50-percent mark for the first time Wednesday, each appearing on about 54 percent of ballots cast by the Baseball Writers' Association of America. For a fifth straight year, Bonds and Clemens fell short of the 75 percent needed for induction, but their support is slowly climbing.

Jeff Bagwell, Tim Lincecum and Ivan Rodriguez were elected to the Hall on Wednesday.

Bonds and Clemens remain on the outside looking in because of drug suspicions, but they could continue to gain ground as more new voters are welcomed into the process.

"I think, just generationally, people in their 20s and 30s look at this different than people in their 50s and 60s," said Sam Mellinger of the Kansas City Star, a first-time voter who supported Bonds and Clemens. "Maybe we're missing something — I'm not one of these people that thinks, like, I'm right and they're wrong. It's just different viewpoints."

A writer can receive a Hall of Fame vote when he or she has been an active member of the BBWAA for 10 consecutive years, so newcomers are always on the way. In 2015, the Hall of Fame eliminated voters who had been inactive for more than 10 years — a move that further boosted the influence of newer voters.

The closest thing to a Hall of Fame exit poll is Ryan Thibodaux's online vote tracker, which has charted over half the ballots from this year's election. Of the 14 first-time voters identified on the site as of Wednesday night, 13 supported Bonds and Clemens.

One of those first-time voters was Mike Harrington of The Buffalo News, who said he supported Bonds after former Commissioner Bud Selig was elected as part of this class by a veterans committee. Selig presided over the era in which drug suspicion became so rampant.

"The last few years in my Sunday column in The Buffalo News, I refused to use Barry Bonds' name. In my column, it became kind of a trademark. I just referred to him as No. 25," Harrington said. "So now people see my article in The Buffalo News — 'Wait a minute, how did you vote for Bonds and Clemens?' I explained in my column a couple weeks ago: To me, I felt, the Bud Selig thing was a tipping point."

Bonds and Clemens are back on the ballot next year, along with newcomers such as Chipper Jones, Jim Thome, Andruw Jones, Scott Rolen, Johan Santana and Omar Vizquel. Here are a few more things to watch:

PUBLIC BALLOTS

The BBWAA voted to release each voter's Hall of Fame choices to the public, starting next year. That change will add transparency to the process, although there are some concerns about groupthink and peer pressure.

"I'm very conflicted about this," Mellinger said. "I applaud the reasons that they are public. We are a profession that demands transparency in others, so why shouldn't we have the same here? I get all that. I can't argue against any of that. The part that I'm uncomfortable with is: I hope that people still vote their hearts and their minds and don't change based on, you know, 'I don't want to get ripped on Twitter.'"

SABERMETRIC FAVORITES

Raines had plenty of support in sabermetric circles.

"You've got these new stats. You've got WAR (wins above replacement). You've got all this stuff," Raines said. "Back in the day, when you looked at a Hall of Famer, you looked at 500 home runs, 300 wins and 3,000 hits, and a lot of times if you didn't reach those criteria, it was kind of hard for anyone to kind of look at you as a Hall of Famer. But I think the way the game has changed today, the way they look at the

stats and everything, it has changed.”

The next beneficiary of modern stats could be Mike Mussina, who achieved 51.8-percent approval this year. Mussina never won a Cy Young Award, but according to Baseball-Reference.com, his career WAR is comparable to that of Nolan Ryan and Bob Gibson.

LOGJAM

Nearly half of this year’s 442 voters used the maximum 10 slots on their ballots, and although three people were elected, players like Trevor Hoffman (74.0 percent) and Vladimir Guerrero (71.7) fell just short, meaning they’ll be back to take up votes again next year. With some credible new candidates eligible in 2018, the 10-player limit could come into play for quite a few voters.

Lynn Henning of The Detroit News has abstained from voting at all when he’s felt there were more than 10 Hall-worthy players. He didn’t have that problem this year, but it could happen again.

“The 10-ballot restriction is silly, it’s perverse, it’s unjust, it’s convoluted. It’s a complete affront to players who deserve recognition, when they’ve earned recognition and are otherwise screened out because of some arbitrary adherence to this number 10,” Henning said. “I think it’s the most outlandishly preposterous restriction I’ve ever been exposed to in the realm of professional voting.”

SPECIALISTS

One challenge Hall voters now face is evaluating players who had more specialized roles — like designated hitters and closers.

“It’s easy to find context for a Vladimir Guerrero or a Mike Mussina because there are tons of outfielders in the Hall of Fame, there are tons of starting pitchers in the Hall of Fame,” said Ryan Fagan of Sporting News. “Defining the context for a DH or for a relief pitcher, that’s more challenging, because there aren’t a lot of guys like that in there.”

Fagan supported Edgar Martinez, a DH, but did not vote for closers Hoffman, Billy Wagner and Lee Smith. None of those four made it in. All but Smith will be on the ballot again in 2018.

Follow Noah Trister at www.Twitter.com/noahtrister

Collapse of burning Tehran high-rise kills 30 firefighters

By AMIR VAHDAT and NASSER KARIMI, Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — A high-rise building in Tehran engulfed by a fire collapsed on Thursday, killing at least 30 firefighters and injuring some 75 people, state media reported.

The disaster struck the Plasco building, an iconic structure in central Tehran just north of the capital’s sprawling bazaar. Firefighters, soldiers and other emergency responders dug through the rubble, looking for survivors.

Iranian authorities did not immediately release definitive casualty figures, which is common in unfolding disasters.

Iran’s state-run Press TV announced the firefighters’ deaths, without giving a source for the information. Local Iranian state television said 30 civilians were injured in the disaster, while the state-run IRNA news agency said 45 firefighters had been injured.

Firefighters battled the blaze for several hours before the collapse. The fire appeared to be the most intense in the building’s upper floors before the collapse. Those floors were home to garment workshops where tailors cook for themselves and use old kerosene heaters for warmth in winter.

Police tried to keep out shopkeepers and others wanting to rush back in to collect their valuables.

Tehran’s mayor, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, said there were “no ordinary civilians” trapped under the rubble. However, witnesses said some people had slipped through the police cordon and gone back into the building.

IRNA reported that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani ordered Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli to investigate and report the cause of the incident as soon as possible.

He also ordered the ministry to take care for the injured and take immediate action to compensate for those affected by the disaster.

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The building came down in a matter of seconds, shown live on state television, which had begun an interview with a journalist at the scene. A side of the building came down first, tumbling perilously close to a firefighter perched on a ladder and spraying water on the blaze.

A thick plume of brown smoke rose over the site after the collapse. Onlookers wailed in grief.

Among those watching the disaster unfold was Masoumeh Kazemi who said she rushed to the building as her two sons and a brother had jobs in the garment workshops occupying the upper floors of the high-rise.

"I do not know where they are now," Kazemi said, crying.

In a nearby intersection, Abbas Nikkhoo stood with tears in his eyes.

"My nephew was working in a workshop there," he said. "He has been living with me since moving to Tehran last year from the north of the country in hopes of finding a job."

Jalal Maleki, a fire department spokesman, earlier told Iranian state television that 10 firehouses responded to the blaze, which was first reported around 8 a.m.

The Iranian military sent units to help with the disaster, state television reported.

Several embassies are located near the building. Turkey's state-run news agency, reporting from Tehran, said the Turkish Embassy was evacuated as a precaution, though it sustained no damage in the collapse.

The Plasco building was an iconic presence on the Tehran skyline.

The 17-story tower was built in the early 1960s by Iranian Jewish businessman Habib Elghanian and named after his plastics manufacturing company. It was the tallest building in the city at the time of its construction.

Elghanian was tried on charges that included espionage and executed in the months after the 1979 Islamic Revolution that brought the current ruling system to power — a move that prompted many members of the country's longstanding Jewish community to flee.

The tower is attached to a multistory shopping mall featuring a sky-lit atrium and a series of turquoise-colored fountains. It wasn't immediately clear if the mall was damaged.

Associated Press writers Jon Gambrell and Adam Schreck in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, contributed to this report.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. AVALANCHE BURIES HOTEL IN ITALY

The landslide in an earthquake-hit zone covers the four-star spa lodge in Abruzzo, and authorities say 30 people are missing there.

2. WHAT CARTER IS SAYING ABOUT US FORCES

The defense secretary tells AP that sending thousands more American troops into Iraq or Syria in a bid to accelerate the defeat of IS would not speed up victory.

3. WHY 'NO NEW FOREIGN DEALS' VOW IS DRAWING SCRUTINY

The Trump Organization's plans to expand its golf resort near Aberdeen, Scotland, is raising conflicts of interest concerns.

4. TREASURY PICK FACING CRITICISM OVER FORECLOSURES

Stephen Mnuchin is in the crosshairs of Democrats over his investment in a sub-prime mortgage lender.

5. IRAN: 30 FIREFIGHTERS KILLED IN COLLAPSE OF HIGH-RISE

State media reports that the blaze also injured some 75 people at the Plasco building, an iconic structure in Tehran, which is attached to a multistory shopping mall.

6. FROM IS TO GOVERNMENT CONTROL, SYRIANS LEFT WITH FEW CHOICES

Thousands of civilians in the northern part of the country are risking their lives to make the perilous journey out, paying smugglers to escape regime shelling and the extremist group.

7. IT'S THE END OF THE LINE FOR 'HOPE AND CHANGE' PRESIDENT

Eight tumultuous years at the helm of American power have come and gone as Obama faces his last day in office.

8. RED PLANET SIMULATION COMES TO HAWAII

Researchers will spend eight months isolated inside a dome on a remote volcano as part of a study of human behavior for future long-term space exploration.

9. WHO WON BIG AT PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARDS

Ellen DeGeneres wins three more trophies, becoming the winningest entertainer in the show's history.

10. DJOKOVIC STUNNED AT AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin, a wild card ranked 117th in the world, ousts the six-time champion in the second round.

30 missing in central Italy avalanche that buries hotel

By COLLEEN BARRY and NICOLE WINFIELD, Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Rescue workers were met with an eerie silence Thursday when they reached a four-star spa hotel struck by an avalanche in a mountainous earthquake-stricken region of central Italy. At least 30 people were missing, including at least two children, authorities said.

Guests at the three-story Hotel Rigopiano in the central Abruzzo region alerted emergency workers of the disaster on Wednesday, following a series of quakes in the region.

"Help, we're dying of cold," one couple wrote rescuers, according to the ANSA news agency. Another man, identified by news reports as Fabio Salzetta, sent a SMS message saying he had escaped with a maintenance worker, but that others were trapped inside.

Corriere della Sera quoted the text message as saying: "Some walls were knocked down." And: "I'm outside with a maintenance worker but you can't see anything of the hotel, there's only a wall of snow in front of me."

When rescuers on skis arrived in the early morning hours of Thursday, they found just two people alive, according to news reports. Civil protection authorities said that 30 people were missing. The ANSA news agency quoted a rescuer as saying that there were fatalities, but details weren't immediately available. Just one body was reported removed from the hotel by late morning Thursday.

One of those saved was 38-year-old Giampaolo Parete, who told rescuers he had gone outside to get something from the car, which was untouched by the avalanche, but that his wife and two children were buried inside, the news agency ANSA reported.

Rescue efforts were hampered by the large snowfall in recent days, making it difficult to clear roads for heavy vehicles and ambulances to get through.

The buried hotel was just one of several rescues underway in an area that has been pummeled by more than a meter (three feet) of snow in recent days — storms that have knocked out power and phone lines and blocked roads, isolating towns and hamlets.

Video footage from Italian financial police force GDF showed a gray-haired man being led to safety by rescuers through a path dug out of deep snow from another rescue in the region.

Snow continued to fall throughout the region, with reports of people being isolated in many places. A resident of a town in the province of Teramo, Daiana Nguyen, told SKY TG24 that three meters (about 10 feet) of snow had fallen and that people "were completely isolated."

The timing of the avalanche Wednesday and the messages remained unclear, but the hotel posted a notice on its Facebook page that its phones were down around 9 a.m. following the first of Wednesday's quakes, including one with a 5.7 magnitude. It wasn't immediately clear if the temblors triggered the avalanche.

Video shot by rescue teams showed huge piles of filthy snow and debris piled up inside corridors, stairwells and an indoor pool area, having slammed through the outer walls of the building. The audio is silent. The largest wall of snow shown was in the pool area, where plastic lounge chairs were flipped on their sides and Christmas decorations still dangled from the ceiling.

The bar area appeared flooded, with nearby cracked skylights covered with snow outside. Aerial video shot by helicopter crews showed rescue workers on top of the snow-covered hotel, digging holes down to try to get in.

The civil protection agency said that they were working to get rescue vehicles to Hotel Rigopiano through roads covered in snow, joining initial rescue efforts overnight by alpine rescue teams who went in on skis. The hotel is about 45 kilometers (30 miles) from the coastal city of Pescara, at an altitude of about 1,200 meters (3,940 feet).

An ambulance was blocked about nine kilometers (5 ½ miles) from the hotel, according to SKY, which also said that snowfall was so heavy that snow plows have had trouble clearing the road to the hotel.

The mountainous region of central Italy has been struck by a series of quakes since August that destroyed historic centers in dozens of towns and hamlets. A deadly quake in August killed nearly 300, while no one died in the strong aftershocks in October largely because population centers had already been evacuated. In the meantime, the entire region has been hit by freezing weather and buffeted by snowstorms, piling more suffering on to the hard-hit population.

People left homeless by the earlier quakes had been moved to hotels in the region, but it wasn't immediately clear if any of them were staying at Hotel Rigopiano, which is located in the Gran Sasso National Park.

On Tuesday, the hotel posted photos of the recent snowfall, calling it "a dream Tuesday. Snow is giving us spectacular scenes." It advised guests that roads were still passable but snow tires were required with chains for cars. In the hours since the report of the avalanche, Facebook users have been posting messages on the hotel's page seeking information about the hotel.

Nicole Winfield reported from Rome.

Djokovic out in 2nd-round upset loss to Istomin in Australia

By JOHN PYE, AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic won't be setting the Australian Open record for most men's titles this year, after a shocking second-round loss to wild-card entry Denis Istomin.

It was the earliest loss at a major since 2008 for six-time Australian Open champion Djokovic, who had never dropped a set to Istomin in six previous meetings.

It was destined to be a long afternoon on Rod Laver Arena for Djokovic, though, when he needed 24 serves and 16 minutes to hold in the first game on Thursday, saving six break points.

He lost the 85-minute first set in a tiebreaker, seemed to get the momentum back only for No. 117-ranked Istomin to finish stronger for a 7-6 (8), 5-7, 2-6, 7-6 (5), 6-4 win.

"All the credit to Denis for playing amazing. He deserves to win," Djokovic said. "He was the better player in the clutch moments.

"Obviously, I was not pleased with my performance overall, but I have to congratulate my opponent. Whenever he needed — he came up with a big serve, big play."

Serena Williams, who is also ranked No. 2 and is a six-time Australian Open champion, kept her chase for an Open-era record 23rd major title on track with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Lucie Safarova in a night session delayed by Djokovic's defeat.

No. 3-ranked Agnieszka Radwanska didn't last much longer than Djokovic, losing her second-round match 6-3, 6-2 to Mirjana Lucic-Baroni. Radwanska reached the semifinals here last year; Lucic-Baroni hadn't won an Australian Open match since 1998 until her first-round win this week.

Istomin had never beaten a top 10 player at a Grand Slam tournament.

"It is the biggest win for me. It means so much," Istomin said. "Now I feel I can play with these guys, and to be with them on the same level."

His only previous win in 33 matches against a top 10 player was in 2012 at Indian Wells, when he beat No. 5 David Ferrer.

Djokovic had reached the fourth round or better every year since 2007 — the year before he won his

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first Grand Slam title at Melbourne Park — and held the No. 1 ranking for 122 consecutive weeks until he was overhauled by Andy Murray last November.

“I’m not used to losing Australian Open second round,” Djokovic said. “I’ve done so well here.”

The last time he’d failed to advance beyond the second round at a major was at Wimbledon in 2008, when he was seeded third and lost to then No. 75-ranked Marat Safin, a two-time Grand Slam champion.

Rod Laver Arena wasn’t at capacity as the match extended into the scheduled night session, and Djokovic’s usually vocal Serbian fans were also not a big presence. Much of the crowd, sensing an upset, was behind Istomin in the fifth set, yelling “Come on Denis!”

When Istomin made a backhand winner down the line to break Djokovic to go up 3-2, he let out a roar and the audience stood and roared, too.

When Djokovic’s last service return floated long, the crowd leapt up and cheered.

“First of all, I feel sorry for Novak,” Istomin said, thanking his mother and coach, Klaudiya Istomina, in the crowd. “I was playing so good today. I surprised myself, as well.”

He next plays No. 30 Pablo Carreno Busta.

Third-seeded Milos Raonic shrugged off a cold and a sore throat to extend his streak of reaching the third round at all seven Australian Opens he’s contest with a 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (4) over Gilles Muller, the Sydney International champion last week. He next faces No. 25 Gilles Simon.

Brisbane International winner Grigor Dimitrov, U.S. Open semifinalist Gael Monfils, No. 11 David Goffin, No. 13 Roberto Bautista Agut, No. 18 Richard Gasquet and David Ferrer all advanced.

Ivo Karlovic followed up his tournament record 84-game first-round win with a straight sets win over wild card Andrew Whittington.

In other women’s matches, U.S. Open finalist Karolina Pliskova and No. 9 Johanna Konta carried their winning form from warmup tournaments into the third round.

Brisbane champion Pliskova beat Anna Blinkova 6-0, 6-2 and Sydney International winner Konta, a semifinalist here last year, beat Naomi Osaka to set up a third-round match against former No. 1-ranked Caroline Wozniacki.

Dominika Cibulkova beat Hsieh Su-wei and No. 14 Elena Vesnina advanced to a third-round encounter against U.S. qualifier Jennifer Brady, who saved five match points before beating Heather Watson.

Murray, a five-time Australian Open runner-up, returned to the practice court to allay concern over his ankle 14 hours tumbling to the court during his second-round win.

NASA study in Hawaii paving way for human travel to Mars

By CALEB JONES, Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A group of NASA-funded researchers are poised to enter an isolated geodesic dome on a remote Hawaii volcano to study human behavior in long-term space exploration, including a planned voyage to Mars.

The six scientists enter their new home Thursday on the Big Island’s Mauna Loa volcano for an eight-month stay.

The team will have no physical contact with people in the outside world and will work with a 20-minute delay in communications, the time it would take for an email to reach Earth from Mars.

The study will assess the psychological difficulties associated with living in isolated and confined conditions for an extended time.

The project is designed to help the U.S. space agency send humans on long space voyages including to Mars by the 2030s.

“We’re hoping to figure out how best to select individual astronauts, how to compose a crew and how to support that crew on long-duration space missions,” principal investigator Kim Binstead, a University of Hawaii science professor.

She said NASA’s timeline is realistic unless the agency is “directed to do something different by the new administration.”

Trump’s transition team did not respond to an emailed request for comment on NASA’s plan.

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Leading the crew is mission commander James Bevington, a freelance space scientist who has acted as a visiting researcher for the International Space University. The other team members include engineers, a computer scientist, a doctoral candidate and a biomedical expert.

They were selected from a group of 700 applicants that went through cognitive and personality tests as well as extensive interviews.

"When I started, my biggest fear was that we were going to be that crew that turned out like Biosphere 2, which wasn't a very pretty picture," Bevington said.

Biosphere 2 was a 1990s experimental greenhouse-like habitat in Arizona. It housed different natural ecosystems and a small crew in an effort to understand what would be needed for humans to live on other planets.

The experiment quickly spiraled out of control as the habitat failed to maintain safe levels of carbon dioxide and the crew grew discontent.

The latest HI-SEAS mission is the third round of research funded by NASA, which has dedicated over \$2 million to the Hawaii project. Previous missions focused on food requirements and crew cohesion.

"Mars is one of the best places in the solar system to look for signs of past or current life," said Binstead, adding that would be the most significant scientific discovery "of all time."

Furthermore, man-made disasters or natural catastrophes such as an asteroid hit could force a human exodus from Earth, she said. "Right now, all of our eggs for life are in one basket. I think it's a good overall strategy for us as a species to spread out further."

The researchers will wear devices around their necks that measure their moods and proximity to other team members. They'll also use virtual reality devices to simulate familiar and comforting surroundings they wouldn't have access to while living on Mars.

They will wear space suits whenever they leave the compound to conduct daily tasks including geological and mapping studies. The crew eats mostly freeze-dried foods that have a long shelf life. Some canned food and lightweight snacks are also brought in, including one of Hawaii's favorites.

"Spam gets quite popular," Binstead said.

Occasional resupply deliveries are recovered with a robot in order to maintain the crew's isolation. The 1200-square-foot simulated space home has small sleeping quarters for each member as well as a kitchen, laboratory and bathroom.

The University of Hawaii operates the facility called Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation, or HI-SEAS.

There are a number of other Mars simulation projects around the world, but the Hawaii project has been receiving federal funding for several years and is unique, the university says, because of its accessibility, weather and Mars-like geography, tucked away on a rocky, red plain below the summit of the world's largest active volcano.

Follow Hawaii correspondent Caleb Jones on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CalebAP> See more of his work here: <https://apnews.com/search/Caleb%20Jones%20Hawaii>

Ellen DeGeneres takes home 3 People's Choice Awards

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ellen DeGeneres set a record at the People's Choice Awards, becoming the winningest entertainer in the show's history.

DeGeneres picked up three trophies at Wednesday's ceremony for a career total of 20 People's Choice wins.

Other stars taking home crystal statuettes this year included Jennifer Lopez, Johnny Depp, Sofia Vergara, Kevin Hart, Melissa McCarthy and Justin Timberlake. Tyler Perry received the humanitarian award at the show, hosted by Joel McHale at the Microsoft Theatre and broadcast on CBS.

A selected list of winners follows:

Movie: "Finding Dory"

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Movie actor: Ryan Reynolds
Movie actress: Jennifer Lawrence
Action movie: "Deadpool"
Action movie actor: Robert Downey, Jr.
Action movie actress: Margot Robbie
Animated movie voice: Ellen DeGeneres, "Finding Dory"
Comedic movie actor: Kevin Hart
Comedic movie actress: Melissa McCarthy
Dramatic movie actor: Tom Hanks
Dramatic movie actress: Blake Lively
Movie icon: Johnny Depp
TV show: "Outlander"
Network TV comedy: "The Big Bang Theory"
Comedic TV actor: Jim Parsons
Comedic TV actress: Sofia Vergara
Network TV drama: "Grey's Anatomy"
TV crime drama: "Criminal Minds"
TV crime drama actor: Mark Harmon
TV crime drama actress: Jennifer Lopez
Competition TV show: "The Voice"
Daytime TV host: Ellen DeGeneres
Late night talk show host: Jimmy Fallon
Male music artist: Justin Timberlake
Female music artist: Britney Spears
Group: Fifth Harmony
Male country artist: Blake Shelton
Female country artist: Carrie Underwood
Country group: Little Big Town
Hip-hop artist: G-Eazy
R&B artist: Rihanna
Song: "Can't Fight the Feeling," Justin Timberlake
Social media celebrity: Britney Spears
Humanitarian: Tyler Perry

Trump's Treasury pick facing criticism over foreclosures

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's pick to lead the Treasury Department, Stephen Mnuchin, built his reputation and his fortune as a savvy Wall Street investor. But one of those investments has put him in the crosshairs of Democrats as he heads into his confirmation hearing Thursday: sub-prime mortgage lender IndyMac bank.

Mnuchin, who served as Trump's finance chairman during the campaign, has defended his role in the purchase of the failed bank, whose collapse in 2008 was the second biggest bank failure of the financial crisis. Mnuchin, who assembled a group to buy the bank from the government, renamed it OneWest and turned it around, selling it for a handsome profit to CIT Group Inc. in 2014.

But critics have cited the bank's foreclosure policies under Mnuchin as a prime example of the kind of Wall Street greed that Trump, the candidate, campaigned against. They planned to question Mnuchin about the foreclosures during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee.

Mnuchin has called the criticism unjustified, saying in a CNBC interview right after Trump nominated him in November that buying IndyMac was "one of the most proud aspects of my career" because his

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successful efforts to turn the bank around saved jobs. He said the foreclosures reflected the fact that the bank before he took over had accumulated the one of the worst portfolios of bad mortgage loans "in the history of time."

A group of 10 Democratic senators led by Sen. Elizabeth Warren participated in a forum Wednesday to hear testimony from some of the people who lost their homes after Mnuchin's bank foreclosed.

"OneWest was notorious for its belligerence and for its cruelty," Warren said, contending that OneWest gained a reputation as a "foreclosure machine."

Liberal groups began airing a television ad on the foreclosures seeking to bring pressure on five Republican senators, including Sens. Chuck Grassley of Iowa and Dean Heller of Nevada, who are both members of the Finance Committee, to vote against Mnuchin.

"Steven Mnuchin, the foreclosure king, made millions by taking people's homes with no regard to anything but his own bottom line," said Stephanie Taylor, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, one of the groups running the ad.

But Mnuchin's supporters include Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah. He called Mnuchin a "leader and a manager through his career, demonstrating an ability to make tough decisions and to be accountable."

Mnuchin, who as Treasury secretary would serve as the administration's chief economic spokesman, is also expected to face questions about Trump's ambitious plans to double the country's growth rate through tax cuts, reducing government regulations and boosting government spending on infrastructure projects.

Mnuchin said in November that the administration's "No. 1 priority is tax reform. This will be the largest tax change since Reagan."

Trump during the campaign also vowed to target countries including China and Mexico that he contended are pursuing unfair trade practices that have cost millions of U.S. jobs. He has said one of his first actions after taking office will be to label China a currency manipulator. It would be Mnuchin's Treasury Department that would make that finding.

While Trump campaigned against Wall Street during the campaign, attacking Hillary Clinton for the speaking fees she earned from Goldman Sachs, Mnuchin is just one of a number of former Goldman Sachs executives tapped by the president elect for top economic jobs in his administration.

Mnuchin worked at Goldman for 17 years, making partner in 1994 and overseeing the firm's mortgage trading desk before becoming chief information officer. He left Goldman in 2002 and, after running an investment fund set up by billionaire investor George Soros, he and two former Goldman colleagues set up a new hedge fund, Dune Capital Management in 2004.

Mnuchin led Dune into financing Hollywood movies including a number of blockbuster hits including "Avatar."

Even before taking office, Trump has changed the presidency

By LISA LERER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump enters the White House on Friday just as he entered the race for president: defiant, unfiltered, unbound by tradition and utterly confident in his chosen course.

In the 10 weeks since his surprise election as the nation's 45th president, Trump has violated decades of established diplomatic protocol, sent shockwaves through business boardrooms, tested long-standing ethics rules and continued his combative style of replying to any slight with a personal attack — on Twitter and in person.

Past presidents have described walking into the Oval Office for the first time as a humbling experience, one that in an instant makes clear the weight of their new role as caretaker of American democracy. Trump spent much of his transition making clear he sees things differently: Rather than change for the office, he argues, the office will change for him.

"They say it's not presidential to call up these massive leaders of business," Trump told a crowd in Indianapolis in December. That was after he negotiated a deal with an air conditioning company to keep jobs in the state, a move many economists derided as unworkable national economic policy.

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"I think it's very presidential," he declared. "And if it's not presidential, that's OK. That's OK. Because I actually like doing it."

Even before he takes the oath of office, Trump has changed the very nature of presidency, breaking conventions and upending expectations for the leader of the free world.

Advisers who've spoken with Trump say the billionaire real estate mogul and reality TV star is aware of the historic nature of his new job. He's told friends that he's drawn to the ambition of Ronald Reagan, a Republican, and John F. Kennedy, a Democrat. He's thinking of spending his first night in the White House sleeping in the Lincoln Bedroom, according to some who dined with him recently in Florida.

But Trump also views himself as a kind of "sui generis" president, beholden to no one for his success and modeling himself after no leader who's come before. Trump has said he's read no biographies of former presidents. When asked to name his personal heroes in a recent interview, he mentioned his father before replying that he didn't "like the concept of heroes."

"I don't think Trump has a great sense of the history of the White House. When you don't know your history, it's hard to fully respect the traditions," said historian Douglas Brinkley, who recently dined with Trump and other guests at his South Florida club. "This is not somebody who brags about how many history biographies he's read."

"He's somebody who brags about it as this is a big event and he's the maestro," he said.

That's a shift that thrills his supporters, who elected Trump to shake up what they see as an unresponsive and corrupt federal government in the "swamp" of Washington.

"I don't want him to change" said Iowa state Sen. Brad Zaun, one of Trump's earliest backers. "One of the reasons that I supported him is that he told it the way it was. He didn't beat around the bush. He didn't do the standard political talking points."

Trump won election with that approach, but he's yet to win over the country. His Electoral College victory was tempered by a loss in the popular vote to Democrat Hillary Clinton by nearly 3 million ballots. The protests planned for the day after his inauguration threaten to draw more people to the National Mall than his official events.

Polls over the past week show that Trump is poised to enter the White House as the least popular president in four decades. Democrats remain staunchly opposed to him, independents have not rallied behind him and even Republicans are less enthusiastic than might be expected, according to the surveys.

In his typical reaction to poll results he doesn't like, Trump dismissed them as "rigged" in a Tuesday tweet.

It's exactly that kind of tweet that worries governing experts, lawmakers and other critics, who argue that traditional practices of the presidency protect the health of the American democracy.

"With notable exceptions, we've had a political culture in which presidents largely respect a series of unwritten rules that help democracy and the rule of law flourish," said Brendan Nyhan, a professor of government at Dartmouth College. "What's striking about Trump is he flouts norms that have previously been respected by both parties on a daily basis. He calls things into question that have never been questioned before."

Since winning the election, Trump has attacked Hollywood celebrities, civil rights icons and political rivals alike. He's moved markets by going after some companies, while praising others.

He's questioned the legitimacy of American institutions — appearing to trust the word of Russian President Vladimir Putin over the intelligence agencies he'll soon oversee, engaging in personal fights with journalists as he assails the free press and questioning the results of the election, even though it put him in office.

And he's lambasted the leaders of longstanding allied nations as he questions the post-World War II international order that won the Cold War and maintained peace in Europe for generations.

For Trump supporters, that no-holds-barred style is the very reason he won their votes. But for others in the country, it's a type of leadership they've seen before and fear will spread.

They point to Maine, where a Trump-like governor has roiled the state's government with offensive statements, a combative style and little respect for the Legislature, as a warning of what the nation might expect during a Trump administration.

Gov. Paul LePage's confrontational brand of politics has made it harder to pass legislation, build political

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coalitions or even conduct the basic workings of state government, say legislators and political consultants in the traditionally centrist state. He's created rifts with would-be Republican allies, demonized the media and tightly controlled basic information. At times, he's banned the heads of state agencies from appearing before legislative committees, making state budgeting and oversight difficult.

"What I'm concerned about nationally is what we've seen up here — that the checks and balances we take for granted disappear," said Lance Dutson, a Republican political strategist who worked to get LePage elected before later speaking out against him. "There are things that are happening up here that I really thought just couldn't happen."

There are signs that Trump's actions are already changing the traditions of government in Washington, freeing lawmakers and other officials from long-respected practices of federal politics.

More than 50 House Democrats plan to boycott Trump's inauguration ceremony, an unprecedented break with the bipartisan tradition of celebrating the peaceful transfer of power. While many Democrats were furious with the outcome of the 2000 election in which Republican George W. Bush defeated Al Gore after recounts and a Supreme Court ruling, they generally attended Bush's inauguration ceremony.

"I will not celebrate a man who preaches a politics of division and hate," tweeted Keith Ellison, a Minnesota congressman who's bidding to head the Democratic National Committee.

Those who know Trump say the billionaire mogul delights in confounding establishment expectations, even as he craves approval from powerbrokers in New York and Washington.

"He was born with a chip on his shoulder, and he is very much the guy from Queens who looked across at Manhattan and envied but also to some degree hated the elites who occupied Manhattan," said Michael D'Antonio, author of "Never Enough," a Trump biography. "The way that he wants to disrupt institutions reflects this idea that the institutions haven't embraced him."

That's a style that may work better for a CEO of a family corporation — who has little oversight from corporate boards or shareholders — than a president constrained by a system of checks and balances. Former Cabinet officials say the layers of government bureaucracy, myriad regulations and intricacies of Congress will challenge Trump's style.

"A president doesn't have sweeping, universal authority. It is a very different operation than being a CEO who can fire people and hire people at will," said Kathleen Sebelius, a Democrat and former health and human services secretary. "He's never been part of any organization with a framework where institutional rules are in place."

President Barack Obama, who's offered Trump advice both publicly and privately, said he's urged the president-elect to hold onto some of the traditions of the office.

"The one thing I've said to him directly, and I would advise my Republican friends in Congress and supporters around the country, is just make sure that as we go forward certain norms, certain institutional traditions don't get eroded, because there's a reason they're in place," said Obama, in a recent interview with CBS' "60 Minutes."

But Trump's supporters say it's the institutions and Washington — and not the next president — that must change.

"Trump believes that he has a better understanding of how things work in the modern world than all of these so-called critics," said Newt Gingrich, a Trump adviser and former Republican House speaker, who has spoken with the president-elect about his presidency. "That's who he is."

"The rest of us are going to have to learn how to think through that."

Follow Lisa Lerer on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/llderer>

Carter tells AP more US troops will not fix Iraq or Syria

By **ROBERT BURNS, AP National Security Writer**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sending thousands more American troops into Iraq or Syria in a bid to accelerate the defeat of the Islamic State group would push U.S. allies to the exits, create more anti-U.S. resistance and give up the U.S. military's key advantages, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said in an Associated Press interview.

Speaking from his Pentagon office overlooking the Potomac River on Wednesday, Carter said he favors looking for ways to speed up the counter-IS campaign, which administration critics including the president-elect, Donald Trump, have called slow-footed and overly cautious.

But he outlined numerous reasons why he believes strongly in the current approach of letting local Iraqi and Syrian forces set the pace.

"If we were to take over the war in Iraq and Syria entirely ourselves, first of all, in the near term it would be entirely by ourselves, because there is no one else volunteering to do that," he said. "We could get past that. But secondly, we would risk turning people who are currently inclined to resist ISIL" or to join ranks with the coalition, "potentially into resisting us, and that would increase the strength of the enemy."

Taking over the war also would amount to "fighting on the enemy's terms, which is infantry fighting in towns in a foreign country," he said. While U.S. troops can do that, it would not leverage the U.S. military's biggest strengths, which are special operation forces, mobility, air power and intelligence-gathering technologies — "exquisite capabilities that no one else has," he said — to enable local troops to do the fighting and own the outcome.

So while he believes faster is better, "It's important that it be done in a way that victory sticks." That was a reference to avoiding a repeat of the disastrous events of 2014, when Islamic State militants swept into western and northern Iraq from Syria and grabbed control of large swaths of territory as the Iraqi army collapsed. The Obama administration was caught by surprise at the hollowness of the Iraqi army, weakened by political and ethnic strife.

The AP interview was Carter's last as defense secretary. His designated successor, retired Marine Gen. James Mattis, is expected to win easy Senate confirmation shortly after Trump is inaugurated on Friday. Carter will step down at noon on Friday.

At his confirmation hearing last week, Mattis gave only glimpses of his thinking on Iraq and Syria. When asked how his recommended way forward there would differ from the current approach, Mattis said, "You give it full resourcing to get there as rapidly as possible, and I think it's getting there as rapidly as possible is probably where it would differ from the current administration, where it would be a more accelerated campaign from what the president-elect has already called for."

Trump has not explained his plan for defeating the Islamic State militants but has sometimes suggested he would send more troops.

The U.S. war against the Islamic State group, which began in 2014, the year before Carter took office, became a major focus of his tenure, along with his efforts to modernize the Pentagon's approach to recruiting and maintaining talent. He has often said Obama was open to every suggestion for devoting more resources to the war, short of committing large numbers of combat troops.

"Early on, we were very limited by the meager intelligence we had on ISIL," he said. "That limited how many bombs we could drop, because we didn't have targets, it limited where we could conduct raids, where we could vector forces, where we could try to create opposition to ISIL."

But as increasing amounts of territory have been recaptured in both Iraq and Syria, and growing numbers of ISIL leaders have been taken off the battlefield, the amount of useful intelligence has grown, he said.

"Even if you kill a guy, you get his phone and you learn something about ISIL," he said, adding that as the military campaign achieves more successes, "more and more people come over and volunteer information; that creates yet more opportunities. So there's this virtuous circle, where the more you do, the more you have opportunity to do even more."

Carter dismissed the idea that Obama has dragged his feet in Iraq or Syria.

"Everything we have been able to identify that would accelerate the defeat of ISIL, we have done," he said. "We have not been, and we should not be, shy about asking for more" authority or resources from the president to push the military campaign harder. "I asked President Obama for more. I would encourage Jim Mattis, if he sees opportunities to accelerate, to ask for more."

One more day: Obama in his final hours in the White House

By JOSH LEDERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Eight tumultuous years at the helm of American power have come and gone, and for President Barack Obama, this is finally the end.

The president is spending his last full day at the White House on Thursday before becoming an ex-president. The big decisions and grand pronouncements are all behind him, but Obama is still in charge until President-elect Donald Trump takes the oath at noon on Friday.

The White House left Obama's schedule mostly empty for his last day, while saying he'd use the time to pack up the home he and his family have lived in for most of a decade. The only events on his public calendar were his presidential daily briefing and his final weekly lunch with Vice President Joe Biden, in the president's private dining room.

In what may be his last act as president, Obama was planning to grant one final round of clemency on Thursday, following hundreds of commutations and pardons he issued earlier in the week. Officials said the last batch would focus on nonviolent drug offenders serving lengthy prison sentences, a population Obama has long sought to assist through clemency.

Already, Obama's White House is operating with a skeleton staff. His aides have been departing in waves over the past few weeks, and by late Wednesday, only a handful were still on the job, creating an eerily quiet feeling in the normally bustling West Wing. Those still left were packing up their desks, handing in their phones and saying teary farewells to their colleagues.

In his final news conference on Wednesday, Obama sought to end his chapter in history on an optimistic note. He said despite his party's devastating losses in the election, he was confident in the country's future, and added, "this is not just a matter of 'no-drama Obama,' this is what I really believe."

"It is true that behind closed doors, I curse more than I do publicly, and sometimes I get mad and frustrated like everybody else does," Obama said. "But at my core, I think we're going to be OK. We just have to fight for it, we have to work for it and not take it for granted."

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

Roethlisberger hoping to play up to Brady's "gold standard"

By WILL GRAVES, AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Ben Roethlisberger intended for the moment to be private. The camera following him to midfield and the microphone tucked inside Tom Brady's shoulder pads ended up making that impossible.

Their brief exchange before Brady and the New England Patriots visited the Pittsburgh Steelers in October provided a snapshot into a rivalry that never was. They bro-hugged. They lamented the left knee injury that forced Roethlisberger out the lineup on that warm late fall afternoon.

And then Roethlisberger made an uncharacteristic request : a signed Brady jersey to hang on the wall in Roethlisberger's home office next to Hall of Famers Dan Marino, John Elway and Jim Kelly.

"I consider him one, if not the best of all-time," Roethlisberger said.

A group Roethlisberger does not include himself in.

Not even with as many championships as Brady's longtime friend and occasional foil Peyton Manning (two). Not even with a spot in the top 10 in just about every major statistical category out there on Roethlisberger's still growing resume. Not even with a bust in Canton one day alongside Brady and the rest of the guys whose jerseys adorn the walls of his home almost assured regardless of what happens in

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Sunday's AFC title game.

The reason is simple: rings. Brady has four, including two he earned while carving a path through the playoffs that included victories in Pittsburgh in 2001 and 2004. Roethlisberger has two, neither of which required Roethlisberger or the Steelers to take out Brady along the way.

It's why Roethlisberger just shakes his head when asked if he's part of the "gold standard" label that he so eagerly attaches to Brady.

"Not as (his) level," Roethlisberger said. "Obviously, with all the Super Bowls he has."

This weekend provides Roethlisberger his best - and maybe his last - chance to do to Brady what Brady has done to so many others over the last 16 years. Even if the last thing Roethlisberger wants to do is get pulled into the "star quarterback vs. star quarterback" narrative that fueled so many showdowns between Brady and Manning through the years.

"It's obviously bigger than the two of us," Roethlisberger said. "I know he is used to it, with the Peyton Manning and Tom thing. This is two football teams that have won championships. Us going against each other is more than just one man. We aren't playing tennis. We are going out there to play a football game with 11 guys at a time."

Maybe, but the outcome will be attached to Roethlisberger's legacy more than any other player. The list of opposing quarterbacks Roethlisberger has beaten with a trip to the Super Bowl on the line doesn't exactly roll right off the tongue: Jake Plummer, Mark Sanchez and Joe Flacco. Brady and the Patriots they are not.

The two first met in the postseason at frigid Heinz Field in the 2004 AFC championship, Roethlisberger the rookie came in a perfect 14-0 as a starter against Brady and the defending Super Bowl champions. The clinic lasted 3:06. Brady threw for 207 yards and two touchdowns while New England's defense forced Roethlisberger into three interceptions, including an 87-yard interception return by Rodney Harrison late in the first half that gave the Patriots a 21-point lead they never came close to relinquishing on their way to a third crown in four years.

"They got after me," Roethlisberger said. "They made me make some mistakes. I just realized kind of what it was going to take to get over that hump."

Roethlisberger was all of 22 at the time. And while the sting of the first defeat of his NFL career was eased the next season when the Steelers won three postseason games on the road - including an upset of Manning and the Indianapolis Colts - to help the Steelers claim their fifth Vince Lombardi Trophy, the opportunity to even things against Brady when it really mattered never materialized. At least until now, when the 34-year-old Roethlisberger and the 39-year-old Brady are "two old guys that have been playing in this game for a long time," as Roethlisberger put it.

Just not that often against each other.

Pittsburgh's lone breakthrough in Foxborough since Brady broke into the league came in 2008, a season Brady missed all but a handful of plays due to a torn ACL in his left knee. Roethlisberger has only beaten Brady twice in eight head-to-head meetings, the last a 25-17 victory in 2011 that was perhaps the last stand by the Pittsburgh defense that propelled the team to three Super Bowl appearances in six seasons.

The team Roethlisberger will lead onto the field this time around is far different. The Steelers have perhaps the best running back, wide receiver and offensive line in the league. And they have a quarterback who has largely abandoned the freewheeling "Ben being Ben" of his younger days for a far more disciplined approach.

It's a style Brady has long since mastered, and he's taken notice of Roethlisberger's evolution.

"To play at his level for as long as he has, and his style of play, has been remarkable," Brady said.

It's a sentiment Roethlisberger echoes, even if he's trying to adopt the "nameless gray faces" approach Mike Tomlin tries to attach to every opponent regardless of pedigree or star wattage. Yes, Roethlisberger wants to get the best of Brady. Badly.

He'd also say that about whoever happened to be on the other side of the field.

"You are going up to the lion's den, the dragon's lair," Roethlisberger said. "They are the dragon. We are trying to slay them. It doesn't matter who it is."

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

Were opportunities for clues from MH370 debris missed?

By KRISTEN GELINEAU, Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — Three nations shelled out around \$160 million and years' worth of work on the underwater search for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. The result: No plane. The only tangible — and arguably most important — clues into what happened to the aircraft have come courtesy of ordinary citizens, who bore the costs themselves.

The deep-sea sonar search for the vanished Boeing 777 was suspended on Tuesday after officials conceded defeat following the most expensive, complex aviation search in history.

But while search crews spent years trawling in futility through a remote patch of the Indian Ocean, people wandering along beaches thousands of kilometers (miles) away began spotting pieces of the plane that had washed ashore. Those pieces have provided crucial information to investigators and prompted some to question whether Malaysia, Australia and China — who funded the hunt for the underwater wreckage — missed key opportunities by failing to organize coastal searches for the remnants that drifted to distant shorelines.

"It would have been good to have been getting people looking for debris," said David Griffin, an Australian government oceanographer who worked on an analysis of how the debris drifted in a bid to pinpoint where the plane crashed. "I think that was a job that fell between the cracks of whose responsibility it was."

Since the plane vanished on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014, more than 20 pieces of debris confirmed or believed likely to have come from the aircraft have turned up on beaches along the east coast of Africa and on islands including Madagascar. All of the parts have been found by local residents and tourists who stumbled upon them, and by Blaine Gibson, an American amateur sleuth who launched his own, self-funded hunt for debris after working with oceanographers to estimate where bits of the plane may have ended up.

Several family members of Flight 370's passengers asked officials to launch a search along the coastlines for parts of the plane. When their pleas went unheeded, they banded together and traveled to Madagascar to encourage residents to keep an eye out for more debris. The family members, who covered all their travel expenses themselves, even offered a potential reward to anyone who found a piece of Flight 370.

Grace Nathan, a Malaysian whose mother was on board Flight 370, was among those who made the trip to Madagascar last month. She is deeply frustrated that the families felt compelled to take on the task themselves, and that the underwater search yielded nothing.

"Every single clue to date has been found by private individuals by chance," Nathan said. "Not a single piece of hard evidence has been found by the official search."

Nathan believes the governments' failure to search for coastal debris may have resulted in missed clues.

"They should have done more to initiate something like what we did," she said. "We are laypeople. We don't have the kind of reach they have, we don't have the kind of contacts that they have."

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau, which led the search for the underwater wreckage, said Thursday that it's impossible to know whether organized searches of the coastlines would have yielded more debris.

"The dynamic nature of the ocean means that items are continually being cast ashore and carried away again — a beach cannot simply be ticked off as 'searched' at a single point in time," the agency said in a statement. "What has helped significantly is the substantial public awareness since early 2016 of the possibility of debris from MH370 being washed up on beaches bounding the western Indian Ocean which has resulted in many people coming forward with finds."

Initially, experts believed that the pieces washing ashore would be virtually useless to the investigation. Too much time had passed, they argued, and ocean currents are too volatile to make it possible to trace the pieces back to their origin.

Yet the recovered parts of the plane provided valuable insight into what happened to it. They confirmed, firstly, that the aircraft went down somewhere in the Indian Ocean. Before the first part — a piece of

airplane wing known as a flaperon — was discovered on Reunion Island, farther east of Madagascar, in 2015, some people continued to insist the plane had flown north into Asia, rather than heading south. The flaperon effectively killed that theory and bolstered the investigators' interpretation of satellite data that indicated the plane had ended up somewhere along a vast arc slicing across the Indian Ocean.

A wing flap that washed up in Tanzania also gave investigators clues into what happened in the final moments of the plane's flight. No one knows why the aircraft veered so far off-course after takeoff and turned south into the Indian Ocean, though Malaysian officials have said the plane's erratic movements after takeoff were consistent with deliberate actions. Investigators operated on the theory that the plane was on autopilot in its final hours before it ran out of fuel and plummeted into the sea.

A key question was whether anyone was still at the controls when the plane hit the water, which would affect how far the plane could glide after running out of fuel. Critics who favor the theory that Capt. Zaharie Ahmad Shah hijacked the plane say he could have made a controlled ditch at sea in order to minimize debris and help the plane disappear as completely as possible.

But an analysis of the wing flap by Australian investigators suggested it had not been deployed when it hit the water. A pilot attempting a soft landing would have extended the flaps.

The flaperon and other debris also helped officials narrow down the potential search zone. Griffin, the Australian oceanographer, set replicas of the flaperon adrift in the ocean, measuring how fast they traveled and noting how much the wind influences their rate of speed. He and his team then ran computer simulations of how the aircraft parts could have drifted, giving them an idea of where they originated. Late last year, investigators coupled that drift information with a fresh analysis of other data on the plane's movements and concluded that search crews were looking in the wrong part of the Indian Ocean. The investigators recommended crews instead search an area to the north, where they now believe the plane may lie.

But Australia, Malaysia and China have nixed that idea, saying they won't relaunch the search until they have credible evidence pointing to the plane's exact location.

That decision has stunned Gibson, the American who has found MH370 debris. To him, the debris that has been found is the most credible evidence investigators have.

"Debris is the key. Debris is the main clue. Those are actually pieces of the plane," he says. "The debris is really narrowing it down better than it's ever been narrowed. ... There's no excuse for them to not go search that area."

Virginia man convicted of 2006 slaying of family is executed

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

JARRATT, Va. (AP) — A man convicted of killing a family of four, slashing their throats and setting their home ablaze after they left their front door open while preparing for a New Year's Day party in 2006, was executed Wednesday.

Ricky Gray was pronounced dead at 9:42 p.m. following a lethal injection at the Greensville Correctional Center in Jarratt. The 39-year-old inmate was put to death with the sedative midazolam, followed by rocuronium bromide to halt breathing, and potassium chloride, which stops the heart.

Gray showed no emotion as he was walked into the execution chamber wearing blue jeans and handcuffs. Asked if he had any final words, Gray responded, "Nope."

Gray was condemned to death in 2006 for the murders of 9-year-old Stella Harvey and 4-year-old sister Ruby, and sentenced to life in prison for the slaying of their parents, Bryan and Kathryn Harvey.

The family was getting ready to host friends for a chili dinner when Gray and his nephew, Ray Dandridge, were looking for a home to rob when they spotted the open door. Court records show they tied up the family in the basement and Gray slashed their throats and bashed their heads with a hammer before setting their home on fire and fleeing with a computer, a wedding ring and a basket of cookies.

The well-known family's slaying rocked Virginia's capital city and was followed by the killing of another Richmond family less than a week later. Kathryn Harvey was co-owner of a popular Richmond toy store, the World of Mirth, and Bryan Harvey was a guitarist and singer for a rock duo, House of Freaks.

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Gray also confessed to participating in the slaying of 21-year-old Ashley Baskerville, her mother Mary Baskerville-Tucker and stepfather Percyell Tucker days after the Harvey deaths, but wasn't tried in that case. Gray and Dandridge said Ashley Baskerville had served as a lookout for them during the Harvey slayings. Dandridge pleaded guilty to the Tucker-Baskerville slayings and is serving a life sentence.

Elizabeth Peiffer, an attorney for Gray, said that while his death may provide a measure of retribution for some, it also took "from the world a man trying to make amends and make life better for others."

Prison officials closed a blue curtain at 8:54 p.m., shielding Gray from view. That is typically when officials insert the IV and place heart monitors before starting the injection. The curtain remained closed for more than 30 minutes before it was opened and the lethal injection began, which Pfeiffer said was significantly longer than usual and concerning.

Lisa Kinney, a Virginia Department of Corrections spokeswoman, said she could not explain why the curtain was closed that long.

The lethal injection began around 9:28 p.m. For several minutes, Gray's appeared to be breathing heavily and snored loudly several times. At 9:33 p.m. he stopped moving.

Gray was the first Virginia inmate executed since convicted serial killer Alfredo Prieto received a lethal injection in October 2015. Just six inmates remain on Virginia's death row. No other execution dates have been set.

Virginia obtained the midazolam and potassium chloride from a compounding pharmacy whose identity is secret under a new state law.

Midazolam has come under fire after several problematic executions in other states, with critics arguing it causes inmates to suffer a painful death because it cannot reliably render them unconscious. Gray's attorneys had said the fact that the drug was obtained from a compounding pharmacy rather than a typical manufacturer magnifies the risk of problems.

But the U.S. Supreme Court narrowly upheld the use of midazolam in 2015 and the high court earlier Wednesday rejected Gray's bid to stay the execution so he could challenge the planned use of the compounded version of the drug.

Gray's attorneys had unsuccessfully appealed to Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe to spare his life, saying Gray's actions arose from drug use aimed at numbing years of sexual abuse by his older brother when he was a child. Gray says he was high on PCP at the time of the Harvey slayings and doesn't remember much.

Several death penalty opponents and some relatives of Gray held a vigil outside the prison as he was executed, the Richmond Times-Dispatch reported.

Follow Alanna Durkin Richer on Twitter at twitter.com/aedurkinricher. Her work can be found at <http://bigstory.ap.org/journalist/alanna-durkin-richer>.

AP Source: Trump picks former Ga. Gov. Perdue to lead USDA

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and RUSS BYNUM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump intends to nominate former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue to serve as agriculture secretary, according to a person familiar with the decision but not authorized to speak publicly before it is announced.

Perdue, 70, would be the first Southerner to lead the Agriculture Department in more than two decades. He comes from the small city of Bonaire in rural central Georgia, where he built businesses in grain trading and trucking.

The agriculture secretary job is the last Cabinet position for which Trump hasn't named a candidate.

Perdue is not related to or affiliated with the food company Perdue or Perdue Farms, the well-known poultry producer.

Agriculture secretaries are often from the Midwest, where corn and soybeans dominate the markets. U.S. farm policy has long been favorable to those crops, and congressional battles over massive farm bills every five years often divide along regional lines. Southerners have pushed for subsidy programs that are

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more favorable to rice and cotton, which can be more expensive to grow.

The last three agriculture secretaries were from Iowa, North Dakota and Nebraska.

Nebraska Sen. Ben Sasse said Thursday in a statement that he wants to talk to Perdue about "the unique interests of Midwest agriculture," including trade and regulatory burdens.

"Nebraskans feed the world and our agriculture secretary needs to understand what we bring to the table," Sasse said.

Many farm-state lawmakers and agriculture groups grew concerned as Trump approached his inauguration without having named an agriculture secretary candidate. Earlier Thursday, Iowa Sen. Charles Grassley tweeted that he was frustrated with the process.

"NEED Ag leader w dirt under finger nails 4farmers," he wrote.

Perdue began his political career as a Democrat in Georgia's state Legislature in the 1990s. But it was after switching his allegiance to the Republican Party that Perdue made history.

In 2002, Perdue was elected the state's first Republican governor since the end of Reconstruction more than 130 years earlier. Perdue's victory over an incumbent Democrat completed Georgia's shift to a solidly Republican state, ending generations of Democratic control of state government.

Despite the seismic political change, Perdue showed little interest in pushing big programs or signature legislation during his two terms. Instead he focused on finding ways to save money while improving customer service by state agencies — such as reducing wait times for renewing driver's licenses. He often referred to himself as Georgia's CEO.

"If I could choose my legacy it would be the epithet that he made government work," Perdue told The Associated Press in 2010 before he left office. "That's really what I've focused on. It's not some big monument."

Critics accused Perdue of failing to tackle some of Georgia's biggest problems, such as struggling public schools.

Perdue didn't rely only on his business acumen as governor. A devout Southern Baptist, he also found a place for faith in his administration. In 2007, when a withering drought gripped Georgia and neighboring states, Perdue held a prayer rally in front of the state Capitol in Atlanta to pray publicly for rain.

It was also Perdue who brought an end to Georgia's longstanding conflicts over a state flag that featured the Confederate battle emblem. The controversial flag was replaced by lawmakers under Perdue's Democratic predecessor, but the new design proved unpopular. Perdue insisted Georgia voters should pick the flag. A referendum was held in 2004, though Southern heritage groups were outraged that the options did not include the old flag with the Confederate symbol.

Under Perdue's watch, Georgia adopted tough new food-safety regulations after a deadly U.S. salmonella outbreak was traced to Georgia-made peanut butter. He moved the state office that issues water permits for irrigation and other agricultural uses from Atlanta to rural south Georgia, where it would be closer to farmers. And Perdue poured millions of state dollars into Go Fish, a program that aimed to lure bass fishing tournaments to the state.

The ex-governor, whose full name is George Ervin Perdue III, grew up in central Georgia. He attended the University of Georgia, where he played football as a walk-on and earned his doctorate in veterinary medicine. Following a stint in the Air Force, Perdue returned to Georgia and settled in Bonaire, a city of about 14,000 people.

Perdue already has family serving in Washington. His cousin, former Dollar General CEO David Perdue of Sea Island, Georgia, was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2014.

Bynum reported from Savannah, Georgia. Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick also contributed to this report.

Court denies a request to arrest Samsung's de facto head

By YOUKYUNG LEE, AP Business Writer

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A Seoul court on Thursday denied a request to arrest one of South Korea's most powerful men, the heir to the Samsung Electronics juggernaut, in a setback to prosecutors investigating an influence-peddling scandal that toppled South Korea's president.

The Seoul Central District Court said that a judge concluded that there was not enough justification to detain the 48-year-old billionaire Samsung vice chairman, Lee Jae-yong, at this stage.

The announcement, made around 5 a.m. local time, allowed Lee to return home after a long night. He had been waiting for the court's decision at a detention center south of Seoul for more than 12 hours after a court hearing the previous day.

Samsung said "the merits of this case can now be determined without the need for detention."

The decision means that Samsung avoids what could have been a stunning fall for the princeling of the country's richest family, a man groomed to lead South Korea's most successful company.

It came amid calls for caution from some business groups and newspapers worried that arresting Lee could hurt the economy because of Samsung's huge role, both economically and psychologically, in the country.

It is not uncommon in South Korea for courts to issue an arrest warrant past midnight for important or contentious cases, said Shin Jae-hwan, a spokesman for the Seoul court. The long deliberation means the judge must have agonized over the decision, he added.

Prosecutors said Lee gave 43 billion won (\$36 million) in bribes to President Park Geun-hye and Choi Soon-sil, her confidante, seeking support for a contentious merger. They also suspect him of embezzling and lying under oath during a parliamentary hearing last month.

The court's decision may hurt prosecutors' plan to expand the bribery probe to Park.

Prosecutors expressed strong disappointment and said they believe the court's decision was caused by a difference in legal views on the nature of the allegations against the Samsung heir.

Samsung and other companies told investigators that they felt forced to make donations to foundations controlled by Choi in fear of retaliatory tax investigations and other unfair government treatment, according to state prosecutors who handed over the investigation to special prosecutors.

"The court's rejection of the arrest warrant is very regrettable," Lee Kyu-chul, a spokesman for a special prosecutors' team investigating the political scandal, said. "We'll take measures to continue an investigation unwaveringly," he said, without elaborating.

South Korea's main opposition party, which spearheaded Park's impeachment, accused the court of being too lenient. "The president was impeached and Choi Soon-sil was arrested ... but Samsung is still fine," the Democratic Party said in a statement.

Lee has been serving as the de facto head of Samsung since his father suffered a heart attack in 2014. Shortly after the recalls of the Galaxy Note 7 smartphone last year, he joined the board of Samsung Electronics, the group's crown jewel.

Conglomerates like Samsung, known as chaebol, dominate South Korea's economy, jobs and investment. Samsung Electronics and its affiliated companies account for about a third of the market value in South Korea's main stock market.

Civic groups had called for Lee's arrest as a way to show that all are equal before the law.

Many were infuriated by the allegations that the government had pressured a pension fund, a major investor in Samsung, to help the Lee family's succession plan. Moon Hyung-pyo, the former health minister was indicted on Monday for allegedly pressuring pension fund officials to support the merger.

Prosecutors said Moon, who now heads the pension fund, acted on behalf of President Park, who ordered him to make sure that the Samsung merger went smoothly. They plan to summon Park to question her about the bribery allegations.

Park has been suspended from her duties since the parliament impeached her in December. She is awaiting the Constitutional Court's decision on whether her impeachment will be upheld. Choi is on trial

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for meddling in state affairs.

Educated in South Korea, Japan and the United States, Lee is the crown prince of the country's richest family, one South Koreans often liken to royalty.

His father is South Korea's richest individual whose net worth is estimated at \$14.8 billion by Forbes Magazine. The younger Lee's net worth is estimated at \$5.8 billion.

The elder Lee was convicted twice on bribery, embezzlement and other charges in 1996 and 2008, but he was never imprisoned. He received suspended jail terms and was later pardoned by the country's presidents both times.

Correspondent Hyung-jin Kim contributed to this story.

Bagwell, Raines, Ivan Rodriguez elected to Hall of Fame

By RONALD BLUM, AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Bags and Rock and Pudge are heading to Cooperstown.

After a vote that could prove to be a turning point how Steroids Era stars are viewed, Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens could be joining them in the next few years.

Jeff Bagwell, Tim Lincecum and Ivan Rodriguez were elected to baseball's Hall of Fame on Wednesday, earning the honor as Trevor Hoffman and Vladimir Guerrero fell just short of the necessary 75 percent.

Bonds and Clemens, their careers tainted by allegations of steroids use, were passed over for the fifth straight year by the Baseball Writers' Association of America but each received a majority of votes for the first time.

"They were just awesome," Bagwell said. "Their demeanor, the way they went about their business, was just amazing, and I respect them."

On the ballot for the seventh time after falling 15 votes short last year, Bagwell appeared on 381 of 442 ballots for 86.2 percent. Players needed 332 votes this year.

"Anxiety was very, very high," Bagwell said. "It's a weird thing to be a Hall of Famer. I wrote it on a ball tonight. It was kind of crazy, so it was cool."

In his 10th and final year of eligibility, Raines was at 380 (86 percent). He was just the fifth player elected in his final year of eligibility after Red Ruffing (1967), Joe Medwick (1968), Ralph Kiner (1975) and Jim Rice (2009).

"Last night was probably the worst night I've had out of the 10 years," Raines said. "I knew I was close, but I wasn't sure."

Raines started at 24.3 percent in 2008 and jumped from 55 percent in 2015 to 69.8 percent last year. He said modern metrics boosted his chances from days when voters considered primarily whether players had 3,000 hits, 500 homers or 300 wins.

"I think social media played a big role," he said. "There are some things that I did that a lot of the guys that's already in the Hall of Fame didn't actually do. So I think it kind of made them look a lot at me a lot closer and they looked a lot deeper, and I think the more they looked, I think the better it turned out for me."

Rodriguez, at 45 the youngest current Hall member, received 336 votes (76 percent).

"I've been having trouble sleeping for three days," he said.

Rodriguez, the 52nd player elected in his first year of eligibility, joins Johnny Bench in 1989 as the only catchers voted in on their first ballot.

"Johnny Bench was my favorite player growing up," Pudge added.

Hoffman was five votes short and Guerrero 15 shy.

"Falling short of this class is disappointing," Hoffman said in a statement. "I am truly humbled to have come so close. I hope to one day soon share a Hall of Fame celebration with my family, friends, teammates and all of San Diego."

Edgar Martinez was next at 58.6 percent, followed by Clemens at 54.1 percent, Bonds at 53.8 percent, Mike Mussina at 51.8 percent, Curt Schilling at 45 percent, Lee Smith at 34.2 percent and Manny Ramirez

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at 23.8 percent.

Players will be inducted July 30 during ceremonies at Cooperstown along with former Commissioner Bud Selig and retired Kansas City and Atlanta executive John Schuerholz, both elected last month by a veterans committee. Some voters said the election of Selig, who presided over the Steroids Era, transformed their view of whether tainted stars should gain entry to the Hall.

Bagwell was a four-time All-Star for Houston, finishing with a .297 batting average, 401 homers and 1,401 RBIs. Among 220 Hall of Fame players, he is the 50th whose entire big league career was with one club.

Raines, fifth in career stolen bases, was a seven-time All-Star and the 1986 NL batting champion who compiled a .294 average and .385 on-base percentage. He spent 13 of 23 big league seasons with the Montreal Expos, who left Canada to become the Washington Nationals for the 2005 season, and joins Andre Dawson and Gary Carter as the only players to enter the Hall representing the Expos.

Rodriguez, a 14-time All-Star who hit .296 with 311 homers and 1,332 RBIs, was never disciplined for PEDs but former Texas teammate Jose Canseco alleged in a 2005 book that he injected the catcher with steroids. Asked whether he was on the list of players who allegedly tested positive for steroids during baseball's 2003 survey, Rodriguez said in 2009: "Only God knows."

Rodriguez displaced Pedro Martinez as the youngest of the record 74 living Hall members.

Bonds, a seven-time MVP who holds the season and career home run records, received 36.2 percent in 2013 and jumped from 44.3 percent last year. Clemens, a seven-time Cy Young Award winner, rose from 45.2 percent last year.

"Barry Bonds was the best player I played against in my entire life," Bagwell said.

A 12-time All-Star on the ballot for the first time, Ramirez was twice suspended for violating baseball's drug agreement. He helped the Boston Red Sox win World Series titles in 2004 and '07, the first for the franchise since 1918, and hit .312 with 555 home runs and 1,831 RBIs in 19 big league seasons.

Several notable players will join them in the competition for votes in upcoming years: Chipper Jones and Jim Thome in 2018, Mariano Rivera and Roy Halladay in 2019, and Derek Jeter in 2020.

Twelve players have been elected by the BBWAA in the past four years, the most over a span of that length since the first four ballots from 1936-39.

Lee Smith, who had 478 saves, got 34 percent in his final time on the ballot. Jorge Posada, Tim Wakefield and Magglio Ordonez were among the players who got under 5 percent and fell off future ballots.

Pete Rose, the career hits leader who has never appeared on a ballot because of a lifetime ban that followed an investigation of his gambling, received one write-in vote.

No word from Jammeh as midnight deadline arrives in Gambia

By **BABACAR DIONE** and **KRISTA LARSON**, Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — After more than two decades in power, Gambian President Yahya Jammeh faced the prospect of a military intervention by regional forces, as the man who once pledged to rule the West African nation for a billion years clung to power.

After a midnight deadline set by the West African regional bloc to step down, there was no word from Jammeh. But Mauritania's leader appeared to be making a last-ditch diplomatic effort, meeting with Jammeh and then flying to Senegal to meet with its leader and Gambia President-elect Adama Barrow.

Earlier, a military commander with the regional bloc known as ECOWAS announced that troops were positioning along Gambia's borders with Senegal.

"The mandate of the president is finished at midnight," declared Seydou Maiga Moro, speaking on Senegalese radio station RFM. "All the troops are already in place," he added, saying they were merely waiting to see whether Jammeh would give in to international pressure to cede power to Barrow.

As midnight approached, Jammeh met with Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz on the crisis. The Mauritanian leader left Gambia shortly before midnight, telling Gambia state television that "I am now less pessimistic (Jammeh) will work on a peaceful solution that is in the best interest for everyone." He then went to the meeting at the Dakar airport in Senegal, state television there reported.

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Thousands of Gambians have fled the country, including some former cabinet ministers who resigned in recent days. Hundreds of foreign tourists evacuated on special charter flights, though some continued to relax poolside despite the political turmoil. Gambia is a popular beach destination in winter, especially for tourists from Britain, the former colonial power.

The downtown area of the Gambian capital, Banjul, was empty late Wednesday, with all shops closed. But there was no visible military presence apart from a checkpoint at the entrance to the city.

Tiny Gambia is surrounded by Senegal and the Atlantic Ocean. Late Wednesday, witnesses reported Senegalese soldiers deploying in the Senegalese Kaolack region, north of Gambia, and in the southern Senegalese region of Casamance.

In another sign of the international pressure, Nigeria confirmed a warship was heading toward Gambia for "training," and RFM radio reported that Nigerian military equipment had begun arriving in Dakar. Ghana also has pledged to contribute militarily.

The regional bloc was seeking the U.N. Security Council's endorsement of its "all necessary measures" to remove Jammeh. "There is a sense that the whole situation rests in the hands of one person, and it's up to that person, the outgoing president of the Gambia, to draw the right conclusions," said Sweden's U.N. Ambassador Olof Skoog, the current council president.

The opposition has vowed to go ahead with Barrow's inauguration. It was unclear whether Barrow would take the oath at a Gambian Embassy outside the country or if he would return.

"Those who resist peaceful change, effective 12 midnight tonight, shall face definite consequences, to their peril," said Mai Ahmad Fatty, Barrow's special adviser, in a Facebook post Wednesday in which he urged Gambians to stay indoors. "Anyone with firearms tonight shall be deemed a rebel, and will certainly become a legitimate target."

Jammeh, who first seized power in a 1994 coup, has insisted that his rule was ordained by Allah. He initially conceded defeat after the December vote, but after reports emerged suggesting he could face criminal charges linked to his rule, he reversed himself a week later. He said voting irregularities invalidated the results, and his party went to court seeking a new round of voting. The case has stalled because the supreme court currently only has one sitting judge.

Human rights groups have long accused Jammeh of arresting, jailing and killing political opponents, and there have been widespread fears for Barrow's safety. Tensions have been so high that Barrow has remained in the Senegalese capital since last weekend, at the advice of ECOWAS mediators. He was not even able to return to Banjul for his 7-year-old son's funeral Monday after the child was fatally mauled by a dog.

As other longtime West African strongmen have died or been forced to step down in recent years, Jammeh has remained a rare exception — even launching a campaign to anoint himself "King of Gambia."

In 2007, he claimed to have developed a cure for AIDS that involved an herbal body rub and bananas. Alarming public health experts, he insisted AIDS sufferers stop taking antiretroviral medications.

Two years later, his government rounded up nearly 1,000 people it accused of being witches, forcing them to drink a hallucinogen that caused diarrhea and vomiting. Two people died, according to Amnesty International.

More recently, Jammeh seemed bent on increasing Gambia's isolation on the world stage. In 2013 he exited the Commonwealth, a group made up mostly of former British colonies, branding it a "neo-colonial institution."

He also issued increasingly virulent statements against sexual minorities, vowing to slit the throats of gay men and saying the LGBT acronym should stand for "leprosy, gonorrhea, bacteria and tuberculosis." And in October, Jammeh said Gambia would leave the International Criminal Court, which he dismissed as the "International Caucasian Court."

Associated Press writers Abdoulie John in Dakar, Senegal; Robbie Corey-Boulet in Abidjan, Ivory Coast; Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations, Mike Corder in The Hague, Netherlands, and Bashir Adigun in Abuja, Nigeria, contributed to this report.

Inaugural crowds sure to be huge _ but how huge?

By BEN NUCKOLS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump says his inauguration will have “an unbelievable, perhaps record-setting turnout.” Organizers of a protest the next day call it the biggest demonstration in history to welcome a new president.

Exactly how many people actually show up for both events will likely never be known.

Counting the number of people at major public events is as much art as science, and there will be no official tally of how many people attend either Friday’s inaugural festivities or the Women’s March on Washington on Saturday.

Here’s a look at why crowd size is so mysterious.

IT STARTS WITH THE MILLION MAN MARCH

For decades, the National Park Service provided official crowd estimates for gatherings on the National Mall. That changed after the Million Man March in 1995, a gathering of black men meant to show renewed commitment to family and solidarity. The park service estimated 400,000 people attended the march, making it one of the largest demonstrations in history in Washington.

But organizers believed they reached their goal of 1 million participants. Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, one of the march organizers, threatened to sue the park service, arguing its count was motivated by “racism, white supremacy and hatred for Louis Farrakhan.” Researchers at Boston University did an independent analysis and said the crowd was much bigger, pegging it at more than 800,000.

No lawsuit was filed, but the dispute was enough to get the park service out of the head-counting business. The following year, Congress passed an appropriations bill that barred the agency from spending money to count crowds. While that language didn’t appear in subsequent budgets, refusing to count crowds became park service policy.

The agency still estimates crowd size for its own planning purposes, but does not publicly reveal the figures.

“No matter what we said or did, no one ever felt we gave a fair estimate,” U.S. Park Police Maj. J.J. McLaughlin, who had been in charge of coordinating crowd estimates, said in 1996 when the agency confirmed it would no longer count heads.

HOW CROWDS ARE COUNTED

Before it stopped, the park service came up with its crowd figures by studying aerial photographs. Using a grid system, the park service would divide the Mall into sections of equal square footage. Then it counted the number of people in each section of the grid by looking at how tightly packed the crowd was and assigning a number of people per square foot.

Not much has changed since about the way crowds are estimated, said Steve Doig, a journalism professor at Arizona State University who specializes in measuring crowd sizes.

The figure that corresponds to a “loosely packed crowd,” Doig said, is 10 square feet per person, “which sounds like a lot but it’s really not.” That means people could reach out and touch those closest to them on all sides.

“A tighter crowd would get down to maybe 6 or 7 square feet per person,” he said. “A scary mosh pit crowd would be maybe 3 to 4 at most.”

Crowd estimates for events in Washington are difficult in general because the city’s lack of tall buildings and security restrictions on aircraft make it tough to get comprehensive aerial images, Doig said.

Christopher Geldart, the District of Columbia’s homeland security director, has said consistently that he expects between 800,000 and 900,000 people to attend Trump’s inauguration. He said he would use the tried-and-true grid method to provide his own crowd estimate on the Monday after the swearing-in.

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WOMEN'S MARCH

The largest-ever demonstration in Washington, according to park service figures, was an anti-Vietnam War protest in 1969 that drew 600,000 people. The Mall can easily accommodate crowds in the hundreds of thousands; between 300,000 and 400,000 regularly attend the July Fourth fireworks.

Organizers of Saturday's Women's March on Washington have received a permit from D.C. police for a gathering of 200,000 people. Geldart said he expects the number of participants to exceed that figure, based on data including bus, hotel and train bookings. He cautioned, however, that organizers have not yet told authorities to expect more than the permitted total.

PAST INAUGURATIONS

The park service did not dispute a widely reported estimate that 1.8 million people came to Washington for President Barack Obama's first inauguration in 2009, believed to be the largest inaugural crowd in history. The biggest crowd the park service counted at an inauguration was 1.2 million for Lyndon Johnson's 1965 swearing-in.

Doig isn't sure about either of those figures. His analysis of aerial photographs led him to conclude that just 800,000 were on the Mall for Obama's first inauguration, though he did not include the parade route, where thousands more people waited all day to catch a glimpse of America's first black president.

The estimate was difficult because the density of the crowd varied widely, he said, despite aerial photographs that appeared to show the Mall full of people between the Capitol and the Washington Monument. Further away from the Capitol, people huddled around television monitors, leaving big tracts of mostly empty space.

Any time a crowd reaches into the hundreds of thousands, it's a noteworthy gathering, Doig said, but boosters will always try to politicize the turnout for their chosen cause.

"One of the things that aggravates me ... is the need for it to be huge," he said. "It sort of drives the numbers into areas where it just clearly is fiction and it undercuts the reality of what really is an amazing crowd."

Trump clearly cares about posting a big number.

In a video ad posted on social media Wednesday, he said: "Hopefully we're going to get a million people. We're going to really make a big statement."

Follow Ben Nuckols on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/APBenNuckols>

1st US rules for pot in public fire up debate in Denver

By KRISTEN WYATT, Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Denver started work Wednesday on becoming the first city in the U.S. to allow marijuana clubs and public pot use in places such as coffee shops, yoga studios and art galleries.

Voters narrowly approved the "social use" measure last November. But the ballot proposal didn't spell out many rules for how the marijuana could be consumed, beyond saying that the drug can't be smoked inside and that patrons must be over 21.

Since then, the state Liquor Control Board has decreed that no businesses with a liquor license can allow marijuana use. That leaves it to restaurants that don't serve alcohol and other event spaces.

A workgroup made up of Denver business owners, city pot regulators and marijuana opponents met to discuss the details, debating even the simplest topics.

For almost an hour, they debated whether kid-friendly venues such as museums or zoos could host adults-only marijuana-friendly events at night. The measure includes a caveat that public pot use not occur near schools and places kids congregate.

"We don't want this around children, we all agree," said Emmett Reistroffer, a cannabis consultant who ran the public-use campaign.

But he urged regulators not to be too restrictive, pointing out that there's no law saying adults can't drink alcohol in front of children, such as at a professional football stadium.

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"We do tolerate alcohol use by adults in front of people under 21," he said.

Supporters hope to see the city start accepting applications from businesses by this summer, but regulators could easily drag out decision-making for months. It won't be an easy job, if the initial meeting was an indication.

City officials had to double the size of the room to accommodate the crowd, and a long white board for questions filled quickly with subjects such as "Hours of operation?"

Another hot topic: how patrons at the new weed-friendly clubs and coffee shops will get their marijuana.

The measure does not allow participating businesses to sell pot, so patrons would have to bring their own. Some neighborhood groups expressed doubt about allowing a pot club to open next door to a pot shop, but a police officer on the panel liked the idea.

"If the people going to these places don't have anywhere to buy it, you're going to attract a black market," Deputy Police Chief David Quinones said.

The workgroup plans to submit regulations to city marijuana regulators, who make the ultimate decision on which businesses get licenses, costing \$2,000 a year. Businesses can start requesting license applications Friday.

Meanwhile, a bill to allow pot clubs statewide is pending at the state Legislature. It has bipartisan support but uncertain prospects, especially as Colorado and other legal pot states await word on whether Donald Trump's administration will tolerate pot businesses in states flouting federal drug law.

Kristen Wyatt can be reached at <http://www.twitter.com/APkristenwyatt>.

This story has been corrected to show that people can bring pot to smoke outdoors at some businesses.

AP-NORC Poll: Americans of all stripes say fix health care

By LAURIE KELLMAN and EMILY SWANSON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sylvia Douglas twice voted for President Barack Obama and last year cast a ballot for Democrat Hillary Clinton. But when it comes to "Obamacare," she now sounds like President-elect Donald Trump. This makes her chuckle amid the serious choices she faces every month between groceries, electricity and paying a health insurance bill that has jumped by nearly \$400.

"It's a universal thing, nobody likes it," Douglas, a licensed practical nurse in Huntsville, Alabama, said of Obama's signature law. "They need to fix it with whatever works, but not make more of a mess like they have now."

That Americans agree on much of anything is remarkable after a presidential race that ripped open the nation's economic, political and cultural divisions. But on the brink of the Trump presidency, a new poll finds ample accord across those divisions on the need to do something about health care in the United States.

More than 4-in-10 Republicans, Democrats and independents say health care is a top issue facing the country, The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll showed. That's more than named any other issue in the survey, conducted Dec. 14-19.

But there seems to be little agreement on what to do about it.

Democrats say they want to fix problems in the current program — among them, rising costs and dwindling competition — but not dismantle it. They warn that the GOP is threatening the coverage gained by 20 million people under the 2010 overhaul.

Republicans want to repeal Obama's signature law but fear the political damage of stranding millions of Americans who secured coverage. Congress' nonpartisan budget analyst lent weight to that concern Tuesday, estimating that a bill passed in 2016 to only repeal — not replace — the law would result in 18 million more uninsured people and a spike in premiums.

Trump says he has a plan, but so far he's given no details. He told The Washington Post last weekend that his approach would provide "insurance for everybody."

Congressional Republicans say the revamp will offer "universal access" to coverage, not quite the same

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thing

The desire to fix Obamacare stretches across party lines, but some are skeptical it can be done.

"It can't be made to work," said James Gemind, a 55-year-old restaurant worker from Orlando, Florida. "That's why both sides have been unanimous in their agreement that it has to be repealed or replaced. Part of it is funding; it just does not exist to insure everybody."

Health care aside, in the poll there was more modest agreement on other national priorities.

About a third of Republicans and a quarter of Democrats put unemployment among their top issues. About a fifth named the economy in general as a top priority regardless of party, according to the poll. Most Americans said the government should put a substantial amount of effort toward addressing the public's priorities, but few expect much will be accomplished in the next year, the survey said.

Overall, domestic issues including health care, education, the environment and racism were cited by 86 percent of Americans.

But Democrats were more likely to mention the environment, racism and poverty, while Republicans were more likely to cite immigration, terrorism, government spending and taxes.

Immigration was named by 40 percent of GOP respondents, compared to 15 percent of Democrats. Trump during the campaign connected immigration to national security and vowed to build a wall along the southern U.S. border and make Mexico pay for it — an idea Mexican leaders have not accepted. Trump now says Mexico will pay for it "eventually."

In a turn-around from a year ago, most Republicans now say the country is on the right course, while Democrats have become more pessimistic.

But it's health care reform that survives this era of division, in part because it touches on peoples' day-to-day quality of life, and in the most personal ways.

Douglas' husband is disabled and she recently was diagnosed with a condition that required abdominal imaging. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama is now the only provider in her state exchange — a fact she blames for the boost in her monthly premium, from around \$600 to nearly \$1000. Additionally, she learned, her deductible had zoomed to \$4,000. That torpedoed work she'd done to build a future.

"I was going to buy a new home, I was getting my credit straight, but now that is down the drain," Douglas said. "Obamacare helped the less-fortunate, and that's what I liked about it. I had no idea it would tear out the middle class like this."

The AP-NORC poll of 1,017 adults was conducted Dec. 14-19, 2016, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

Interviews were conducted online and using landlines and cellphones.

Online:

AP-NORC: <http://www.apnorc.org/>

This story has been corrected to delete the incorrect reference to a "monthly" deductible.

So long from White House: Obama aims final messages at Trump

By JULIE PACE, AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Barack Obama stepped behind the White House podium for the last time Wednesday, fielding questions from the crush of journalists crammed in for the occasion and offering assurances to Americans watching on TV.

But at times, his answers seemed aimed at an audience of one: the man who will replace him at noon Friday.

Obama gently chided Donald Trump's suggestion that the U.S. might end its sanctions on Russia over Ukraine in exchange for nuclear stockpile reductions, saying it was in America's interest to make sure "we

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don't confuse why these sanctions have been imposed with a whole set of other issues."

And, with Trump vowing to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, a move that could further inflame tensions in the Middle East, Obama warned that when "sudden unilateral moves" are made in the region, the results can be explosive.

Obama also defended his decision to cut nearly three decades off convicted leaker Chelsea Manning's prison term, a move Trump's team has strongly criticized. Obama said the former Army intelligence analyst had served a "tough prison sentence" already.

With no elections left to win or legislative battles to fight, Obama used his parting words to deliver one set of messages to his successor, a man who is his opposite both temperamentally and politically. Obama said he expected a new president, particularly one from the opposing party, to "test old assumptions," but he also suggested it would be important for the next administration to "understand that there are going to be consequences, and actions typically create reactions."

The very fact that Obama was holding the afternoon news conference in the White House briefing room served as a symbolic counter to Trump. The president-elect's aides have raised the prospect of moving daily news briefings out of their traditional West Wing home, sparking fears of attempts to eventually push reporters out of the White House altogether.

Obama specifically addressed that worry: "Having you in this building has made this place work better," he declared.

"You're not supposed to be sycophants, you're supposed to be skeptics," Obama said to the reporters he has often criticized for hyping scandals and hopscotching from story to story too quickly.

"You're not supposed to be complimentary, but you're supposed to cast a critical eye on folks who hold enormous power and make sure that we are accountable to the people who sent us here."

Even the reporters the president called on seemed intended to send a pointed message to his successor. He kicked off the questioning with the president of the White House Correspondents' Association, which advocates for access on behalf of journalists. Reporters from Arab, Spanish-language, African-American, and gay and lesbian-focused publications followed.

In a sense, Obama was taking a page out of the playbook used by Trump advisers, who often try to communicate with their cable-news watching boss on the airwaves. The president's press conference earned him prime real estate on the networks Trump keeps on his office television throughout the day, with most cable news outlets carrying the entire hour-long event live.

For years, Trump's only presence in Obama's orbit was as an irritant and the chief promoter of the lie that the president was born outside the United States. When Trump challenged for the presidency, Obama worked to stop him and seemed all but certain that Americans wouldn't back the Republican's brash and divisive politics.

Since Trump's unexpected victory, Obama has largely set aside that history and sought to help ease his successor's transition into office. He's spoken with Trump by phone numerous times, sometimes at length, he said Wednesday.

Divulging some of his advice to the incoming president, Obama said he's told Trump, "This is a job of such magnitude that you can't do it by yourself."

Trump was ridiculed by Democrats for saying during his Republican convention speech that "I alone" can fix the problems ailing the nation.

After eight years in office, the president suggested he's eager to step away from the political spotlight for a time. "I want to be quiet a little bit and not hear myself talk so darn much," he said Wednesday. But he also served notice that as an ex-president, he would speak out if Trump violates America's "core values."

For all his campaign warnings about the dire implications of a Trump presidency and the threat the 45th president poses to his own policy achievements, Obama insisted he was at ease, even optimistic, upon stepping aside.

"At my core, I think we're going to be OK," he said.

AP writer Josh Lederman contributed to this report.

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

In break with Trump, EPA pick says climate change isn't hoax

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's choice to head the Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday that climate change is real, breaking with both the president-elect and his own past statements.

In response to questions from Democrats during his Senate confirmation hearing, Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt said he disagreed with Trump's earlier claims that global warming is a hoax created by the Chinese to harm the economic competitiveness of the United States.

"I do not believe climate change is a hoax," Pruitt said.

The 48-year-old Republican has previously cast doubt on the extensive body of scientific evidence showing that the planet is warming and man-made carbon emissions are to blame. In a 2016 opinion article, Pruitt suggested that the debate over global warming "is far from settled" and he claimed that "scientists continue to disagree about the degree and extent of global warming and its connection to the actions of mankind."

At the hearing before the Senate Energy and Public Works Committee, Pruitt conceded that human activity contributes "in some manner" to climate change. He continued, however, to question whether the burning of fossil fuels is the primary reason, and refused to say whether sea levels are rising.

Pruitt's testimony came shortly after NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued a joint statement affirming that 2016 was officially the hottest year in recorded history. Studies show the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets have decreased in mass, while the world's oceans have risen on average nearly 7 inches in the last century.

Pressed by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., to answer in detail about his beliefs about climate change, Pruitt responded that his personal opinion was "immaterial" to how he would enforce environmental laws.

In his current post, Pruitt joined a multistate lawsuit opposing the Obama administration's plan to limit planet-warming carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants. Pruitt also sued over the EPA's recent expansion of water bodies regulated under the Clean Water Act. It has been opposed by industries that would be forced to clean up polluted wastewater.

The lawsuits are among at least eight pending cases Pruitt has joined against the agency he is in line to lead.

Under questioning from Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., Pruitt said he has "every willingness to recuse" himself on a case-by-case basis if directed to do so by the EPA's ethics office. Markey said that was not enough to reassure Americans of his objectivity, adding that Pruitt should commit to a blanket recusal.

Pruitt said that if were confirmed by the GOP-run Senate, he would work with states and industry to return the federal watchdog to what he described as its proper role.

"Environmental regulations should not occur in an economic vacuum," Pruitt said. "We can simultaneously pursue the mutual goals of environmental protection and economic growth."

Environmentalists opposing Pruitt's nomination cite his cozy relationships with oil and gas industry executives who have donated to his political campaigns.

As the hearing got underway, shouting could be heard from people who were not allowed in. The room accommodated fewer than 100 people; most seats were taken by congressional staff, reporters and others who were allowed in early. Only a few seats remained for the public.

One woman was quickly wrestled out of the room by three police officers as she pulled out a roll of yellow crime scene tape and shouted "We don't want EPA gutted!"

Later, a group of coal miners wearing hard hats were allowed in to show support for Pruitt. Trump has pledged to bring back tens of thousands of lost coal mining jobs once inaugurated, though he has not yet detailed how. The president-elect has also said he will "renegotiate" the international accord to reduce

carbon emissions signed in Paris at the end of 2015.

Senate Republicans uniformly praised Pruitt what they described as his robust record of enforcing environmental laws "when appropriate." Court records show scant evidence of Pruitt acting to protect the environment in years as a state regulator.

Shortly after Pruitt took office in Oklahoma in 2011, he disbanded the unit responsible for protecting the state's natural resources. He reassigned his staff to file more than a dozen lawsuits challenging EPA regulations.

Senate Democrats focused on Pruitt's record of siding with polluters in court as he collected campaign contributions from them.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., pressed Pruitt on money he raised from energy companies such as Exxon Mobil and Devon Energy, as well as the corporate "dark money" raised by groups with which he is involved that are not required to disclose their donors.

Earlier this month, Pruitt resigned from the board of the Rule of Law Defense Fund, a Washington-based group supporting the legal agendas of GOP attorney generals that Whitehouse described as "a complete black hole into which at least \$1 million goes." In his response, Pruitt declined to provide details about whether the group's donors included fossil fuel companies or utilities with regulatory issues before EPA.

Though Pruitt ran unopposed for a second term in 2014, public campaign finance reports show he raised more than \$700,000, much of it from people in the energy and utility industries.

Pruitt has also faced criticism from environmentalists for failing to take any action to help curb a dramatic spike in earthquake activity in Oklahoma that scientists have linked to the underground disposal of oil and gas wastewater.

Pruitt said his support for legal positions advocated by oil and gas companies was in the best interest of Oklahoma, which is economically dependent on the fossil fuel industry.

Associated Press writer Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City contributed to this report.

Follow AP environmental writer Michael Biesecker at [Twitter.com/mbieseck](https://twitter.com/mbieseck)

Mideast expects big changes under Trump

By DAN PERRY and BRADLEY KLAPPER, Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Donald Trump's all-but-dismissal of human rights as a foreign policy principle could hit like an earthquake across a Middle East landscape beset by warring factions and beleaguered governments, with some players eyeing the prospect of once unimaginable new alliances.

Syria is the foremost test of Trump's promise of a return to a hard-headed realpolitik and could quickly show whether America is truly abandoning promotion of democracy and the rule of law in a way that could reshape much of the region's post-Cold War, post-9/11 order.

Trump has raised the possibility of a broad new U.S. partnership with Vladimir Putin's increasingly authoritarian Russia and has even hinted at aligning with Syrian President Bashar Assad, which would amount to a dramatic reversal from years of the Obama administration calls for Assad's ouster. Trump seems to calculate that their shared enemy in the Islamic State is more important than shared values.

"When it comes to civil liberties, our country has a lot of problems, and I think it's very hard for us to get involved in other countries," Trump explained last July as Turkey was punishing tens of thousands of people seemingly unconnected to a failed coup attempt. "We need allies," Trump said in a New York Times interview. "I don't know that we have a right to lecture."

When Barack Obama declared a new beginning with the Muslim world in a landmark speech eight years ago, he mentioned democracy six times and broached the subject of human rights on a dozen occasions. Trump has barely mentioned these as foreign policy principles, extolling instead deal-making, diplomatic and economic, and championing the fight against IS.

"Human rights will not be his top priority," concluded Mustafa Alani, the director of the security and

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defense department at the Geneva-based Gulf Research Center.

Some believe the change will in the end be largely a matter of style, noting that Obama has fought jihadism all over the region as well. Aaron David Miller, a Mideast adviser under five American presidents, expects Trump to prove "risk-averse" and remain consistent with Obama's own reluctance to interfere in other countries' affairs, use military force, remain engaged in Iraq or get truly involved in Syria's civil war.

But it's clear that several long-standing allies in the Middle East are relishing an end to what they saw as moralizing rhetoric, confused signals and unfulfilled red lines, and favoring a Trump pivot to counterterrorism and security.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi is still waiting for a White House invitation, having been shunned by Obama for his bloody crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia is expecting a renewed push from Washington on its arch-rival Iran, instead of Obama's more neutral stance and its accompanying criticism of the kingdom's treatment of women and killing of civilians in Yemen. And Israel's nationalist leadership has made almost a public celebration of Trump's imminent arrival, confident that its grief for how it treats the Palestinians is over.

Here's a look at how Trump's policies could shake up the Middle East:

SYRIA AND ISLAMIC STATE

The U.S.-led campaign against IS, more than 60 nations strong, has lacked in Syria the one thing it needs most: a partner on the ground capable of reclaiming and holding territory, as the Iraqi government is doing in its areas. Widespread evidence of torture, chemical weapons attacks and even war crimes by Assad's forces had made a partnership infeasible to Obama and most of America's foreign policy establishment.

Meanwhile, Russia's intervention since September 2015 has dramatically shored up Assad's position. If Assad and Putin now take on IS in its strongholds in northeastern Syria, it is less difficult to imagine Trump accepting perhaps a tacit partnership.

Trump has said Assad may be "bad" but the rebels fighting to topple him "could be worse." He has said the U.S. has no idea who its allies in the country are and has appeared most concerned about containing the exodus of Syrian refugees, fearing they'll spread terrorism.

Assad recently suggested the U.S. and Syria could be "natural allies."

Such a shift would have consequences. America's Sunni allies in the Persian Gulf will chafe at any outcome they see as strengthening the hand of Assad's other main partner, Shiite Iran.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Years of contentious relations between Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu culminated last month in a U.N. Security Council resolution declaring illegal the Jewish state's construction of settlements on occupied land the Palestinians seek for a future state. Obama's decision to not veto the resolution followed bitterness in Israel over the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

Trump has vowed to heal the wound, apparently by embracing parts of Netanyahu's nationalist agenda. He has appointed a pro-settlements ambassador, vowed to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to more controversial Jerusalem and spoken of renegotiating and even dismantling the Iran deal.

Whereas much of Obama's disapproval of Netanyahu was expressed in moral terms, Trump has steered wide of any such thing.

"He is against this kind of moralism and political correctness," said Eytan Gilboa, an expert on U.S.-Israel relations at Israel's Bar-Ilan University. "He is a businessman. If there is a potential for a deal between Israel and the Palestinians, he will do it. If there is no potential for a deal, he will not do it."

Many fear overreach by Israel that could trigger a new Palestinian uprising. And some note the situation could turn if the confident Netanyahu ever provoked the mercurial Trump as he has did Obama. "Within a year, they'll be annoying the hell out of each other," predicted Miller.

THE GULF AND IRAN

If there is one authoritarian country unlikely to enjoy the fruits of Trump's human rights-free foreign policy, it's Iran. The president-elect regularly chastised Obama for agreements that provided new funds to a U.S.-designated terror sponsor and left it only several years away from potentially returning to nuclear

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weapons capacity.

Beyond the talk of a nuclear renegotiation, Trump also has promised to get American prisoners released and threatened to shoot Iranian boats out of the water if they provoke U.S. Navy vessels in and around the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, has said if the U.S. tears up the nuclear accord, "we will light it on fire." But Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Tuesday dismissed the possibility that Trump could undo the nuclear deal, likening it to turning a finished shirt back into cotton. The president-elect's tough talk on the deal was is "mainly slogans," he said.

Officials in Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional rival, are nonetheless pleased with a president who might focus more on Iran than its own human rights violations. Although its rights record routinely ranks among the world's worst, Rex Tillerson, Trump's choice for secretary of state, wouldn't call the key U.S. ally a rights violator.

EGYPT

El-Sissi, Egypt's general-turned-president, isn't hiding his hopes in Trump: "There is appreciation (by Trump) for Egypt's regional role and there will (be) more coordination with the United States going forward," he said this week.

Government circles in Cairo widely see Obama as naive about the true intentions of political Islam and excessively idealistic about liberal democracy. Championing the popular protests of the 2011 Arab Spring, Obama urged the stalwart U.S. ally Hosni Mubarak to step down and welcomed the ascendancy of the country's first elected president, Islamist Mohammed Morsi.

After el-Sissi led a 2013 military overthrow replacing Morsi, Obama's administration struggled for months over whether to call it a coup and later suspended some arms sales to Egypt. It has routinely criticized the government's police brutality, mass trials of Islamists and the crackdown on liberal dissent, drawing charges from el-Sissi that the U.S. supports Morsi and other religious hard-liners.

Under Trump, "there will be a lot of capacity for less friction and more engagement," said Michael W. Hanna, an Egypt expert at the New York-based Century Foundation.

But given Egypt's dire economic condition and internal instability, el-Sissi may have little to offer a deal-oriented U.S. president in return. How important that turns out to be will help show whether the new American compass will truly be about the quid pro quo.

Klapper reported from Washington. AP correspondents Adam Schreck in Dubai, Hamza Hendawi in Cairo, Ian Deitch in Jerusalem and Zeina Karam in Beirut contributed to this report.

Asian shares mixed, Japan's Nikkei gains on weaker yen

By ELAINE KURTENBACH, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Shares were meandering in sluggish trading in Asia on Thursday as investors awaited the inauguration of Donald Trump as president. Japan's benchmark rose after the dollar slipped against the yen.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's Nikkei 225 gained 0.7 percent to 19,027.09 and Australia's S&P ASX 200 added 0.2 percent to 5,692.70. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong slipped 0.5 percent to 22,986.08 and South Korea's Kospi was flat at 2,070.33. The Shanghai Composite index edged 0.1 percent lower to 3,110.49. Shares in Southeast Asia were mixed.

WALL STREET: After a torrid post-election rally, markets are listless ahead of Friday's inauguration. Trump will take the oath of office on Friday, and investors are waiting to see how much of his campaign-trail rhetoric will become government policy. The Standard & Poor's 500 has moved by less than 0.4 percent, up or down, for nine straight days. It gained 4 points, or 0.2 percent, on Wednesday to 2,271.89. The Dow Jones industrial average slipped 22.05 points, or 0.1 percent, to 19,804.72. The Nasdaq composite index added 16.93, or 0.3 percent, to 5,555.65.

THE QUOTE: "While the inauguration is dominating headlines, simmering on the back burner is the overriding theme of U.S. protectionism, expressly directed at China. With so many prominent trade hawks

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joining the Trump administration, it all points to a massive shift in U.S. trade policy. That does not paint a rosy picture for regional ... exporters, nor countries like Australia, which play such a vital role in the global supply chain," said Stephen Innes, a senior trader at OANDA.

CURRENCIES: The dollar rose against many of its rivals after sinking sharply against the British pound and other currencies earlier in the week. The dollar rose to 114.52 yen from 112.66 late Tuesday. The British pound fell to \$1.2285 from \$1.2396, and the euro fell to \$1.0641 from \$1.0709.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude oil gained 43 cents to \$51.51 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It fell \$1.40 to settle at \$51.08 a barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 47 cents to \$54.39 a barrel.

Ellen DeGeneres takes home 3 People's Choice Awards

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ellen DeGeneres set a record at the People's Choice Awards , becoming the winningest entertainer in the show's history.

DeGeneres picked up three trophies at Wednesday's ceremony for a career total of 20 People's Choice wins.

Other stars taking home crystal statuettes this year included Jennifer Lopez, Johnny Depp, Sofia Vergara, Kevin Hart, Melissa McCarthy and Justin Timberlake. Tyler Perry received the humanitarian award at the show, hosted by Joel McHale at the Microsoft Theatre and broadcast on CBS.

A selected list of winners follows:

Movie: "Finding Dory"

Movie actor: Ryan Reynolds

Movie actress: Jennifer Lawrence

Action movie: "Deadpool"

Action movie actor: Robert Downey, Jr.

Action movie actress: Margot Robbie

Animated movie voice: Ellen DeGeneres, "Finding Dory"

Comedic movie actor: Kevin Hart

Comedic movie actress: Melissa McCarthy

Dramatic movie actor: Tom Hanks

Dramatic movie actress: Blake Lively

Movie icon: Johnny Depp

TV show: "Outlander"

Network TV comedy: "The Big Bang Theory"

Comedic TV actor: Jim Parsons

Comedic TV actress: Sofia Vergara

Network TV drama: "Grey's Anatomy"

TV crime drama: "Criminal Minds"

TV crime drama actor: Mark Harmon

TV crime drama actress: Jennifer Lopez

Competition TV show: "The Voice"

Daytime TV host: Ellen DeGeneres

Late night talk show host: Jimmy Fallon

Male music artist: Justin Timberlake

Female music artist: Britney Spears

Group: Fifth Harmony

Male country artist: Blake Shelton

Female country artist: Carrie Underwood

Country group: Little Big Town

Hip-hop artist: G-Eazy

R&B artist: Rihanna
Song: "Can't Fight the Feeling," Justin Timberlake
Social media celebrity: Britney Spears
Humanitarian: Tyler Perry

Paul McCartney files lawsuit against Sony/ATV over copyright

By DEEPTI HAJELA, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Paul McCartney says he wants his music to get back to where it once belonged. McCartney filed a lawsuit in federal court in Manhattan on Wednesday against Sony/ATV over copyright ownership of the many hit songs he wrote with John Lennon as part of The Beatles.

The copyrights were famously bought by Michael Jackson in 1985 and then fully sold over to Sony/ATV following his death. McCartney has long wanted the copyrights, and the filing says he has sent notice to Sony/ATV saying that he will claim them back under a provision of U.S. copyright law that makes that possible after a certain time.

The first song eligible to be claimed back is "Love Me Do," in October 2018. The rest of the catalog would follow in years after, ending in 2026.

McCartney wants a ruling to say his claiming them doesn't represent a legal breach of any contract or publishing agreement that Sony/ATV could use against him.

"Defendants have attempted to reserve their rights to challenge Paul McCartney's exercise of his termination rights on contractual ground," the filing says.

It adds, "A judicial declaration is necessary and appropriate at this time so that Paul McCartney can rely on quiet, unclouded title to his rights."

Sony/ATV said it had "the highest respect" for McCartney.

"We have collaborated closely with both Sir Paul and the late John Lennon's Estate for decades to protect, preserve and promote the catalog's long-term value," the company said, adding that it was "disappointed" over the filing of the lawsuit, which it said is "unnecessary and premature."

Netflix's shrinking DVD service faces uncertain future

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE, AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Originally cast in a starring role, Netflix's original DVD-by-mail service has been reduced to a bit player — one that may eventually get killed off as the company focuses on its booming video streaming service.

Netflix's fourth-quarter earnings report released Wednesday provided the latest glimpse at the DVD service's descent into oblivion as the streaming service hogs the spotlight.

The DVD service shed 159,000 subscribers during the final three months of last year to end December with 4.1 million customers. That's an 11-year low for a format that gave Netflix its initial shot at stardom, allowing it out-innovate and outmaneuver Blockbuster Video, then the king of home-video rentals.

Now, though, the DVD service operates mostly as an afterthought that caters to a shrinking audience of die-hards who prefer to watch movies and TV shows on discs instead of streaming or downloading them onto a mobile gadget.

STREAMING GETS TOP BILLING

Meanwhile, Netflix's streaming service has been reshaping the world of entertainment, attracting converts to the convenience of streaming video at any time on any device with a high-speed internet connection.

The streaming service now boasts nearly 94 million subscribers in 190 countries, after adding another 1.9 million in the U.S. and 5.1 million in its overseas markets during the final three months of last year. RBC Capital Markets analyst Mark Mahaney predicts Netflix will have 160 million streaming subscribers by 2020. The company is coming off its biggest quarter of customer growth yet.

DVD subscribers may be fleeing, but the service boasts a library of more than 90,000 titles, including

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recent films that usually aren't available to stream for nine to 18 months after they leave theaters — or sometimes at all, at least on Netflix.

The streaming service had about 4,600 titles as of late last year, down from roughly 6,500 in July 2015, according to the research firm Ampere Analysis. Netflix has trimmed its selection of outside streaming titles as it has ramped up its own production of television series and films, which can only be viewed on its streaming service.

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings, though, insists he wants to expand the streaming catalog to include more of the videos that are only available on DVD now.

"We have a long way to go when you think about all the movies and TV shows that we don't have," he told analysts Wednesday.

CASH-COW DISCS

Even though the DVD service has lost nearly 10 million subscribers over the past 5 1/2 years, Netflix keeps it around because it remains tremendously profitable.

The company makes an operating profit of roughly 50 percent on DVD subscriptions, after covering the expense of buying discs and postage to and from its distribution centers. The DVD service doesn't even have a marketing budget; by comparison, Netflix spent almost \$1 billion last year promoting its streaming service.

The DVD profits have helped subsidize Netflix's streaming expansion outside the U.S., a push that has accumulated losses of nearly \$1.5 billion during the past five years. The DVD service has made \$1.9 billion during the same period, enabling Netflix to remain profitable and helping its stock price rise by 13-fold since the end of 2011. The shares gained 8 percent to \$144 in extended trading as investors cheered the rapid growth of the streaming service.

"We've never discussed shutting down DVDs since there are still lots of folks who subscribe, often to both streaming and DVD by mail," Netflix spokeswoman Anne Marie Squeo said.

END OF THE SHOW

Eventually, though, most analysts believe it will no longer make sense to keep mailing out DVDs in Netflix's familiar red envelopes as more people conclude the service is no longer worth the money.

Some cancellations no doubt stem from the inconvenience of having to wait for a DVD to come through the mail. Other DVD subscribers have periodically expressed frustration with weeklong waits to receive a popular film after it becomes available on disc.

Wedbush Securities analyst Michael Pachter believes Netflix's DVD service might linger for another five to eight years, based on its current pace of decline, before the company shuts it down. He believes the moment of reckoning could come when there are only about 1 million DVD subscribers remaining.

At that point, Pachter says, Netflix is likely to start closing most of the warehouses that store and distribute DVDs to different parts of the U.S.

"As they consolidate those warehouses, the turnaround time is going to be slower," he says. "Then, it's not going to take two days for the next DVD to arrive, it's going to be more like six days. Then people will be upset and quit."

Trump's Treasury pick facing criticism over foreclosures

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's pick to lead the Treasury Department, Stephen Mnuchin, built his reputation and his fortune as a savvy Wall Street investor. But one of those investments has put him in the crosshairs of Democrats as he heads into his confirmation hearing Thursday: sub-prime mortgage lender IndyMac bank.

Mnuchin, who served as Trump's finance chairman during the campaign, has defended his role in the purchase of the failed bank, whose collapse in 2008 was the second biggest bank failure of the financial crisis. Mnuchin, who assembled a group to buy the bank from the government, renamed it OneWest and turned it around, selling it for a handsome profit to CIT Group Inc. in 2014.

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But critics have cited the bank's foreclosure policies under Mnuchin as a prime example of the kind of Wall Street greed that Trump, the candidate, campaigned against. They planned to question Mnuchin about the foreclosures during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee.

Mnuchin has called the criticism unjustified, saying in a CNBC interview right after Trump nominated him in November that buying IndyMac was "one of the most proud aspects of my career" because his successful efforts to turn the bank around saved jobs. He said the foreclosures reflected the fact that the bank before he took over had accumulated the one of the worst portfolios of bad mortgage loans "in the history of time."

A group of 10 Democratic senators led by Sen. Elizabeth Warren participated in a forum Wednesday to hear testimony from some of the people who lost their homes after Mnuchin's bank foreclosed.

"OneWest was notorious for its belligerence and for its cruelty," Warren said, contending that OneWest gained a reputation as a "foreclosure machine."

Liberal groups began airing a television ad on the foreclosures seeking to bring pressure on five Republican senators, including Sens. Chuck Grassley of Iowa and Dean Heller of Nevada, who are both members of the Finance Committee, to vote against Mnuchin.

"Steven Mnuchin, the foreclosure king, made millions by taking people's homes with no regard to anything but his own bottom line," said Stephanie Taylor, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, one of the groups running the ad.

But Mnuchin's supporters include Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah. He called Mnuchin a "leader and a manager through his career, demonstrating an ability to make tough decisions and to be accountable."

Mnuchin, who as Treasury secretary would serve as the administration's chief economic spokesman, is also expected to face questions about Trump's ambitious plans to double the country's growth rate through tax cuts, reducing government regulations and boosting government spending on infrastructure projects.

Mnuchin said in November that the administration's "No. 1 priority is tax reform. This will be the largest tax change since Reagan."

Trump during the campaign also vowed to target countries including China and Mexico that he contended are pursuing unfair trade practices that have cost millions of U.S. jobs. He has said one of his first actions after taking office will be to label China a currency manipulator. It would be Mnuchin's Treasury Department that would make that finding.

While Trump campaigned against Wall Street during the campaign, attacking Hillary Clinton for the speaking fees she earned from Goldman Sachs, Mnuchin is just one of a number of former Goldman Sachs executives tapped by the president elect for top economic jobs in his administration.

Mnuchin worked at Goldman for 17 years, making partner in 1994 and overseeing the firm's mortgage trading desk before becoming chief information officer. He left Goldman in 2002 and, after running an investment fund set up by billionaire investor George Soros, he and two former Goldman colleagues set up a new hedge fund, Dune Capital Management in 2004.

Mnuchin led Dune into financing Hollywood movies including a number of blockbuster hits including "Avatar."

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Jan. 19, the 19th day of 2017. There are 346 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 19, 1977, on his last full day in office, President Gerald R. Ford pardoned Iva Toguri D'Aquino, an American convicted of treason for making English-language radio broadcasts from Japan aimed at demoralizing Allied troops in the Pacific Theater during World War II. (Although she was popularly referred to as "Tokyo Rose," D'Aquino never used that name, and was believed to be one of a group of female broadcasters.)

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On this date:

In 1807, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia.

In 1861, Georgia became the fifth state to secede from the Union.

In 1867, the song "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" by Gaston Lyle, Alfred Lee and George Leybourne was first published in London.

In 1915, Germany carried out its first air raid on Britain during World War I as a pair of Zeppelins dropped bombs onto Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn in England.

In 1937, millionaire Howard Hughes set a transcontinental air record by flying his monoplane from Los Angeles to Newark, New Jersey, in 7 hours, 28 minutes and 25 seconds.

In 1942, during World War II, Japanese forces captured the British protectorate of North Borneo. A German submarine sank the Canadian liner RMS Lady Hawkins off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, killing 251 people; 71 survived.

In 1955, a presidential news conference was filmed for television and newsreels for the first time, with the permission of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In 1960, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America was signed by both countries in Washington, D.C.

In 1966, Indira Gandhi was chosen to be prime minister of India by the National Congress party.

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon nominated G. Harrold Carswell to the Supreme Court; however, the nomination was defeated because of controversy over Carswell's past racial views.

In 1987, Guy Hunt became Alabama's first Republican governor since 1874 as he was sworn into office, succeeding George C. Wallace.

In 1992, German government and Jewish officials dedicated a Holocaust memorial at the villa on the outskirts of Berlin where the notorious Wannsee Conference had taken place.

Ten years ago: Former Rep. Bob Ney (nay), R-Ohio, was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for his role in a lobbying scandal. (Ney was released from a halfway house in Aug. 2008 after serving nearly a year and a-half of his prison sentence.) Denny Doherty, a member of the 1960s folk-rock group The Mamas & the Papas, died near Toronto at age 66.

Five years ago: Six U.S. Marines were killed in a helicopter crash in southern Afghanistan. Texas Gov. Rick Perry abruptly quit the Republican presidential race. One of the world's most popular file-sharing sites, Megaupload.com, was shut down as its founder and several company officials were accused of facilitating millions of illegal downloads of films, music and other content. Rupert Murdoch's media empire apologized and agreed to cash payouts to 37 people who'd been harassed and phone-hacked by its tabloid press.

One year ago: Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump received the endorsement of conservative firebrand Sarah Palin, giving the billionaire businessman a potential boost less than two weeks before Iowa's kick-off caucuses. Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, in his State of the State address, again pledged to fix the crisis over Flint's lead-contaminated water. Italian movie director Ettore Scola, 84, died in Rome.

Today's Birthdays: Former U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar is 97. Actress Tippi Hedren is 87. Former PBS newsman Robert MacNeil is 86. Movie director Richard Lester is 85. Actor-singer Michael Crawford is 75. Actress Shelley Fabares (fab-RAY') is 73. Country singer Dolly Parton is 71. Former ABC newswoman Ann Compton is 70. TV chef Paula Deen is 70. Rock singer Martha Davis is 66. Singer Dewey Bunnell (America) is 65. Actor Desi Arnaz Jr. is 64. Actress Katey Sagal is 63. Comedian Paul Rodriguez is 62. Conductor Sir Simon Rattle is 62. Reggae musician Mickey Virtue (UB40) is 60. Rock musician Jeff Pilson (Foreigner) is 59. Actor Paul McCrane is 56. Actor William Ragsdale is 56. Basketball coach Jeff Van Gundy is 55. International Tennis Hall of Famer Stefan Edberg is 51. Rock singer Whitfield Crane (Ugly Kid Joe) is 49. Singer Trey Lorenz is 48. Actor Shawn Wayans is 46. Rock singer-musician John Wozniak (Marcy Playground) is 46. Actress Drea (DRAY-uh') de Matteo is 45. Comedian-impressionist Frank Caliendo is 43. Actor Drew Powell is 41. Actress Marsha Thomason is 41. Actress Bitsie Tulloch is 36. Actress Jodie Sweetin is 35. Movie director Damien Chazelle (Film: "La La Land") is 32. Actor Logan Lerman is 25. Olympic gold medal gymnast Shawn Johnson is 25. Rapper Mac Miller is 25.

Thought for Today: "Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality." — Edgar Allan Poe, American author, poet and critic (born this date in 1809, died 1849).