

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Saturday, March 4

MS All State Band in Huron  
State Debate in Mitchell

## Sunday, March 5

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

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

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

**Emmanuel Lutheran:** Worship with Milestones at 9 a.m., Sunday School at 10 a.m.

**St. John's Lutheran:** Worship with communion at 9 a.m., Sunday School at 10 a.m., Voters meeting at 10 a.m.

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

## Monday, March 6

**School Breakfast:** French toast sticks, links, fruit, juice, milk.

**School Lunch:** Chicken drummies, smile potato, fruit, carrots and dip, bread stick.

**Senior Menu:** Sloppy joe on wheat bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, crunchy cranberry salad.

School board public meeting, 7 p.m., Bristol Community Center

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

## Tuesday, March 7

**School Breakfast:** Egg sausage biscuit, fruit, juice, milk.

**School Lunch:** Chili, corn bread, fruit, broccoli and dip.

**Open:** Recycling Trailer in Groton  
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

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

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## Upholding our Responsibility to our Native Population

Our tribal population is amidst a government-induced health care crisis as a result of decades of mismanagement and poor leadership at the Indian Health Service (IHS). In South Dakota and across the country, IHS facilities consistently fail to meet basic benchmarks of providing proper care to Native Americans.

Headlines frequently tell the tale of emergency rooms closing down, lack of adequate health care professionals and blatant corruption among IHS administrative employees. Too often, my staff hears horror stories of dirty or broken medical equipment, poor record-keeping, and in one case, a woman who gave birth to her baby on a bathroom floor with no nurses or doctors around to help her. This is unacceptable.

The first step toward fixing the crisis is understanding where the problems lie within the IHS itself. I recently introduced legislation requiring a full audit of the IHS. Despite the agency's well-known and well-documented history of failing the people it is meant to serve, there has never been an independent, broad, thorough review of IHS. I have requested a systemic review of the agency's structural, financial and administrative problems so that the federal government, working in close consultation with tribes, can make the changes necessary to live up to its trust obligations.

IHS is tasked with providing health care for approximately 2.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives across the country. But one does not have to look beyond the agency's own website to see that it is failing in its core mission. According to [www.ihs.gov](http://www.ihs.gov), tribal members continue to die at higher rates than other Americans in a number of categories, including liver disease and cirrhosis, diabetes, suicide and respiratory diseases. In the Great Plains Area, which includes South Dakota, Native Americans have a life expectancy 10 years less than the U.S. population.

Why this is happening can be found – at least in part – in the structure and culture of IHS itself. For example, my office has uncovered an alarming imbalance of staff: of more than 15,000 total IHS employees, only 725 are doctors. More than 10,000 IHS employees are administrative professionals – with nearly 4,000 dedicated to billing alone.

Additionally, there is no financial accountability or even a formula for how to allocate funding among the 12 IHS regional offices. IHS officials themselves can't explain their own budget. This is particularly troubling in places like the Great Plains Region, which has one of the worst health disparities of all IHS regions despite being one of the largest and fastest-growing populations. Even if IHS is underfunded, we cannot responsibly spend more taxpayer dollars on this broken agency without increased transparency and financial accountability.

My legislation would allow us to fully understand the dysfunction at the agency so we can take the necessary steps to fix it. It is supported by the Great Plains Area Tribal Chairmen, officials within the Department of Health and Human Services, the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations and, most recently, the South Dakota legislature, which passed a resolution in support of an IHS audit earlier this year.

Our ultimate goal is for the federal government to live up to its trust obligations of providing timely, quality care to our tribal members. IHS will never be able to accomplish this without broad reforms. But first we need to understand where the problems lie. In the meantime, I will continue working with my colleagues in Congress, tribal leadership, IHS administrators, Health and Human Services officials and others to identify key areas of reform and identify potential solutions to provide better health care to our tribal members.

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## South Dakota's Seat At The Table

"Action is not a choice, it is a necessity." Those were President Trump's words on Obamacare to Congress. As the President mentioned in that speech, one-third of America's counties now have only one insurer. A number of insurance companies have left the market. Others have been forced to raise premiums or narrow their networks, leaving South Dakotans and consumers nationwide with fewer options, which for many, are unaffordable.

Prior to Obamacare, as many as 17 separate insurance companies were offering individual health insurance plans in South Dakota. As Obamacare was adopted in 2010, companies began leaving the market. Last fall, one of South Dakota's largest carriers, Wellmark, announced that it would no longer offer individual health insurance plans in South Dakota. This affected 8,000 South Dakotans, whose plans were terminated on Dec. 31. DakotaCare has also ceased offering health insurance plans. The company could no longer sustain the costs. Avera, which now owns DakotaCare, and Sanford are now the only two insurance options for individuals in South Dakota today.

Governors know that as Congress and the President consider the repeal and replacement of Obamacare, they will be reconsidering the expansion of Medicaid. This also offers an opportunity fundamentally to reform the Medicaid program. If Medicaid is to be sustainable, attention must be given to controlling Medicaid cost growth, for both the federal government and the states. As Medicaid cost control is considered, states should neither be rewarded nor penalized for having expanded or not expanded Medicaid eligibility under Obamacare.

Many states want the authority to require Medicaid beneficiaries, if they are able, to work, look for work or be trained for work. States also want the flexibility to require beneficiaries to engage in preventative care and wellness behaviors.

I recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend National Governor's Association meetings, where I heard from Republican and Democrat congressional leaders. Republican leaders shared their belief that repeal and reform will take place on three fronts: a reconciliation bill, requiring just 51 votes in the Senate; administrative acts by U.S. Health & Human Services Secretary Tom Price (using existing authority); and a further bill, which will require at least 60 votes in the Senate.

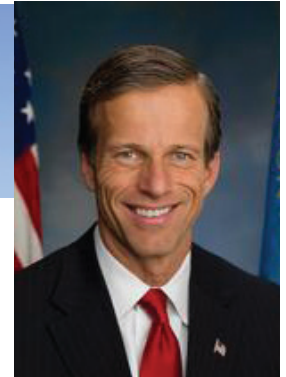
While in D.C., S.D. Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon and I joined state Senate Majority Leader Blake Curd at a private meeting with Secretary Price. At that meeting, we discussed South Dakota's concern over IHS failures and the shift of Native American healthcare costs onto the state.

Thanks to Sen. John Thune's office, we also had the chance to discuss IHS problems with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's chief health policy advisor. We also met with House Energy and Commerce Committee staff members, and with the chief counsel for the Senate Finance Committee. These committees will have jurisdiction over healthcare reform legislation.

It is clear that much work remains to determine how Congress will move forward on Medicaid and health care reform. Although I have no vote in this process, I am working to educate Congress and the Trump administration about South Dakota's particular circumstances. As the debate continues, I will remain engaged. I will work to ensure South Dakota's Medicaid program can meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in our state. I will also do what I can to bend the future cost curve so the program is sustainable over the long term.



**John Thune**  
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



## **A New, Innovative Program to Help South Dakota Farmers**

Ask any member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, of which I'm a long-time member, and they'd tell you that work on the farm bill never really ends. It doesn't matter if it's a farm bill year or not, I'm always listening to farmers' and ranchers' ideas about how I can provide assistance so they can run their operations more efficiently, earn a better living, and ultimately pass their farm or ranch on to the next generation.

Today's sluggish agriculture economy means it's more important than ever for policymakers in Washington to find new, innovative ways to help present and future generations of farmers and ranchers stay on their land. We can work toward achieving that goal by providing reasonable alternatives to growing crops on land that produces the least, which would make family-run farms more profitable.

After months of collecting feedback from farmers and other agriculture stakeholders, I've introduced a new farm bill program that's intended to protect farmers' income in these tough economic times. My bill, the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP), is an economic assistance tool that offers several conservation benefits. SHIPP will not compete with or replace the popular Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), but would be a voluntary alternative for farmers who don't want to tie up their land for long periods of time.

Most farmers are familiar with CRP. It's a good, common-sense program that provides a long-term benefit to farmers, wildlife, and the environment. It creates a safe and healthy habitat for South Dakota's pheasant population, which has an exponential impact on the state's economy. But in order to enroll land in CRP, farmers must be willing to commit to a lengthy contract of up to 15 years. SHIPP, on the other hand, would give farmers the flexibility they need to plant their least productive cropland to a soil-enhancing, low-cost perennial conserving use crop for three, four, or five years. In return, they would receive an annual rental payment and additional crop insurance assistance.

Every farmer knows exactly which portion of his or her land produces the least. Technology, like yield maps, for example, can help many farmers identify their poorest producing land. Other farmers know certain areas of their fields are less productive than others because of consistently excessive wetness, dryness, or other yield-reducing factors.

Under SHIPP, farmers could enroll up to 15 percent of a farm's least productive acres as long as they were planted or considered planted to a commodity crop for three consecutive years prior to enrollment. Once enrolled, the acreage must be planted to a perennial conserving use cover that can be hayed or grazed outside the designated primary nesting and brood-rearing season in the county in which the land is located. And SHIPP would be a low-cost program because it would encourage the removal of poor land from taxpayer-subsidized crop insurance premium subsidies and indemnities.

SHIPP is just the first of several individual farm bill proposals that I'll unveil throughout the year, and I look forward to hearing from South Dakotans about how we can improve this or any existing farm bill program, for that matter. By laying the groundwork for some of these key issues early in the process, we can make sure we're doing all we can to meet the needs of today's farming community.



## 21st Century Cures

Almost two years ago, my nephew Gage learned he had Type 1 diabetes, a disease his older brother Hunter had been diagnosed with a few years before. Shortly after the family got home from the hospital in Sioux Falls where Gage had learned to give himself shots and test his blood sugar levels, he was talking with his mom about what the diagnosis would mean. At one point, he told her, "If God is going to heal me or Hunter, I hope he heals Hunter. He's had diabetes a lot longer than me."

What an incredible display of brotherly love! Just a few months ago, another one of my nephews, Mitchell, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes as well. It's my hope and prayer that one day, because of the incredible research currently underway, we'll be able to tell Hunter, Gage, Mitchell and young people like them that there is a cure; they can be healed.

On February 28, in observance of the 10th annual RARE Disease Day, people around the world turned their attention to diseases like this. Throughout the day and the week that surrounded it, my team and I met with many South Dakotans whose families were forever changed by rare conditions.

I spoke with one father, for instance, whose son had both Type 1 diabetes and Celiac disease, which our family has learned is a somewhat common combination as they are both autoimmune diseases (one of our nephews also has Celiac disease). The whole family has now gone gluten free to accommodate his son's Celiac disease and with new technological advancements, he can monitor his son's blood sugar levels almost minute-by-minute through an app on his phone.

We also met with two inspiring moms of children with cystic fibrosis and a father whose son has been living with a severe genetic disorder. The disorder causes intellectual disability, behavioral and learning challenges, and various physical characteristics. Ongoing research offers more insight into how to manage life with the disease, but there is currently no cure.

While the syndromes and diseases take many different forms, I am consistently inspired by the resilience of those who live with these diagnoses and the caregivers who offer support. It was with these families in mind that I helped pass the 21st Century Cures Act last year. The bill was also approved by the Senate and eventually signed into law by the president.

The 21st Century Cures Act provided new support for research and biomedical innovation, specifically incentivizing the development of drugs and medical countermeasures for pediatric diseases. Additionally, the legislation removed regulatory burdens that slow the pace of scientific advancement, modernized clinical trials, put patients at the heart of the regulatory review process, and streamlined processes that made it difficult to translate discoveries into FDA-approved treatments.

For more than a century, the United States has been on the leading edge of medical innovation and I'm committed to protecting this tradition for a century more. With the 21st Century Cures Act now in place, I'm hopeful we've cleared a space where innovation can thrive and new forms of healing can take hold.

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## GROTON CITY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

March 6, 2017 - 7pm  
Groton Community Center

- 1) Minutes
- 2) Financial Report
- 3) Bills
- 4) 7:10 Justin Olson – Skating Season Report
- 5) Department Reports –Mayou, Lambertz, Herron
- 6) Police Vehicle Update / Camera - Mayou
- 7) Paint Main Street Stripes - Fliehs
- 8) Surplus Property – Herron
- 9) Spring Garbage Route- Herron
- 10) MJ's Electric Pole Change out – Hanlon & Lambertz
- 11) Water Tower Application/Planning Grant
- 12) Paint SD
- 13) Code Enforcement School
- 14) Set Equalization Times & Place
- 15) Annual Report 2016
- 16) Transfer Funds
- 17) Nominating Petitions Filed –Set or Cancel Election 2017
- 18) Exe Session – Legal & Personnel 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
- 19) Hire Summer Employees
- 20) 2nd Reading Ordinance #710- 2017 Summer Salary Ordinance



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or Tina at  
397-7285  
for  
membership  
Information**

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25 Main St., Downtown Groton



## Today in Weather History

March 4, 1994: Two to five inches of snow fell across northeast and part of central South Dakota from the 3rd into the 4th. This new snowfall, combined with the already deep and expansive snowpack and winds of 20 to 40 mph, brought widespread blowing and drifting snow. Visibilities were reduced to near zero at times, making travel treacherous. Many roads were blocked by snowdrifts. Many schools, as well as several highways, were closed. Several vehicles became stuck and had to be pulled out. Some snowfall amounts included 4 inches at Clear Lake, Britton, Waubay, and Wilmot; and 5 inches at Onida, Blunt, Highmore, Miller, and Milbank.

1873: The second inauguration of Ulysses S. Grant remains Washington, DC's, record cold March day. The low was 4 degrees, and by noon with the sunshine, the temperature was 16 degrees. Wind chills were around 30 degrees below zero. The 40 mph winds made his inaugural address inaudible to most on the platform with him.

1899: Cyclone Mahina, aka "The Bathurst Bay Hurricane" in Australia was credited with having produced the highest storm surge on record in the world. The cyclone, with an estimated central pressure of 911 millibars or 26.90 inches of mercury caused a 42.6-foot surge when it came ashore on the coast of northern Australia. The storm killed as many as 400 people and is currently Australia's deadliest cyclone.

1909 - Though fair weather was forecast, President Taft was inaugurated amidst a furious storm. About ten inches of wet snow disrupted travel and communications. The storm drew much criticism against the U.S. Weather Bureau. (David Ludlum)

1953 - Snow was reported on the island of Oahu in Hawaii. (The Weather Channel)

1966 - A severe blizzard raged across Minnesota and North Dakota. The blizzard lasted four days producing up to 35 inches of snow, and wind gusting to 100 mph produced snow drifts 30 to 40 feet high. Bismarck ND reported zero visibility for 11 hours. Traffic was paralyzed for three days. (2nd-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1983: Brownsville, Texas recorded a high of 100 degrees, the earliest the city has ever hit the century mark.

1987 - Rain and high winds prevailed in the northwestern U.S. A wind gust to 69 mph at Klamath Falls OR was their highest in 25 years, and winds at the Ashland Ranger Station in the Siskiyou Mountains of northern California reached 85 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)








1988 - Snow and freezing rain made travel hazardous in Ohio and Indiana. A six car pile-up resulted near Columbus OH, with seven injuries reported. Up to two inches of ice glazed central Indiana. Up to ten inches of snow blanketed northern Ohio. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



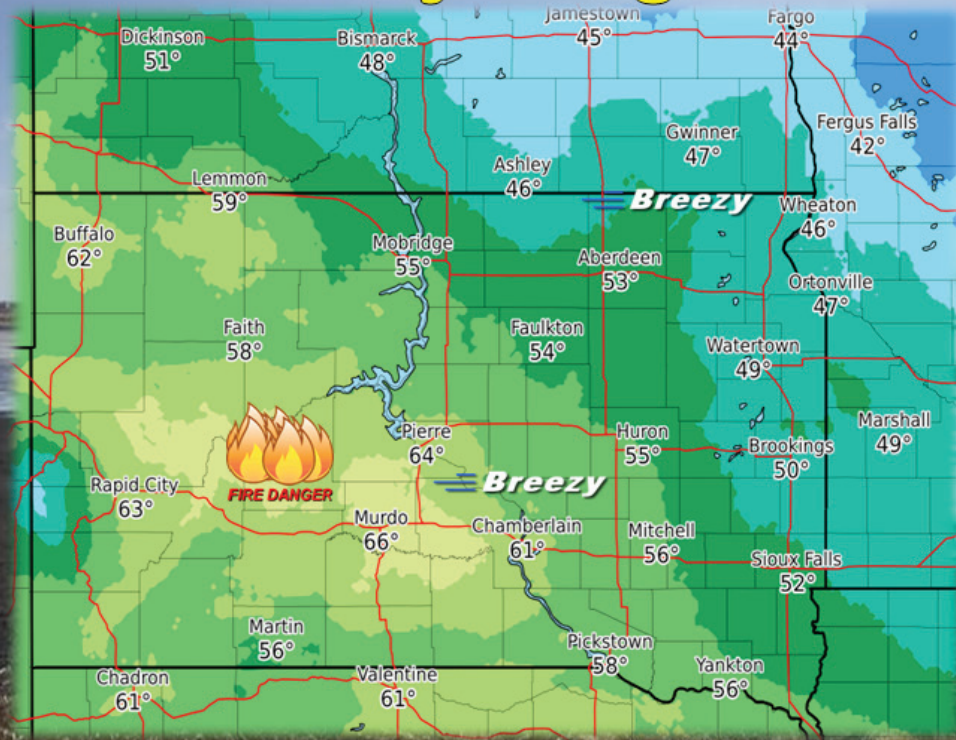
**livestream**  
**Upcoming Event**  
**Monday, March 6**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
**Groton City Council Meeting**  
**gdilive.com**

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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Breezy. Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Mostly Cloudy and Blustery	Mostly Sunny and Breezy
High: 53 °F	Low: 28 °F	High: 62 °F	Low: 40 °F	High: 51 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 39 °F

## Nice Warm Up This Weekend! \*Today's High\*



Partly Cloudy and Mild  
Add Another 5 to 10 degrees for Sunday!

Breezy with Very High Fire Danger  
SW/SC South Dakota Today

Published on: 03/04/2017 at 4:58AM

A mild and dry weekend is expected across the region. Meanwhile, breezy winds and low relative humidity will lead to very high fire danger over parts of the region this afternoon.



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## Yesterday's Weather

**High Outside Temp: 36.8 F at 4:08 PM**

**Low Outside Temp: 9.6 F at 1:59 AM**

**High Gust: 30.0 Mph at 1:10 PM**

**Rain: 0.00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 64° in 2000**

**Record Low: -23 in 1917**

**Average High: 34°F**

**Average Low: 14°F**

**Average Precip in March.: 0.11**

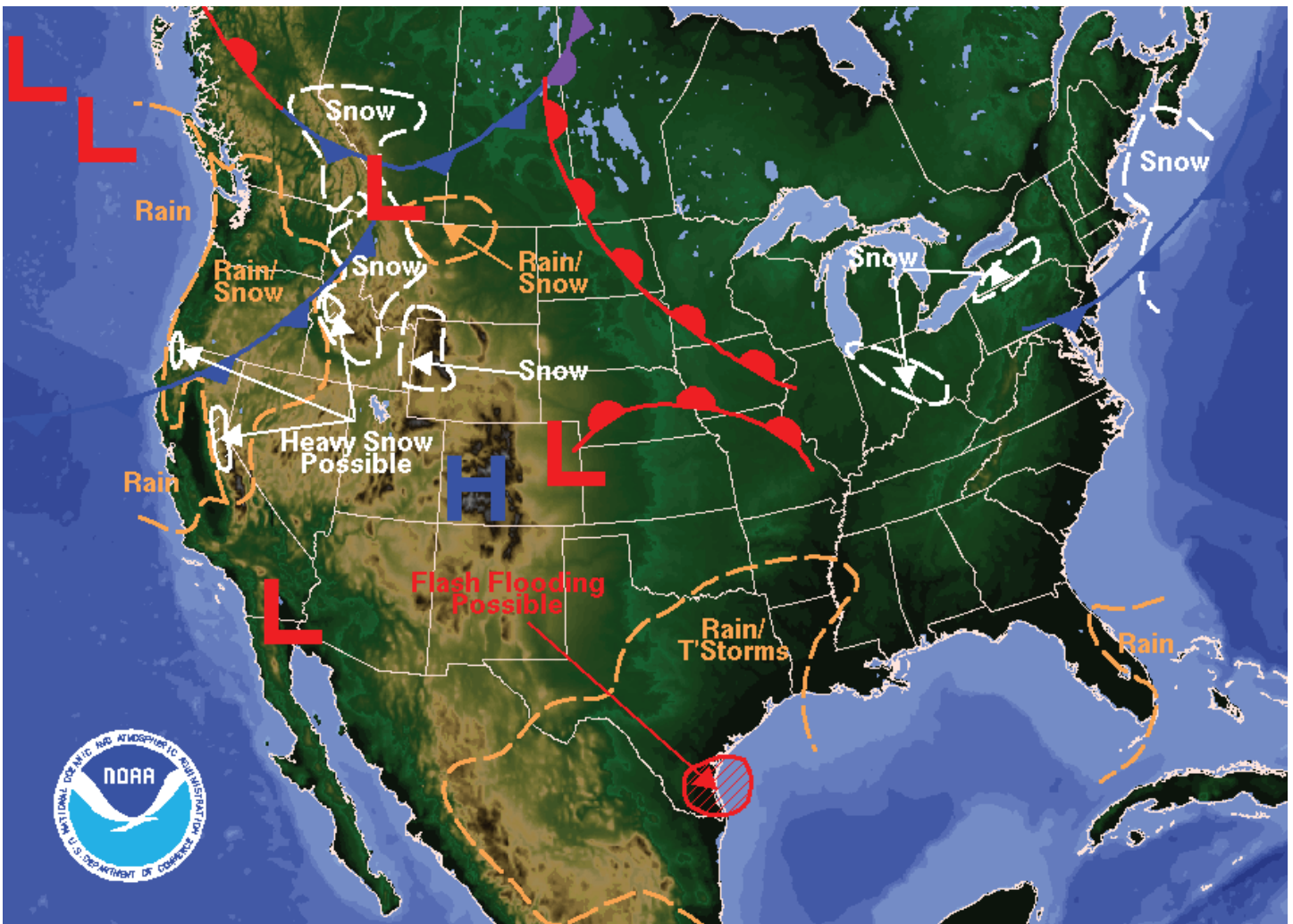
**Precip to date in March.: 0.00**

**Average Precip to date: 1.13**

**Precip Year to Date: 0.00**

**Sunset Tonight: 6:25 p.m.**

**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:04 a.m.**



Weather Forecast for Sat, Mar 04, 2017, issued 3:57 AM EST  
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center  
Prepared by Reinhart based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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## NEVER LEFT ALONE

A flight attendant noticed an elderly lady having a difficult time buckling her seat belt. Recognizing her anxiety and obvious fear, the flight attendant went to the captain and explained what she had seen. Graciously, he accompanied the attendant to the lady and he asked, "May I help you, Ma'am?"

"Oh yes," she replied. "This is my first flight. I must admit that I am rather frightened. Tell me, Sir, will you bring me back down safely?"

As he fastened her seat belt, he smiled politely and said, "Yes, Ma'am. I've flown hundreds of thousands of miles and never left anyone up there."

In the closing verse of Matthew, Jesus promised His disciples, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

What a precious promise: "I am with you always." But what does it mean? His memories would be with us? His teachings would be with us? His imprint on history would be with us? Of course. But that is only the beginning.

"I am with you" leaves no doubt that after Jesus ascended into heaven He would be with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit would be Jesus' presence that was with them then and is with us now and will never leave us. Ever.

Jesus said, "I am going away, but I will come back to you again!" Jesus continues to be with us today.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the assurance of Your presence in our lives. We are comforted to know that whatever comes into our life, You are there to protect us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

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## News from the Associated Press

### Friday's Scores By The Associated Press BOYS' BASKETBALL

District 1AA  
Third Place: Sioux Falls Roosevelt 46, Watertown 36  
Championship: Sioux Falls O'Gorman 53, Brookings 48  
District 2AA  
Third Place: Brandon Valley 61, Sioux Falls Washington 55, OT  
Championship: Sioux Falls Lincoln 45, Harrisburg 41  
District 3AA  
Third Place: Aberdeen Central 75, Mitchell 52  
Championship: Pierre 56, Huron 52  
District 3B Championship: Potter County 64, Faulkton 33  
District 4AA  
Third Place: Rapid City Central 62, Douglas 61, 20T  
Championship: Rapid City Stevens 44, Sturgis Brown 42  
District 4B Championship: Sully Buttes 54, Lower Brule 41  
District 7B Championship: Chester 60, Colman-Egan 50  
District 8B Championship: Bridgewater-Emery 62, Canistota 51  
District 9B Championship: Parker 52, Scotland 34  
District 10B Championship: Irene-Wakonda 65, Viborg-Hurley 58  
District 11B Championship: Platte-Geddes 58, Corsica/Stickney 56, 20T  
District 12B Championship: Gregory 49, Colome 43  
District 13B Championship: White River 83, Crazy Horse 26  
District 14B Championship: Wall 68, Rapid City Christian 60  
District 15B Championship: Lemmon 64, Timber Lake 55  
District 16B Championship: Harding County 57, Faith 41

### GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Class A - Sweet Sixteen  
Dell Rapids 59, Todd County 49  
Hamlin 65, Sioux Valley 51  
Lennox 69, Crow Creek 48  
Little Wound 62, West Central 56  
Madison 52, McCook Central/Montrose 49  
St. Thomas More 54, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 11  
Vermillion 55, Belle Fourche 50  
Webster 58, Milbank Area 49  
Region 1B Regional Final: Warner 53, Florence/Henry 41  
Region 3B Regional Final: Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 51, DeSmet 38

### SD Lottery By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) \_ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:  
Mega Millions  
14-26-39-48-51, Mega Ball: 9, Megaplier: 5



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(fourteen, twenty-six, thirty-nine, forty-eight, fifty-one; Mega Ball: nine; Megaplier: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$83 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$68 million

## **Officer fires at stolen vehicle in Sioux Falls; no one hurt**

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police say an officer fired shots at a stolen car with two people inside near a public park, but no one was hurt.

Police spokesman Sam Clemens says officers in downtown Sioux Falls spotted the stolen vehicle about 3:45 p.m. Friday. The car drove past Falls Park and was stopped in traffic when officers tried to make arrests.

But Clemens says the driver made a U-turn, striking a police car. When another police vehicle made the suspect's car turn around again, a police officer was struck in the leg. That officer then fired at the suspect's vehicle as it sped away.

The suspect car crashed into a boulder on the side of the road. The 22-year-old driver and a 17-year-old passenger were taken into custody.

The Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2mWbvZa>) reports the officer had minor injuries.

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

## **Jackley meets with Trump, top officials on public safety**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley says that he left discussions with President Donald Trump and other top officials with a firm commitment that the administration is going to work with attorneys general and law enforcement for public safety.

Jackley this week met with Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions to discuss addressing violent crime, human trafficking and drugs from the country's southern borders.

He says that it was very fulfilling to have that level of interest in public safety. Jackley, who previously served as U.S. Attorney for South Dakota, says that he invited the Republican president to visit Mount Rushmore National Memorial and the Crazy Horse Memorial.

Jackley, a Republican, plans to run for governor in 2018.

## **Lawmakers may end option to pocket leftover campaign cash**

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — State lawmakers are weighing new campaign finance regulations that would remove South Dakota from the short list of states that allow politicians to pocket the money in their campaign accounts.

Senate Democratic leader Billie Sutton said he's pushing to restrict candidates' ability to tap political contributions for personal use because political office shouldn't be used for personal enrichment. South Dakota is one of just a few states including neighboring North Dakota where withdrawals are legal.

"That's a pretty common theme in South Dakota, I'm afraid, with a lot of different things," Sutton said. "I would venture to say a lot of people don't know that you can currently use the campaign funds for whatever you want."

State campaign finance records show that officials leaving office often give their remaining funds away. Some recently retired lawmakers have held onto the balance of their accounts, but it's difficult to track how former officials use money they keep.

A House panel is scheduled Monday to take up the campaign finance bill, which includes Sutton's provision to limit politicians from using contributions for anything other than campaign-related purposes or donations to charity or another candidate.

Top Republicans including Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Secretary of State Shantel Krebs support some

form of new restrictions. Daugaard said he doesn't think people should be allowed to empty their campaign accounts at the end of their service.

Daugaard, who is serving his final term, had over \$1 million in his governor campaign account at the end of 2016. Spokesman Tony Venhuizen said in an email that after he leaves office, Daugaard would consider donations to charity and using it for political purposes.

Former Gov. Bill Janklow in 2011 closed out his state campaign fund, which held more than \$850,000, and transferred it to his personal account. The handwritten filing is difficult to read. His son, Russ Janklow, said the money went to charities and the University of South Dakota Foundation.

Several former state lawmakers who recently shuttered their political committees held onto the balance of their campaign accounts. Former Republican Sen. Ried Holien, whose report terminating his political committee listed a nearly \$8,200 "consulting" expenditure, said he kept the money to use for his role as national committeeman after checking with most local donors to see if they wanted their money back.

The former lawmaker from Watertown said his new gig is an unpaid position in which he's expected to cover all of his own travel and lodging.

"I had a slightly better situation than some people were presented simply because it's a political fund, and I still had a political office — It's just one I don't get paid for," Holien said. "I figured it's being used for political purposes, and most of the people who gave it to me are happy that I still have a political office."

Ex-Rep. Susy Blake, a Democrat, said she intends to give away the \$1,670 she retained from her campaign committee. Former lawmakers David Omdahl and Mike Verchio, both Republicans, each received about \$1,700 from terminating their campaign committees. Omdahl said he donated the funds to other campaigns, while Verchio said that he used it to pay himself back for his expenses including gas used traversing his sprawling western South Dakota House district.

"The legislators in this state are so underpaid," Verchio said. "I don't see anything wrong with it going to the individual legislator."

State lawmakers are paid \$6,000 per session plus a per diem allowance.

## **Paper apologizes for column tying Peterson case to slavery**

A Wisconsin newspaper is apologizing for a columnist who connected Minnesota Vikings star Adrian Peterson's child abuse case to beatings suffered by slaves. Green Bay-Press Gazette columnist Pete Dougherty's wrote that Peterson "likely is descended from slaves who suffered savage disciplinary beatings generation after generation after generation." The newspaper removed the paragraph Thursday night and apologized to its readers. Dougherty didn't respond to messages seeking comment.

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — A Wisconsin newspaper is apologizing for a columnist who connected Minnesota Vikings star Adrian Peterson's child abuse case to beatings suffered by slaves.

Green Bay-Press Gazette columnist Pete Dougherty's remark came in a column calling for the Packers to consider signing Peterson.

Referencing the charge Peterson faced for disciplining his son with a wooden switch, Dougherty wrote that Peterson "likely is descended from slaves who suffered savage disciplinary beatings generation after generation after generation. It excuses nothing but also can't be ignored."

The Press-Gazette removed the paragraph Thursday night and apologized to readers. In a statement Friday, editor Robert Zizzo called it "a huge mistake in judgment by a reporter and failed oversight by editors."

The column was also carried by USA Today and the affiliated PackersNews.com.

Dougherty didn't respond to messages seeking comment.

## **UN official: Tribe not properly heard in pipeline dispute**

**By BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press**

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A United Nations official who visited North Dakota in the wake of months of protests over the disputed Dakota Access oil pipeline believes the concerns and rights of Native Americans haven't been adequately addressed.

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North Dakota Republican Gov. Doug Burgum says the state has respected legal protests and that it focused on maintaining peace and protecting the environment. He said his administration is working to restore relations with the Standing Rock Sioux.

The tribe has led the fight against the \$3.8 billion pipeline to move North Dakota oil to Illinois. The opposition became centered at a camp that protesters established on federal land between the tribe's reservation and the pipeline route. It grew at times to thousands of people, many of whom clashed with police, leading to about 750 arrests since August.

"My impression is that there was unnecessary use of force," Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, U.N. special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, told The Associated Press after visiting the area this week at the invitation of Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault. "Anybody has a right to protest and express their opposition to what is happening."

Police say some protesters were violent and took part in riots, and that some targeted police both professionally and personally.

"Through this ordeal, our law enforcement personnel have shown great professionalism and restraint as they faced taunts, verbal abuse, threats, thrown objects and even gunshots," Burgum told the AP.

The main protest camp recently was shut down in advance of spring flooding, and a federal contractor is cleaning up hundreds of tons of trash and debris before it can pollute nearby rivers. Tauli-Corpuz acknowledged the large amount of garbage but said she considered it "not such a huge issue."

"Efforts to clean it up could be undertaken even if people were there," she said.

Burgum said the pollution concern and the cleanup that could cost federal taxpayers up to \$1.2 million isn't overblown.

"More than 600 truckloads of garbage, building materials and toxic debris were hauled away from the protest camps. ... Most North Dakotans would agree that's 'a huge issue,'" he said.

Tauli-Corpuz also said she believes the tribe wasn't properly consulted about the pipeline route — an argument the tribe has made in a federal lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers and Texas-based pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners. The defendants dispute that claim.

The tribe says the pipeline threatens its water, sacred sites and religion. The tribe successfully pushed for a full environmental study of the pipeline's crossing under Lake Oahe, a Missouri River reservoir from which it draws water. However, the Corps rescinded the study at the urging of President Donald Trump.

Tauli-Corpuz said she's likely to recommend a full environmental study in a September report to the U.N. Human Rights Council. The report will have no force of law.

She isn't the first U.N. official to weigh in on the pipeline. The U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues last August issued a statement calling for more tribal input. Forum member Edward John visited the camp in late October, saying he found a "war zone" atmosphere, and the group issued a statement in November calling on the U.S. government to protect sacred sites and uphold human rights.

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

## Sanford Health, hospital partner on gene sequencing project

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sanford Health, one of the largest health systems in the country, is partnering with the flagship hospital of the Miami Children's Health System to sequence the genes of nearly 1,000 Latinos and Hispanics in order to better understand the health needs of the populations.

Philanthropist Denny Sanford and Sanford Health have given \$7 million to the Nicklaus Children's Hospital initiative in Miami, Florida, to support the research, which uses genetic and genomic information to personalize health care — in this case, for children.

Golfing great Jack Nicklaus, for whom the hospital is named, said he recently approached his friend, Denny Sanford, and asked for help with the project.

"When we approached Denny with a plea to assist our important work at Nicklaus Children's Hospital and through our Foundation, he was quick to open his heart and lend a hand," Nicklaus said in a statement.

The sequencing project will make it easier to determine whether a person is predisposed to a certain



disease, or how he or she might respond to a particular medicine. The initiative will help build a database of common genomes and identify genetic patterns among Hispanic and Latino populations.

MCHS is South Florida's only health care system exclusively for children and includes the nonprofit Nicklaus Children's Hospital.

Sanford Health, which is the largest employer based in the Dakotas with 28,000 workers, has 45 hospitals and nearly 300 clinics in nine states and four countries. Sanford Health CEO Kelby Krabbenhoft said the partnership will help Sanford diversify its work and research with genomic medicine.

## US, tribal officials want pipeline documents released

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON**, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — U.S. and tribal officials are opposing an effort by the developer of the \$3.8 billion Dakota Access oil pipeline to keep some information shielded from the public amid a court battle over the project.

Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners last month asked a federal judge to shield details such as spill response plans and pipeline features that could be targeted by anti-pipeline activists.

"The documents contain information that could be used by terrorists or others intending to cause harm," company attorney William Scherman said in court documents.

The pipeline to move North Dakota oil to a shipping point in Illinois has been the subject of months of protests in North Dakota, with about 750 arrests since August. There also has been vandalism to company equipment in Iowa and North Dakota.

ETP is a defendant along with the Army Corps of Engineers in a lawsuit filed by the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux, who believe the pipeline threatens water, sacred sites and their right to practice their religion. The company disputes that and says the pipeline is safe.

Tribal attorneys in court documents call the company's reasoning for wanting the documents kept secret "a ruse." The actual reason, they maintain, is that "the documents are embarrassingly inadequate and undermine (the company's) primary narrative in this case — that oil spill risk can be dismissed without further analysis or independent expert review."

Corps attorneys say only a limited amount of the information warrants protection, based on analyses by the Transportation Security Administration and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

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

## PETA wants Sioux Falls sports show to drop bear act

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A well-known animal rights organization is calling on organizers of a bear show to cancel the event at the Sioux Falls Arena.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has made similar demands of the bear show organizers in other communities.

The Great Bear Show has performances scheduled at the Sioux Empire Sportsmen's Show running March 9 to 12 at the arena and convention center. PETA claims the traveling bear exhibit "drags suffering animals, who are often chained, from town to town, forcing them to perform tricks."

The Great Bear Show, on its website, says it takes orphaned bear cubs, trains them and takes them on the road to educate the public and raise money for their care and feed.

The Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2IIRkHD>) reports the company that manages the arena, SMG, said it's aware of PETA's demands, but will not force organizers of the sports show to drop the bears from the schedule.

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

## Trump claims Obama had his phones wiretapped; no proof cited

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Saturday accused former President Barack Obama of having Trump Tower telephone lines “wire tapped” during last year’s election, but Trump didn’t offer any evidence or say what prompted the allegation.

Trump, whose administration has been under siege over campaign contacts with Russian officials, said in a series of early morning tweets that he “just found out that Obama had my ‘wires tapped’ in Trump Tower just before the victory. Nothing found. This is McCarthyism!”

Trump said the wiretapping occurred in October. Trump ran the presidential transition largely out of Trump Tower in New York.

The White House did not immediately reply to inquiries about what led to the president’s tweets. A spokesman for Obama did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Trump’s tweets came days after revelations that Attorney General Jeff Sessions, during his Senate confirmation hearing, didn’t disclose his own campaign-season contacts with Russia’s ambassador to the United States. Sessions, a U.S. senator at the time, was Trump’s earliest Senate supporter.

Trump’s first tweet Saturday mentioned Sessions and claimed the first meeting Sessions had with the Russian diplomat was “set up by the Obama Administration under education program for 100 Ambassadors ...”

U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that Russia interfered in the campaign with the goal of helping elect Trump over Democrat Hillary Clinton — findings that Trump has dismissed. The FBI has investigated Trump associates’ ties to Russian officials. Trump has blamed Democrats for leaks of information about the investigation and the contacts.

It was not clear what prompted Trump’s new charge. The president often tweets about reports he reads on blogs and conservative-leaning websites.

In recent days, the Breitbart News website has published reports citing other anonymously sourced or unconfirmed reports about the Obama administration’s attempts to investigate Trump campaign ties to Moscow.

The Associated Press has not confirmed those reports.

Steve Bannon, Trump’s chief strategist in the White House, is the former executive chairman of Breitbart News.

Trump is spending the weekend at his waterfront estate in Palm Beach, Florida, after highlighting his education agenda and support for school choice on Friday by visiting a Catholic school in Orlando. Trump had no public events scheduled during the weekend.

After tweeting Saturday about Obama, as well as about Arnold Schwarzenegger’s decision to leave “The New Celebrity Apprentice,” Trump went to his golf club in nearby West Palm Beach. Schwarzenegger replaced Trump as host of the show while the president remained its executive producer.

Trump planned to return to the White House late Sunday.

Follow Darlene Superville on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/dsupervilleap>

## Malaysia expels North Korean ambassador over Kim probe

By EILEEN NG, Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysia said it expelled North Korea’s ambassador on Saturday for refusing to apologize for his strong accusations over Malaysia’s handling of the investigation into the killing of the North Korean leader’s half brother.

Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said a notice was sent to the North Korean Embassy at around 6 p.m. declaring Ambassador Kang Chol persona non grata. The notice said Kang must leave Malaysia within 48 hours.

Earlier in the week, Malaysia demanded that North Korea formally apologize for Kang’s accusations over the investigation into the Feb. 13 killing of Kim Jong Nam at Kuala Lumpur’s airport, including that “the

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Malaysian government had something to hide and that Malaysia has colluded with outside powers to defame" North Korea, Anifah said in a statement.

He said that no apology had come and none appeared forthcoming, and that North Korean Embassy officials also failed to turn up for a meeting Saturday at the foreign ministry, so Malaysia decided to expel the ambassador.

"It should be made clear — Malaysia will react strongly against any insults made against it or any attempt to tarnish its reputation," Anifah said.

The death of Kim, the estranged half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, has unleashed a diplomatic battle between Malaysia and North Korea. Authorities said Kim was killed within 20 minutes after two women smeared his face with VX, a banned nerve agent considered a weapon of mass destruction.

Kang's expulsion came just days after Malaysia said it would scrap visa-free entry for North Koreans and expressed concern over the use of the nerve agent. Anifah had said this was an "indication of the government's concern that Malaysia may have been used for illegal activities."

Earlier Saturday, a North Korean chemist deported from Malaysia accused police of threatening to kill his family unless he confessed to killing Kim. Ri Jong Chol, who was released after police said there was insufficient evidence to charge him, spoke to reporters in Beijing while on his way to Pyongyang.

Ri said that he wasn't at the airport the day Kim was killed, but that police accused him of being a mas-terminand and presented him with "fake evidence." He said they showed him a picture of his wife and two children, who were staying with him in Kuala Lumpur, and threatened to kill them.

"These men kept telling me to admit to the crime, and if not, my whole family would be killed, and you too won't be safe. If you accept everything, you can live a good life in Malaysia," Ri said. "This is when I realized that it was a trap ... they were plotting to tarnish my country's reputation."

Malaysia's national police chief, Khalid Abu Bakar, said he would hold a news conference on Tuesday to respond to Ri's comments.

Ri was detained four days after Kim died, but police never said what they believed his role in the attack was. Two women — one Indonesian, one Vietnamese — have been charged with murder in the case, although both reportedly say they were duped into thinking they were playing a harmless prank.

Malaysia is looking for seven other North Korean suspects, four of whom are believed to have left the country on the day of the killing. Three others, including an official at the North Korean Embassy and an employee of Air Koryo, North Korea's national carrier, are believed to still be in Malaysia.

On Friday, police issued an arrest warrant for the Air Koryo employee, Kim Uk Il, but didn't say why he is a suspect. Police say he arrived in Malaysia on Jan. 29, about two weeks before Kim was killed.

North Korea earlier had rejected Malaysia's autopsy finding that VX killed Kim. Ri Tong Il, a former North Korean deputy ambassador to the United Nations, said he probably died of a heart attack because he suffered from heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Malaysia's finding that VX killed Kim boosted speculation that North Korea orchestrated the attack. Experts say the oily poison was almost certainly produced in a sophisticated state weapons laboratory, and North Korea is widely believed to possess large quantities of chemical weapons, including VX.

North Korea is trying to retrieve Kim's body, but has not acknowledged that the victim is Kim Jong Un's half brother, as Malaysian government officials have confirmed.

Kim Jong Nam reportedly fell out of favor with his father, the late Kim Jong Il, in 2001, when he was caught trying to enter Japan on a false passport to visit Tokyo Disneyland.

## China says defense budget to rise by about 7 percent in 2017

By GERRY SHIH and CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China will raise its defense budget by about 7 percent this year, a government spokeswoman said Saturday, continuing a trend of lowered growth amid a slowing economy despite regional tensions over the South China Sea and other issues.

Total defense spending would account for about 1.3 percent of projected gross domestic product in 2017,



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said Fu Ying, spokeswoman for the legislature. She was speaking at a news conference on the eve of the opening of the body's annual session.

The precise figure will be provided by Premier Li Keqiang in his address to the National People's Congress on Sunday morning.

Fu reiterated China's contention that its military was purely for defense and constituted a force for stability in Asia.

"We advocate dialogue for peaceful resolutions, while at the same time, we need to possess the ability to defend our sovereignty and interests," Fu said. "The strengthening of Chinese capabilities benefits the preservation of peace and security in this region, and not the opposite."

Depending on the final figure, this year's budget could mark the third consecutive year of declines in defense spending growth rates, even while some outside observers say those figures don't account for all military spending. The budget grew by 7.6 percent last year and 10.1 percent in 2015.

That trend reflects "the new normal, an acknowledgement that Chinese growth is plateauing as a whole," said Alexander Neill, a senior fellow for Asia-Pacific security for the International Institute for Strategic Studies based in Singapore.

While the slowing economy may preclude a spending spree similar to past years, when growth rose by double-digit percentages each year, there's no doubt China will continue to add high-tech weaponry according to its long-term strategy, Neill said.

Seeking a more streamlined fighting force, China plans to complete the cutting of 300,000 military personnel by the end of the year, shifting the emphasis away from the land forces and toward the navy, air and rocket units.

Still, the increase of about 67 billion yuan (\$9.7 billion) would push the total defense budget past the 1 trillion yuan (\$145 billion) mark for the first time. The percentage increases do not track in U.S. dollar figures because of variations in the exchange rate.

China's defense budget is expected to rise to \$233 billion by 2020, almost twice what it was in 2010 and four times what Britain spends, according to a study released in December by IHS Jane's. By 2025, China would outspend all other states in the Asia-Pacific combined, the consultancy predicted.

The defense budget has for years been the world's second largest, although it still lags far behind the U.S. President Donald Trump has asked for a 10 percent increase in U.S. defense spending this year, adding \$54 billion to the budget that topped \$600 billion last year.

China points out that, as a developing country with a population of 1.37 billion, its defense spending per capita is a fraction of those of other nations. Fu also said the percentage of GDP China spends on defense is below the 2 percent the U.S. calls on NATO allies to spend.

The relatively modest spending increase reflects both China's steady, if not spectacular economic growth, and a security outlook that has changed little in recent years, said Tang Yonghong of the Institute of Taiwan Studies at Xiamen University in southeastern China.

"China's defense budget is formulated on the basis of its own needs and the domestic economic situation. Beijing isn't much concerned about the reaction from the international community," he said.

China has been spending heavily on technologies, allowing it to project power far from shore, including aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and its first overseas military base located in the East Africa nation of Djibouti.

Along with defending China's frontiers, the self-governing island of Taiwan remains a military priority for the 2.3 million-member People's Liberation Army, the world's largest standing military. Beijing has never renounced its vow to use force to take control of the island it considers its own territory, and tensions have risen since the election last year of independence-leaning Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen.

Beijing has also come under criticism for militarizing man-made islands in the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety.

Fu turned those accusations back on the U.S., saying the strategically vital waterway through which about \$5 trillion in trade passes each year was basically calm.

"As to how the situation develops in future, that depends on U.S. intentions. American actions in the

South China Sea have a definite significance in terms of which way the winds blow," she said.

## Other mysterious deaths of North Korea's perceived enemies

By KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — An outcast from North Korea's ruling family was killed with a weapon believed to belong to North Korea's chemical arsenal and several North Koreans are wanted for questioning. But with Malaysia deporting the only North Korean it detained in the airport assassination of Kim Jong Nam, many in South Korea see the secretive, dictatorial regime in Pyongyang escaping punishment for another mysterious killing.

The government in Seoul and human rights groups say Pyongyang has for decades acted to silence its perceived enemies, sending assassins after South Korean government officials, North Korean defectors and anti-Pyongyang activists.

And yet North Korea often takes out the targets without leaving evidence that would indisputably prove its involvement, South Koreans say.

When suspicions were expressed, North Korea responded with silence or with wounded indignation. Some of the mysterious deaths suspected of being carried out by North Korea:

### DIPLOMAT IN RUSSIA

Choi (pronounced Chwey) Duk-kun, a South Korean diplomat stationed in the eastern Russian city of Vladivostok, just north of North Korea, was found dead in front of his apartment in 1996. He had head wounds, but his passport and money were still in his pockets.

South Korea is almost certain North Korea organized a hit job on the diplomat who had been monitoring the North.

The biggest evidence Seoul offers? He was stabbed with a sharp object on his right side, and investigators later found in his bloodstream traces of neostigmine bromide, a chemical that attacks the nervous system and was known to be frequently used by North Korean operatives.

The timing of Choi's death was also suspicious. It came weeks after a North Korean submarine beached on South Korea's east coast. Twenty-two North Koreans were killed by South Korean forces or were later found dead, prompting the North to vow "hundredfold and thousand-fold" retaliation.

Choi's assailants were never caught. North Korea denied involvement and claimed it was framed by Seoul.

### MISSIONARIES IN CHINA

North Korea hates South Korean activists, many of them evangelical Christians, who smuggle out defectors and send anti-Pyongyang literature and Bibles into the North across the border from China.

South Korea believes Pyongyang killed at least one of them, Patrick Kim, a 46-year-old pastor who died in August 2011 after collapsing in the Chinese border city of Dandong.

South Korea said Kim was likely attacked by a North Korean agent using a poisoned needle. Investigators detected in Kim's body neostigmine bromide, the same chemical found in the diplomat in Vladivostok.

A day after Kim's attack, Kang (pronounced Gahng) Ho-bin, another South Korean missionary who helped defectors, was stabbed in the back with what officials believed was a poisoned needle in another Chinese city, Yangji.

The assailant wasn't captured. Kang survived the attack, but was killed in 2012 after his car collided with a bus in the Chinese city of Longjing.

There are suspicions that North Korea also assassinated Han Chung Ryeol, a Korean-Chinese pastor who was found dead in the Chinese county of Changbai last year with slash wounds to his neck.

### TURNCOATS IN THE SOUTH

South Korea almost immediately blamed the 1997 death of Lee Han-young, a nephew of one of the former wives of North Korea's second leader, Kim Jong Il, on North Korean agents sent on a revenge mis-

sion. But police failed to catch the assailants before they allegedly returned to the North.

Lee died of gunshot wounds after being attacked in front of his apartment near Seoul in 1997. According to his neighbors, Lee after the shooting said, "spy, spy," and held up two fingers, perhaps indicating the number of attackers. Police said a woman purporting to be a magazine reporter called the apartment to ask when Lee would be home before the attack.

Lee had defected through Switzerland in 1982, but Seoul kept his arrival secret until 1996, when his mother also fled the North. He had harshly criticized the country and his dictator uncle.

South Korean officials said that Lee's killing might have also been North Korea's way of sending a message to Hwang Jang-yop, a former North Korean Workers' Party secretary who defected to the South earlier in 1997.

Hwang, who once tutored Kim Jong Il and remains the highest-level North Korean to seek asylum in South Korea, survived what the South said was an assassination attempt by the North in 2010. He died six months after his would-be assailants were arrested, at the age of 87.

Follow Kim Tong-hyung on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/KimTongHyung](http://www.twitter.com/KimTongHyung)

## Officials: Man threatened Jewish centers to frame, harass ex

By COLLEEN LONG, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A former journalist fired for fabricating details in stories made at least eight of the scores of threats against Jewish institutions nationwide, including a bomb threat to the Anti-Defamation League, as part of a bizarre campaign to harass and frame his ex-girlfriend, federal officials said.

Juan Thompson was arrested in St. Louis and appeared there in federal court Friday on a cyberstalking charge. He answered questions and told the judge he had enough money to hire a lawyer.

A crowd of supporters who attended said Thompson had no criminal record. His lawyer didn't comment. Federal officials have been investigating 122 bomb threats called in to Jewish organizations in three dozen states since Jan. 9 and a rash of vandalism at Jewish cemeteries.

A criminal complaint said Thompson started making threats Jan. 28 with an email to the Jewish History Museum in New York written from an account that made it appear as if it were being sent by an ex-girlfriend. "Juan Thompson put 2 bombs in the History Museum set to go off Sunday," it said.

Authorities said he followed that up with similar messages to a Jewish school in Farmington Hills, Michigan, and to a school and community center in Manhattan.

In another round of emails and phone calls, he gave the woman's name, rather than his own, the court complaint said. The Council on American-Islamic Relations received an anonymous email saying the woman put a bomb in a Dallas Jewish center.

Thompson, who's black, then took to Twitter: "Know any good lawyers?" he wrote. "Need to stop this nasty/racist #whitegirl I dated who sent a bomb threat in my name." He later tweeted to the Secret Service: "I'm been (sic) tormented by an anti-Semite. She sent an antijewish bomb threat in my name. Help."

But police say it was a hoax created to make the woman look guilty. Thompson also made threats in which he identified the woman as the culprit, authorities said. It's unclear why Jewish organizations were targeted.

Republican President Donald Trump suggested in a meeting Tuesday with state attorneys general the threats against Jewish community centers may have been designed to make "others look bad," according to Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro. Trump also has condemned violence against Jewish organizations.

Thompson was fired from the online publication The Intercept last year after being accused of fabricating several quotes and creating fake email accounts to impersonate people, including the Intercept's editor-in-chief. One of the stories involved Dylann Roof, the white shooter of black worshippers at a Charleston, South Carolina, church.

Thompson had written that a cousin named Scott Roof claimed the gunman was angry that a love interest chose a black man over him. A review showed there was no cousin by that name. The story was retracted.



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The Intercept wrote Friday it was "horrified" to learn of Thompson's arrest.

Thompson had been accused of bizarre behavior before.

Doyle Murphy, a reporter at the Riverfront Times, an alternative weekly in St. Louis, said he was subjected to social media harassment after writing about Thompson's troubled past in the fallout from his firing at The Intercept.

Murphy said Thompson set up anonymous accounts on Twitter and other social media posing as a woman who claimed she had been sexually assaulted by Murphy. Murphy said he contacted Twitter but every time one fake account was taken down a new one popped up. He said he contacted police but there was little they could do.

"It was a nightmare, and there's not a whole lot I could do about it," Murphy said.

The Federal Communications Commission said Friday it will grant an emergency waiver allowing Jewish community centers and their phone carriers to track the numbers of callers who make threats, even if the callers try to block the numbers. It said Democratic U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer had requested such a waiver earlier in the week.

According to the criminal complaint, Thompson and the ex-girlfriend, a social worker, broke up last summer. The following day, her boss received an email purporting to be from a national news organization saying she'd been pulled over for drunken driving.

The harassment got worse, authorities said. She received an anonymous email with nude photos of herself and a threat to release them. Her company, a nonprofit that works to end homelessness, got faxes saying she was anti-Semitic. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children got a note saying she watched child porn.

Thompson's IP address was used for the emails, but he told police his computer had been hacked, the complaint said.

The ADL said Thompson had been on its radar since he fabricated the story about Roof. According to ADL research, Thompson also claimed he wanted to dismantle the system of "racial supremacy and greedy capitalism that is stacked against us." He said he was going to run for mayor of St. Louis to "fight back against Trumpian fascism and socio-economic terrorism."

FBI Director James Comey met with Jewish community leaders Friday to discuss the recent threats, the agency said.

University City, Missouri, police Lt. Fredrick Lemons told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that detectives will question Thompson about the 154 headstones toppled last month at a Jewish cemetery there.

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Associated Press writers Jim Salter in St. Louis, Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles and Jake Pearson and Verena Dobnik in New York contributed to this report.

## China says defense budget to rise by about 7 percent in 2017

By GERRY SHIH and CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China will raise its defense budget by about 7 percent this year, a government spokeswoman said Saturday, continuing a trend of lowered growth amid a slowing economy.

Total defense spending would account for about 1.3 percent of projected gross domestic product in 2017, said Fu Ying, spokeswoman for the legislature. She was speaking at a news conference on the eve of the opening of the body's annual session.

The precise figure will be provided by Premier Li Keqiang in his address to the National People's Congress on Sunday morning.

Fu reiterated China's contention that its military was purely for defense and constituted a force for stability in Asia.

"We advocate dialogue for peaceful resolutions, while at the same time, we need to possess the ability to defend our sovereignty and interests," Fu said. "The strengthening of Chinese capabilities benefits the preservation of peace and security in this region, and not the opposite."

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Depending on the final figure, this year's budget could mark the third consecutive year of declines in defense spending growth rates. The budget grew by 7.6 percent last year and 10.1 percent in 2015.

The increase of about 67 billion yuan (\$9.7 billion) would push the total defense budget past the 1 trillion yuan (\$145 billion) mark for the first time. The percentage increases do not track in U.S. dollar figures because of variations in the exchange rate.

China's defense budget has for years been the world's second largest, although still lagging far behind the U.S. President Donald Trump has asked for a 10 percent increase in U.S. defense spending this year, adding \$54 billion to the budget that topped \$600 billion last year.

China points out that, as a developing country with a population of 1.37 billion, its defense spending per capita is a fraction of those of other nations. Fu also said the percentage of GDP China spends on defense is below the 2 percent the U.S. calls on NATO allies to spend.

"The gap in capabilities with the U.S. is enormous, but China's military development and construction will continue in keeping with our need to defend our national sovereignty and security," Fu said.

While China insists its military is purely for domestic purposes, it has been spending heavily on technologies allowing it to project power far from shore, including aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and its first overseas military base located in the East Africa nation of Djibouti.

Beijing has also come under criticism from the U.S. and others for militarizing man-made islands in the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety.

Fu turned those accusations back on the U.S., saying the strategically vital waterway through which about \$5 trillion in trade passes each year was basically calm.

"As to how the situation develops in future, that depends on U.S. intentions. American actions in the South China Sea have a definite significance in terms of which way the winds blow," she said.

## French candidate going it alone amid campaign defections

By **ELAINE GANLEY, Associated Press**

PARIS (AP) — The once promising presidential bid of French conservative Francois Fillon, already seriously hobbled by pending corruption charges, was coming unraveled Friday with the resignation of his campaign director and his campaign spokesman, adding momentum to a stream of defections and panicking his party.

Fillon appeared increasingly alone with the resignation of two key officials, and other high-profile supporters following them out. But he did not balk. He looked past the pressure, counting on a support rally planned for Sunday near the Eiffel Tower and tweeting a video plea for people to show up in force "to show everyone what the will of the militants of France looks like."

A poor showing at the support rally would impact Fillon's legitimacy, which has been based on his win in the primary held by conservatives and centrists.

As Fillon's fortunes fell, former Prime Minister Alain Juppe again was being mentioned as a potential Plan B for The Republicans party, which could find itself without a candidate as the April 23 first round of the presidential election nears. A runoff between the top two candidates is May 7. Juppe had refused filling in for Fillon in the past.

"Don't let anyone deprive you of your choice. I ask you to resist," Fillon said in his tweeted video, an apparent reference to the defections and behind-the-scenes maneuvering to replace him.

After Thierry Solere announced Friday he was bowing out as spokesman, becoming the most visible of Fillon's defectors so far, more severe woes were in store with the resignation of campaign director Patrick Stefanini.

A brief statement by the press office of Fillon's campaign said Stefanini presented his resignation Friday morning and that Fillon had accepted it. Critically, Stefanini is to stay on until the end of Sunday's rally, the statement said.

Financial prosecutors are investigating allegations that Fillon gave his wife and two of their children

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taxpayer-funded jobs they never performed. Fillon initially said he would step down if charged, but decided to maintain his candidacy even though he's been summoned to face charges on March 15.

His family members were paid more than 1 million euros (\$1.1 million) over a number of years for work as his parliamentary aides. It is legal in France to hire relatives for public jobs, if they actually work. Fillon insists his wife and children did.

Fillon is not the only candidate in the firing line of judicial investigators.

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen is at the center of several judicial inquiries along with her anti-immigration National Front party.

She has been summoned to appear next Friday before investigating judges in a case concerning her aides at the European Parliament. Le Pen has advised them she would refuse to show up during the campaign, her lawyer, Rodolphe Bosselut, said, confirming French press reports.

The European Parliament voted Thursday to lift her immunity in another case surrounding her tweets of gruesome images of the Islamic State group.

Unlike Fillon, Le Pen has not lost ground in polls, where she is vying for the top spot with an upstart independent centrist, Emmanuel Macron.

Fillon is struggling to survive. His campaign treasurer quit on Thursday, when three Republican lawmakers also announced they were withdrawing their support.

Other conservatives and centrists allied with them have resigned over the past two days, with some calling for the more moderate Juppe to return to the ring.

Juppe, the Bordeaux mayor, placed second in the conservative primary. After previous refusals to take Fillon's place The Republicans party candidate, he remained silent Friday.

Nadine Morano, a former minister who backed Fillon's candidacy, was among those making a U-turn Friday. Morano urged him to withdraw his bid and cancel the solidarity rally, which she claimed could overheat.

"I'm among those who use their energy trying to convince Francois Fillon to step down," Morano said. "I'm worried that the French will not let us reach the second round."

Jerome Chartier, Fillon's special adviser, is remaining faithful to the candidate even though his companion thinks a way out is needed.

"I've seen friends leave," Chartier said on BFM-TV. "In the toughest moments, you hope the sailors will pull the oars with the captain. I'm a sailor and I pull the oars with Captain Fillon."

Virginie Calmels, Chartier's partner and president of a conservative movement called DroiteLib, wants Fillon, Juppe and former French President Nicolas Sarkozy to meet and make a decision.

"The spectacle of this presidential campaign makes me sick. The violence of the public debate is unheard of," Calmels said in a statement.

While Fillon's popularity has nosedived in recent weeks, Juppe's is high enough to qualify for the second round of the election, according to an opinion poll published Friday.

In his tweeted video, Fillon said the election's stakes are higher than ever and that the contest involves a decision "between several conceptions of France and its future," the far-right or left.

Fillon used language in the video normally employed by Le Pen and her anti-immigration party, from "national sovereignty" to "vanquishing Islamic totalitarianism."

Le Pen, appearing at a town hall east of Paris on Friday, defended a topic which concerns her directly: the presumption of innocence.

"When (Fillon) declared that he would not be candidate if charged, I declared that this is an incoherent statement because in France, there is a principle named presumption of innocence," she said.

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Samuel Petrequin in Paris and Chris Den Hond.in Vaudoué contributed.



## Deported Korean says Malaysia threatened to harm his family

By EILEEN NG, Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — A North Korean chemist deported from Malaysia accused police of threatening to kill his family unless he confessed to the assassination of the half-brother of North Korea's leader, calling it a plot to tarnish his country's honor.

Ri Jong Chol spoke to reporters in Beijing early Saturday while on his way to Pyongyang. Malaysian authorities have said there's insufficient evidence to charge Ri over Kim Jong Nam's killing at Kuala Lumpur's airport on Feb. 13.

Ri was detained four days after the attack but police never said what they believed his role was. Two women — one Indonesian, one Vietnamese — have been charged with murder after police said they smeared Kim's face with VX, a banned nerve agent considered a weapon of mass destruction.

Ri said he wasn't at the airport the day Kim was killed but that police accused him of being a mastermind and presented him with "fake evidence." He said they showed him a picture of his wife and two children, who were staying with him in Kuala Lumpur, and threatened to kill them.

"These men kept telling me to admit to the crime, and if not, my whole family would be killed, and you too won't be safe. If you accept everything, you can live a good life in Malaysia," Ri said. "This is when I realized that it was a trap ... they were plotting to tarnish my country's reputation."

Police did not immediately respond to a request for comment Saturday.

Immigration Director-General Mustafar Ali said Friday that Ri has been blacklisted from re-entering Malaysia.

Malaysia is looking for seven other North Korean suspects, four of whom are believed to have left the country on the day of the killing. Three others, including an official at the North Korean Embassy and an employee of Air Koryo, North Korea's national carrier, are believed to still be in Malaysia.

Police on Friday issued an arrest warrant for the Air Koryo employee, Kim Uk Il, but didn't say why he is a suspect. Police say he arrived in Malaysia on Jan. 29, about two weeks before Kim was killed.

Kim's death has unleashed a diplomatic battle between Malaysia and North Korea. Malaysia said it was scraping visa-free entry for North Koreans, while the Foreign Ministry said it was "greatly concerned" about the use of the nerve agent.

Malaysia has not directly accused North Korea of being behind the killing, but the ministry statement came hours after a North Korean envoy rejected a Malaysian autopsy finding that VX killed Kim. Ri Tong Il, a former North Korean deputy ambassador to the United Nations, said that the man probably died of a heart attack because he suffered from heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.

He said that if VX had been used, others besides Kim would have been killed or sickened. Malaysian police have brushed off Ri's claim of a heart attack and insisted he was murdered.

The two female suspects at an airport terminal were caught on grainy surveillance video smearing what Malaysian authorities say was VX on his face and eyes, though both reportedly say they were duped into thinking they were playing a harmless prank.

Kim died within 20 minutes, authorities say. No bystanders reported falling ill.

Police said the women had been trained to go immediately to the bathroom and wash their hands. Police said the four North Korean suspects who had left the country put the VX liquid on the women's hands.

Police can't confirm whether the two women may have been given antidotes before the attack. An antidote, atropine, can be injected after exposure and is carried by medics in war zones where weapons of mass destruction are suspected.

Malaysia's finding that VX killed Kim boosted speculation that North Korea orchestrated the attack. Experts say the oily poison was almost certainly produced in a sophisticated state weapons laboratory, and North Korea is widely believed to possess large quantities of chemical weapons including VX.

North Korea is trying to retrieve Kim's body, but has not acknowledged that the victim is Kim Jong Un's half brother.

## Deported Korean says Malaysia threatened to harm his family

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## Next in line to lead Russia probe: Rosenstein has respect

By ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some Democrats worry the appointment of a Jeff Sessions subordinate to oversee an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election won't be a clean enough break from the embattled attorney general.

But the veteran prosecutor in line for the job may be uniquely politically palatable.

Rod Rosenstein, who faces his confirmation hearing next week for the role of deputy attorney general, was appointed top federal prosecutor in Maryland by George W. Bush and remained in the post for the entire Obama administration. That staying power, extraordinary for a position that routinely turns over with changes in the White House, lends weight to the reputation he's cultivated as an apolitical law enforcement official.

"He is so well-respected. He cannot be influenced, he cannot be bought, he cannot be pressured because of outside political forces," said Baltimore criminal defense attorney Steven Silverman, who has known Rosenstein for years.

Sessions recused himself from any Trump-Russia investigation Thursday after the Justice Department acknowledged he had spoken twice with the Russian ambassador last year and had failed to disclose the contacts during his Senate confirmation process. Sessions said he had not tried to mislead anyone but could have been more careful in his answers. He planned to file amended testimony on Monday, a Justice Department spokesman said.

The new attorney general's recusal handed authority for an investigation — for now — to his deputy, Dana Boente, another longtime federal prosecutor who has the post in an acting capacity. Boente was appointed U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia in 2015 by Barack Obama and was elevated to acting attorney general in January after Trump fired Obama holdover Sally Yates. When Sessions won confirmation, Boente stepped to the No. 2 position.

Once Rosenstein is confirmed, he'll take over responsibility for any probes touching the Trump campaign and Russian meddling.

He arrives at the Justice Department with experience in politically freighted investigations, having earlier in his career been part of the Clinton-era Whitewater independent investigation.

When he was a U.S. attorney, his office also led the leak prosecution of Thomas Drake, the former National Security Agency official who pleaded guilty to a minor misdemeanor after more serious charges of mishandling documents were dropped. He more recently oversaw the probe of James Cartwright, the former Joint Chiefs of Staff vice chairman who admitted making false statements during a separate leak investigation and was ultimately pardoned by Obama.

"It's hard to imagine a more challenging environment in which to come in as the deputy attorney general than what we have now," said Jason Weinstein, who served under Rosenstein in the U.S. attorney's office in Maryland. "Having said that, I can't imagine a better person for the job right now than Rod."

Regardless, the Sessions recusal did little to assuage demands from some Democrats that the investigation be placed in the hands of a special prosecutor.

Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, called the Sessions recusal "deeply inadequate" and said he was troubled by the number of Trump associates who he contended have either made misleading statements or concealed communications with Russia.

"I also think for the public to have confidence that any prosecutorial decision is made truly independent of the administration, that the extra remedy of a special counsel is really warranted here," Schiff said in an interview.

There is precedent for the selection of a special counsel by the Justice Department for especially sensitive investigations, though there's no indication yet that federal officials are planning to seek such an appointment.

One prominent example was in 2003, when the Bush Justice Department turned to Patrick Fitzgerald, then the top federal prosecutor in Chicago, to investigate who leaked the identity of Valerie Plame, a covert



CIA officer. That appointment was made by James Comey, who at the time was deputy attorney general and now is director of the FBI.

"I think if the decision is made to bring someone in from the outside, it's not because the department can't do it and can't do it well," said Weinstein, now a Washington lawyer. "It's because in this politicized environment, the public's faith in the integrity of the investigation is so important and the department will want to bend over backward to put in place measures to ensure that the results of the investigation weren't questioned."

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

## Other mysterious deaths of North Korea's perceived enemies

By KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — An outcast from North Korea's ruling family was killed with a weapon believed to belong to North Korea's chemical arsenal and several North Koreans are wanted for questioning. But with Malaysia deporting the only North Korean it detained in the airport assassination of Kim Jong Nam, many in South Korea see the secretive, dictatorial regime in Pyongyang escaping punishment for another mysterious killing.

The government in Seoul and human rights groups say Pyongyang has for decades acted to silence its perceived enemies, sending assassins after South Korean government officials, North Korean defectors and anti-Pyongyang activists.

And yet North Korea often takes out the targets without leaving evidence that would indisputably prove its involvement, South Koreans say.

When suspicions were expressed, North Korea responded with silence or with wounded indignation. Some of the mysterious deaths suspected of being carried out by North Korea:

### DIPLOMAT IN RUSSIA

Choi (pronounced Chwey) Duk-kun, a South Korean diplomat stationed in the eastern Russian city of Vladivostok, just north of North Korea, was found dead in front of his apartment in 1996. He had head wounds, but his passport and money were still in his pockets.

South Korea is almost certain North Korea organized a hit job on the diplomat who had been monitoring the North.

The biggest evidence Seoul offers? He was stabbed with a sharp object on his right side, and investigators later found in his bloodstream traces of neostigmine bromide, a chemical that attacks the nervous system and was known to be frequently used by North Korean operatives.

The timing of Choi's death was also suspicious. It came weeks after a North Korean submarine beached on South Korea's east coast. Twenty-two North Koreans were killed by South Korean forces or were later found dead, prompting the North to vow "hundredfold and thousand-fold" retaliation.

Choi's assailants were never caught. North Korea denied involvement and claimed it was framed by Seoul.

### MISSIONARIES IN CHINA

North Korea hates South Korean activists, many of them evangelical Christians, who smuggle out defectors and send anti-Pyongyang literature and Bibles into the North across the border from China.

South Korea believes Pyongyang killed at least one of them, Patrick Kim, a 46-year-old pastor who died in August 2011 after collapsing in the Chinese border city of Dandong.

South Korea said Kim was likely attacked by a North Korean agent using a poisoned needle. Investigators detected in Kim's body neostigmine bromide, the same chemical found in the diplomat in Vladivostok.

A day after Kim's attack, Kang (pronounced Gahng) Ho-bin, another South Korean missionary who helped defectors, was stabbed in the back with what officials believed was a poisoned needle in another Chinese city, Yangji.

The assailant wasn't captured. Kang survived the attack, but was killed in 2012 after his car collided with

a bus in the Chinese city of Longjing.

There are suspicions that North Korea also assassinated Han Chung Ryeol, a Korean-Chinese pastor who was found dead in the Chinese county of Changbai last year with slash wounds to his neck.

## TURNCOATS IN THE SOUTH

South Korea almost immediately blamed the 1997 death of Lee Han-young, a nephew of one of the former wives of North Korea's second leader, Kim Jong Il, on North Korean agents sent on a revenge mission. But police failed to catch the assailants before they allegedly returned to the North.

Lee died of gunshot wounds after being attacked in front of his apartment near Seoul in 1997. According to his neighbors, Lee after the shooting said, "spy, spy," and held up two fingers, perhaps indicating the number of attackers. Police said a woman purporting to be a magazine reporter called the apartment to ask when Lee would be home before the attack.

Lee had defected through Switzerland in 1982, but Seoul kept his arrival secret until 1996, when his mother also fled the North. He had harshly criticized the country and his dictator uncle.

South Korean officials said that Lee's killing might have also been North Korea's way of sending a message to Hwang Jang-yop, a former North Korean Workers' Party secretary who defected to the South earlier in 1997.

Hwang, who once tutored Kim Jong Il and remains the highest-level North Korean to seek asylum in South Korea, survived what the South said was an assassination attempt by the North in 2010. He died six months after his would-be assailants were arrested, at the age of 87.

Follow Kim Tong-hyung on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/KimTongHyung](http://www.twitter.com/KimTongHyung)

## Man charged with threatening Jewish centers to frame his ex

By COLLEEN LONG, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A former journalist fired for fabricating details in stories made at least eight of the scores of threats against Jewish institutions nationwide, including a bomb threat to the Anti-Defamation League, as part of a bizarre campaign to harass and frame his ex-girlfriend, federal officials said Friday.

Juan Thompson was arrested in St. Louis and appeared there in federal court Friday on a cyberstalking charge. He politely answered questions and told the judge he had enough money to hire a lawyer.

A crowd of supporters who attended said Thompson had no criminal record. His lawyer didn't comment. Federal officials have been investigating 122 bomb threats called in to Jewish organizations in three dozen states since Jan. 9 and a rash of vandalism at Jewish cemeteries.

Thompson started making threats Jan. 28, a criminal complaint said, with an email to the Jewish History Museum in New York written from an account that made it appear as if it were being sent by an ex-girlfriend. "Juan Thompson put 2 bombs in the History Museum set to go off Sunday," it said.

He followed that up with similar messages to a Jewish school in Farmington Hills, Michigan, and to a school and community center in Manhattan, authorities said.

In another round of emails and phone calls, he gave the woman's name, rather than his own, the court complaint said. The Council on American-Islamic Relations received an anonymous email saying the woman put a bomb in a Dallas Jewish center.

Thompson, who's black, then took to Twitter: "Know any good lawyers?" he wrote. "Need to stop this nasty/racist #whitegirl I dated who sent a bomb threat in my name." He later tweeted to the Secret Service: "I'm been (sic) tormented by an anti-Semite. She sent an antijewish bomb threat in my name. Help."

But police say it was a hoax created to make the woman look guilty. Thompson also made threats in which he identified the woman as the culprit, authorities said. It's unclear why Jewish organizations were targeted.

Republican President Donald Trump suggested in a meeting Tuesday with state attorneys general the threats against Jewish community centers may have been designed to make "others look bad," accord-

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ing to Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro. Trump also has condemned violence against Jewish organizations.

Thompson was fired from the online publication The Intercept last year after being accused of fabricating several quotes and creating fake email accounts to impersonate people, including the Intercept's editor-in-chief. One of the stories involved Dylann Roof, the white shooter of black worshippers at a Charleston, South Carolina, church.

Thompson had written that a cousin named Scott Roof claimed the gunman was angry that a love interest chose a black man over him. A review showed there was no cousin by that name. The story was retracted.

The Intercept wrote Friday it was "horrified" to learn of Thompson's arrest.

Thompson had been accused of bizarre behavior before.

Doyle Murphy, a reporter at the Riverfront Times, an alternative weekly in St. Louis, said he was subjected to social media harassment after writing about Thompson's troubled past in the fallout from his firing at The Intercept.

Murphy said Thompson set up anonymous accounts on Twitter and other social media posing as a woman who claimed she had been sexually assaulted by Murphy. Murphy said he contacted Twitter but every time one fake account was taken down a new one popped up. He said he contacted police but there was little they could do.

"It was a nightmare, and there's not a whole lot I could do about it," Murphy said.

The Federal Communications Commission said Friday it will grant an emergency waiver allowing Jewish community centers and their phone carriers to track the numbers of callers who make threats, even if the callers try to block the numbers. It said Democratic U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer had requested such a waiver earlier in the week.

According to the criminal complaint, Thompson and the ex-girlfriend, a social worker, broke up last summer. The following day, her boss received an email purporting to be from a national news organization saying she'd been pulled over for drunken driving.

The harassment got worse, authorities said. She received an anonymous email with nude photos of herself and a threat to release them. Her company, a nonprofit that works to end homelessness, got faxes saying she was anti-Semitic. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children got a note saying she watched child porn.

Thompson's IP address was used for the emails, but he told police his computer had been hacked, the complaint said.

The ADL said Thompson had been on its radar since he fabricated the story about Roof. According to ADL research, Thompson also claimed he wanted to dismantle the system of "racial supremacy and greedy capitalism that is stacked against us." He said he was going to run for mayor of St. Louis to "fight back against Trumpian fascism and socio-economic terrorism."

FBI Director James Comey met with Jewish community leaders Friday to discuss the recent threats, the agency said.

University City, Missouri, police Lt. Fredrick Lemons told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that detectives will question Thompson about the 154 headstones toppled last month at a Jewish cemetery there.

Associated Press writers Jim Salter in St. Louis, Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles and Jake Pearson and Verena Dobnik in New York contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show Thompson is accused of tweeting the Secret Service, not the FBI.

## Yellen signals the Fed will likely raise rates this month

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen signaled Friday that the Fed will likely resume



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raising interest rates later this month to reflect a strengthening job market and inflation edging toward the central bank's 2 percent target.

Yellen also said in a speech in Chicago that the Fed expects steady economic improvement to justify additional rate increases. While not specifying how many rate hikes could occur this year, Yellen noted that Fed officials in December had estimated that there would be three in 2017.

Yellen's signal of a likely rate hike this month reflects an encouraging conclusion by the Fed: That nearly eight years after the Great Recession ended, the U.S. economy has finally regained most of its health.

At a separate appearance Friday in New York, Vice Chair Stanley Fischer added his voice to a series of Fed officials who have indicated this week that they would likely favor raising rates at the Fed's next meeting March 14-15.

Asked whether there had been a conscious effort by Fed officials to signal a probable rate hike at that meeting, Fischer said, "If there has been a conscious effort, I'm about to join it."

Many economists now say that barring an unexpectedly disastrous monthly jobs report next Friday, a Fed rate increase this month appears certain.

"The Fed will hike unless next week's payroll report is calamitous," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. "That's unlikely, so we expect rates to rise."

At the March 14-15 meeting, Yellen said the Fed's policymakers will "evaluate whether employment and inflation are continuing to evolve in line with our expectations, in which case a further adjustment of the federal funds rate would likely be appropriate."

Friday's remarks from Yellen and Fischer echoed those made earlier this week by several other Fed officials, including Lael Brainard, a board member who had been a leading voice urging caution in raising rates.

What has shifted the sentiment of most Fed officials decisively toward a rate increase has been a wave of robust economic data — notably on job growth, manufacturing and consumer confidence — along with surging stock prices.

On Thursday, for example, the government reported that first-time applications for unemployment benefits — a proxy for the pace of layoffs — fell last week to their lowest level in nearly 44 years.

The stock market has been setting a string of record highs, fueled by confidence that President Donald's Trump's plans for cutting taxes and boosting spending will win congressional approval.

And inflation, which had been lagging at chronically low levels, has been edging steadily up, reflecting in part a rebound in gasoline prices and higher wages. The Fed's preferred inflation gauge showed that prices rose 1.9 percent over the 12 months that ended in January. That was the largest 12-month gain in nearly five years and just below the Fed's 2 percent target for inflation.

Yellen was asked during a question-and-answer period about the Fed's likely response to Trump's forthcoming economic stimulus program, the details of which remain unclear. Yellen said Fed officials are inclined to wait to see which measures are approved by Congress.

"I think most of my colleagues have decided that we should just be patient and wait to see what happens," Yellen said.

In December, the Fed raised its benchmark rate by a quarter-point to a range of 0.5 percent to 0.75 percent. It was its first increase since December 2015, when the Fed raised its key rate from a record low. In estimating three rate hikes for 2017, the Fed was indicating a quickened pace of increases.

In her speech, Yellen sought to explain why the Fed has been slow to raise rates in the past two years. She pointed to the prolonged drop in oil prices that started in 2014 and slowed spending by energy companies. And she noted a sizable rise in the value of the dollar, which depressed inflation and hurt export sales by making American goods costlier overseas.

Other disruptive events last year led the Fed to proceed cautiously. They included anemic U.S. economic growth early in the year, global fears about a sharp slowdown in China and Britain's vote to leave the European Union.

Despite all that, Yellen said, "The U.S. economy has exhibited remarkable resilience in the face of adverse shocks."

She said she saw no evidence to suggest that the Fed has been excessively slow to raise rates or that inflation is threatening to rise too quickly.

"I therefore continue to have confidence that a gradual removal of accommodation is likely to be appropriate," Yellen said.

At the same time, she added: "Unless unanticipated developments adversely affect the economic outlook, the process of scaling back accommodation likely will not be as slow as it was during the past couple of years."

AP staff writer Sara Burnett in Chicago contributed to this report.

## Uber deploys secret weapon against undercover regulators

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Uber has been wielding a secret weapon to thwart authorities who have been trying to curtail or shut down its ride-hailing service in cities around the world.

The program included a feature nicknamed "Greyball" internally that identified regulators who were posing as riders while trying to collect evidence that Uber's service was breaking local laws governing taxis.

To stymie those efforts, Uber served up a fake version of its app to make it appear the undercover regulators were summoning a car, only to have the ride canceled. The San Francisco company mined the data that it collects through its real app to pinpoint the undercover agents.

The New York Times revealed Greyball's existence in a story published Friday based on information provided by four current and former Uber employees who were not named.

Uber acknowledged it has used Greyball to counter regulators working with the company's opponents to entrap its drivers.

Greyball is part of a broader program called VTOS, shorthand for "violations of terms of service," that Uber says it developed to protect its service.

"This program denies ride requests to fraudulent users who are violating our terms of service — whether that's people aiming to physically harm drivers, competitors looking to disrupt our operations, or opponents who collude with officials on secret 'stings' meant to entrap drivers," Uber said.

Although Uber is becoming more widely accepted than in its early years, the company says it still uses Greyball as a tool in some cities that it declined to identify.

The Times reported that Uber has targeted regulators in Boston, Paris and Las Vegas, among other cities, as well as a litany of countries that include Australia, China, Italy and South Korea.

The cat-and-mouse game with regulators is the latest example of the aggressive tactics that Uber has adopted while upending the heavily regulated taxi industry. In doing so, Uber has built a rapidly growing company valued at more than \$60 billion by its investors that is frequently accused of bending the rules.

Among other things, the company has faced lawsuits for classifying its drivers as independent contractors to save money and allegedly stealing the technology for a fleet of autonomous cars that it is currently testing. In the past two weeks, a former female engineer alleged Uber routinely ignores claims of sexual harassment and a video surfaced of CEO Travis Kalanick profanely berating a driver who confronted him about steep cuts in its rates for a premium version of its service.

Uber's rise also has raised tensions in cities that have sometimes gone to extreme measures to crack down on a service that they contended was operating without the proper permits. In Las Vegas, local taxi regulators confronted an Uber driver while wearing ski masks. And in Florida, Hillsborough regulators coordinated with taxi and limousine companies on an undercover operation that lured out Uber drivers so they could be assessed \$700 fines.

## Subtle (very) 'gay moment' in new Disney film generates buzz

By JOCELYN NOVECK, AP National Writer

To be clear: "Brokeback Mountain," this isn't.

The so-called "gay moment" in Disney's new live-action version of "Beauty and the Beast" is subtle — so subtle that one could easily miss it with an ill-timed sneeze or glance away from the screen. And it may sail over the heads of young viewers.

But the cast and director say it is indeed a gay moment — one they're proud of. And advocates are calling it a big step forward for Disney and for youth entertainment.

Mere word of it was also enough to lead one Alabama drive-in theater to cancel plans to show the film — apparently without having seen it, because it doesn't open nationwide until March 17.

The scene in question involves the character of LeFou (Josh Gad), the timid and lovable sidekick to the preening villain Gaston (Luke Evans). Without spoiling too much, it's safe to say that LeFou spends much of the film in Gaston's thrall, and toward the end also has a moment — a few seconds, really — where the same-sex theme is more overt.

At the film's Los Angeles premiere on Thursday evening, Gad said he was "very proud" of the scene.

"(Director) Bill Condon did an amazing job of giving us an opportunity to create a version of LeFou that isn't like the original ... but that makes him more human and makes him a wonderfully complex character to some extent," he said. "And there's a moment at the end of the film that I don't want to ruin ... because I want the surprise to be intact, but I'm very proud of it. I think it's an incredible moment and it's subtle, but I think it's effective."

Condon suggested that descriptions of LeFou as the first Disney gay character went too far. "I keep saying it's more like the first gay moment," he said. "Because I think it's a very fluid character." The director added: "You can't help but wonder in his adoration of Gaston ... (is there) something more going on?"

The length of the scene — or scenes, since LeFou's fluid orientation is hinted at elsewhere — is not what's important, said Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, the LGBTQ media advocacy group.

"It's a wonderful step forward," she said. "And this is incredibly important for the youth of today. They need to see themselves reflected in the media they consume. More and more, as studios want to appeal to youth audiences, they're going to have to include LGBTQ story lines and characters."

Ellis noted that in the annual survey that GLAAD puts together on LGBTQ inclusion in movies, "we have struggled year after year to find any content in major studio films. We're usually the punching bag or the laughingstock. So this is an enormous step forward for us."

In the past, many have speculated on what they see as "coded" gay characters, or winking references to gay characters or themes in Disney and other youth-oriented films. Ellis said the difference here is that "we're moving from coded, where you have to put together the pieces, to this being in the spotlight ... It shows the direction America is moving in."

A Facebook page that apparently belongs to the Henagar Drive-In Theatre in Henagar, Alabama, announced that the theater won't be showing the film as planned because its operators are "first and foremost Christians" and "will not compromise on what the Bible teaches."

"If we cannot take our 11-year-old granddaughter and 8-year-old grandson to see a movie we have no business watching it," the message said. Theater operators did not immediately respond to emails or phone messages to confirm the Facebook posting. The theater's website continued on Friday to say the film was coming in March.

Audra McDonald, the Tony-winning Broadway actress who plays a particularly tuneful supporting character in "Beauty and the Beast," said she was "so honored" to be a part of the moment. "The thing is, Disney's not doing anything all that revolutionary," she said. "LGBTQ people have always existed, interracial couples have always existed. And now they're shining light on it. So they're just representing the world the way it actually is and I think that's spectacular and necessary." (Interracial couples also appear in the film.)

Evans said the scene in question was "about unity. It's about never judging a book by its cover, but digging a little deeper and understanding to not be fearful of things you don't know, people that are a little

different to you. Fear is not a good thing to fuel.”

Online:

<http://movies.disney.com/beauty-and-the-beast-2017>

Associated Press video journalist Nicole Evatt in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

## **Pence fought against releasing records as Indiana governor**

**By BRIAN SLODYSKO, Associated Press**

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Vice President Mike Pence repeatedly stonewalled media requests to view public records when he was Indiana’s governor, including emails about state business distributed from a private AOL account that was hacked last year.

Revelations Pence used the account to discuss homeland security and other official matters, first reported Thursday by the Indianapolis Star, are just the latest in a series of transparency battles involving the Republican’s tenure as governor.

The Star obtained the AOL emails through an open records request after new Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb agreed to release 29 pages from his predecessor’s AOL account. The Associated Press filed a similar records request last July seeking the emails and followed up with a complaint against the governor’s office in January when there was no response.

Earlier this year, lawyers for Pence argued unsuccessfully in a civil case that Indiana courts had no authority to force him to comply with public records law. His administration also has repeatedly delayed or denied the release of records that could shed light on his tenure as governor.

Pence’s efforts stand in stark contrast to the image he had previously sought to cultivate, presenting himself as a champion of a free press and the First Amendment.

The hacking of Pence’s private emails also raises questions of hypocrisy for some of his attacks against Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail. He argued Clinton’s use of a private server when she was secretary of state could have jeopardized national security if the emails got into the wrong hands.

“There’s no comparison whatsoever between Hillary Clinton’s practice of having a private servers, mishandling classified information, destroying emails when they were requested by the Congress and by officials,” Pence said Friday. “We have fully complied with all of Indiana’s laws. We had outside counsel review all of my private email records to identify any emails that ever referenced or mentioned state business-related activities. As Indiana laws required we transferred all of those to the state of Indiana subject to the public access laws.”

Pence and his wife, Karen Pence, have used their private accounts — mpence1314@aol.com and kspence1314@aol.com — to conduct official business dating back to at least 2013, according to separate records obtained by the AP.

Richard Painter, former President George W. Bush’s chief ethics lawyer, said even if Pence wasn’t handling state secrets like Clinton, his use of an AOL account still jeopardizes national security because hacked information could be used as leverage.

“The Russians aren’t Democrats or Republicans,” Painter said. “They would love to find anything they can get on Pence or (President Donald) Trump.”

Pence’s AOL account was subjected to a phishing scheme last spring, before Trump chose him to join the GOP presidential ticket. Pence’s contacts were sent an email falsely claiming that the governor and his wife were stranded in the Philippines and needed money.

“Those are the very low-level hackers,” Painter said. “If that kind of joker can get in, there are Russian hackers that are a lot higher up the food chain.”

The governor moved to a different AOL account with additional security measures, Pence spokesman Marc Lotter said, but has since stopped using the new personal account since he was sworn-in as vice president.



The 29 pages of Pence's AOL emails, which were released to the AP on Friday, show Pence was given FBI updates on arrests made in a terrorism case. They include details about Pence's attempts to bar Syrian Refugees from resettling in Indiana, efforts that were ultimately blocked by a federal judge.

In one email, former Pence spokeswoman Kara Brooks told her boss "good job" for conducting himself well in a local TV news story.

Holcomb declined to release an unspecified number of additional emails, which he said are confidential.

Public officials are not barred from using personal email accounts under Indiana law, but the law is interpreted to mean that any official business conducted on private email must be retained to comply with public record laws.

The state requires all records pertaining to state business to be retained and available for public information requests. Emails involving state email accounts are captured on the state's servers, but any emails that Pence may have sent from his AOL account to another private account would need to be retained.

At the end of his term, Pence hired the Indianapolis law firm of Barnes & Thornburg to conduct a review of all of his communications and that review is still ongoing, Lotter said. Any correspondence between Pence's AOL account and any aides using a state email account would have been automatically archived, he said.

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Associated Press reporters Scott Bauer in Janesville, Wisconsin; Ken Thomas in Washington; and Tom Davies in Indianapolis contributed to this report.

## Trump, hitting back, accuses Schumer of Putin ties

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump, his administration under siege for contacts with Russian officials, is calling for "an immediate investigation" into Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer's own ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump's evidence? A 14-year-old photo of Schumer and Putin holding coffee and doughnuts in a New York City gas station.

The president on Friday tweeted a photo of the two men, calling for a probe into Schumer's "ties to Russia and Putin" and called the New York senator "A total hypocrite!" Trump did not say where the photo came from, but Schumer quickly pointed out that it was taken in 2003 when Putin ventured to New York to celebrate the opening of a Russian-owned Lukoil gas station on Manhattan's west side.

Several news organizations covered that event, which drew far more political star power than the average gas station opening.

Schumer, in his own tweet, said he would "happily talk" under oath about his meeting with Putin, which took place "in full view of press and public." He then challenged Trump to do the same. And, a short time later, he posted a follow-up in which he further poked fun at the photo, noting "And for the record, they were Krispy Kreme donuts."

On the same trip to the United States in 2003, Putin traveled to Camp David, Maryland, where he met with Republican President George W. Bush and the two held a joint news conference.

Trump's tweet came just hours after the conservative website Drudge Report made the photo its lead image. And that was a day after the photo was unearthed by the pro-Trump blog Gateway Pundit, which ran it with the headline "Where's the outrage?"

Trump targeted congressional Democrats for their encounters with Russians over the years even though the party's criticism of Attorney General Jeff Sessions centered on his failure to acknowledge his meetings when questioned at his Senate confirmation hearing and in written responses to the Judiciary Committee.

"I think he was asked a pretty straightforward question at his committee hearing and I do think he should resign," Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said in an interview.

Trump also tweeted Friday about House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who was among the first to call for Sessions to resign.

In his tweet, Trump linked to a 2010 photo in which Pelosi and other lawmakers, including Rep. Mac

Thornberry, R-Texas, now the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, are shown meeting with Russian officials, including then-President Dmitry Medvedev and Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.

Trump demanded an investigation of the House minority leader. Pelosi had initially denied ever meeting Kislyak; her spokeswoman later clarified that they never had a one-on-one meeting.

Pelosi then needled Trump by saying he didn't "know the difference" between an official meeting photographed by the press and a "secret" meeting that Sessions "lied about under oath."

It is not improper for elected officials to meet with foreign diplomats.

Trump's White House has been battered by questions about his links to Russia, quashing any sort of political momentum he had earned from his highly praised address to Congress earlier this week.

Sessions on Thursday said he would recuse himself from Russia probes after it was revealed that he had conversed with Russia's ambassador twice during last year's campaign, a contradiction of his testimony during his Senate confirmation hearings. But that move has not satisfied many Democrats, who have called for Sessions' resignation. They also demand an independent investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia.

Several other Trump allies have also faced questions about their ties to Russia, including former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who was ousted last month for misleading White House officials about his conversations with Kislyak before Trump took office.

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Donna Cassata contributed reporting from Washington.

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## Thousands flee Iraq's Mosul overnight, as fighting rages on

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — Thousands of civilians fled Mosul overnight as Iraqi forces advanced north of a sprawling military base near the city's airport on Friday.

Iraq's special forces pushed into the Wadi Hajar district in western Mosul and retook the area from the Islamic State group Friday, according to Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, spokesman of the Joint Military Operations.

Special forces Brig. Gen. Haider al-Obeidi said clearing operations were ongoing in the area and his forces were close to linking up with the militarized federal police forces who were pushing up along the western bank of the Tigris river.

Iraqi forces, including special operations forces and federal police units, launched an attack on the western part of Mosul nearly two weeks ago to dislodge IS. Since the offensive began, more than 28,000 people have been displaced by the fighting, according to the United Nations.

Nahla Ahmed, 50 fled Mosul late Thursday night, walking more than five kilometers (three miles) from her home in the Shuhada neighborhood.

"All the families were hiding behind a wall," she said, explaining how they escaped an IS-held part of the city. "We gave the children valium so they wouldn't cry and (the IS fighters) wouldn't catch us."

Ahmed, like most of the civilians who have escaped Mosul in the past week, fled through Mamun neighborhood. The district is partially controlled by Iraq's special forces.

Maj. Saif Ali, who is stationed in Mamun, said huge crowds of civilians began pouring into the area from neighboring districts just after midnight. Ali said civilians in western Mosul are becoming increasingly desperate as food and water supplies begin to run out.

"In total 7,000 people fled through this area last night," he said. "We were up all night trying to control the crowds."

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Friday "the latest figures we have of people recorded leaving western Mosul is 28,400 and that's since operations in west Mosul started on Feb. 19. However we're also tracking down reports thousands more people are on the move."

He said that on average about 4,000 people a day have been fleeing since the beginning of the operation.

"We think about 750,000 civilians are still trapped inside western Mosul, either sheltering from the fight-

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ing or waiting to flee," Dujarric said. "We're deeply concerned with their well-being and safety and their access to vital resources."

By late morning nearly all the families had been moved out of Mamun. The neighborhood was littered with discarded clothing and blankets piled up in empty lots and on street corners.

Iraqi forces deployed east of Mamun advanced into Wadi Hajar, a neighborhood north of the Ghazlani military base.

The U.S.-led coalition dropped more than 15 munitions in Mosul on Friday, Ali said, saying they targeted car bombs, sniper positions and small IS mortar units.

Brig. Gen. Wathaq al-Hamdani, Nineveh province's police chief, said IS targeted the Al Jazair District in western Mosul with "Katyusha launchers with missiles carrying chlorine gas" in at least two separate incidents over the past few days. He added that five civilians had been taken to a nearby hospital to be treated for asphyxiation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said in a statement Friday that seven patients likely exposed to a toxic chemical agent were currently being treated at Rozhawa hospital, close to Mosul, where fighting is ongoing.

"During the past two days, the hospital has admitted five children and two women showing clinical symptoms consistent with an exposure to a blistering chemical agent," said the ICRC's Regional Director for the Middle East, Robert Mardini, adding "We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons, by any party, anywhere."

At a screening center south of the city, hundreds of women and children were gathered on the cement ground of an old gas station as men were screened in a parking lot next door. An Iraqi intelligence officer walked with an informant past the rows of men and boys sitting on the ground before they had their names checked against a database.

Muthana Younis also fled Mosul late Thursday night.

"We waited until all the IS fighters left the streets," he said, his track suit covered in mud from the journey. Younis walked for hours, crossing more than five kilometers (three miles) with his mother, father, brother and sister.

"There were mortars and we could hear gunfire," Younis said. He said explaining his younger siblings were so scared at times he had to carry them. "But we had to flee, we had run out of food."

Banksy's art in West Bank hotel with world's 'worst view'

By NEBI QENA, The Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) — A Palestinian guesthouse packed with artwork of the elusive British graffiti artist Banksy unveiled itself Friday in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, with a sneak peek of what the owner sarcastically called the "hotel with the worst view in the world."

Wisam Salsaa, 42, said the nine-room establishment named "The Walled Off Hotel" will officially open on Mar. 11, but he offered a handful of reporters a tour of the hotel looking directly at the West Bank separation barrier erected by Israel to ward off potential Palestinian attackers. The barrier, which Palestinians consider to be a land grab that stifles their movement, is heavily decorated by artists and Banksy has previously painted several murals on a walled segment of it.

The hotel, several of whose rooms look onto an Israeli security watchtower, is awash in the trademark satirical work of the mysterious artist. The highlight is room number three, known as "Banksy's Room," where guests sleep in a king-size bed underneath Banksy's artwork showing a Palestinian and an Israeli in a pillow fight.

The hotel also features a presidential suite and a museum with the artist's politically-charged work. It has the markings of a gentleman's club from the English colonial period. The entrance to one small niche accommodates a life-size figure of Arthur James Balfour signing his 1917 letter that came to be known as the Balfour declaration, and was the basis for the international push for the creation of Israel.

The cheapest rooms were available from \$30 a night.

The whole project took 14 months to complete and was kept under complete secrecy, in accordance

with Banksy's request to protect his anonymity. Salsaa said the entire interior was personally overseen by Banksy, to the very last details. The hotel is the largest new body of work in years, according to a press release distributed by representatives who attended Friday's tour.

Banksy has made previous forays into the Palestinian territories. In one secret visit, he drew a painting of a girl pulled upward by balloons on the barrier facing his current project. Last year, he is believed to have sneaked into Gaza to draw four street murals, including one on a metal door that depicted the Greek goddess Niobe cowering against the rubble of a destroyed house. The painting, titled "Bomb Damage," was drawn on the last remaining part of a two-story house that was destroyed in the 2014 war between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers.

The artist's satirical stencils — rats, kissing policemen, riot police with yellow smiley faces — first appeared on walls in Bristol before spreading to London and then around the world. His artwork comments on war, child poverty and the environment. His identity remains a mystery, but his works have fetched as much as \$1.8 million at auctions.

## Rivals in Syria race to assault militants' 'capital' Raqqa

By **BASSEM MROUE**, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — After the battlefield of Iraq's Mosul, the next major campaign against the Islamic State group will be to take its de facto capital, the Syrian city of Raqqa. The Pentagon has drawn up a secret plan to do that, likely leaning on local allies with stepped up American support.

The question is: In the tangled mess that is Syria's conflict, who are those local allies?

Syrian government forces, Turkish troops and their Syrian militia allies, and U.S.-backed Kurdish forces all have their eye on Raqqa. Each vehemently rejects letting the others capture the city and would likely react in anger should the United States support the others. And it is not clear that any has the resources to take the city on its own.

"Raqqa is more of an abstract goal: everyone wants it in principle, but no one is willing to commit the resources and bear the risks necessary," said Faysal Itani, an analyst at the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

The fall of Raqqa, the Islamic State group's de facto capital and largest remaining stronghold, would be the biggest defeat for the militants in Syria since they captured the northern city on the banks of the Euphrates River in January 2014.

President Donald Trump has vowed to "obliterate" the group. "We will work with our allies, including our friends and allies in the Muslim world, to extinguish this vile enemy from our planet," he told Congress on Tuesday.

The top U.S. commander in the campaign against IS, Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, has said he believes Raqqa and Mosul will be taken within six months. So far, the offensive on Mosul has been underway four months, with only half the city captured from the militants in ferocious street-to-street urban combat. And that is using a relatively intensively trained and united military, backed by heavy U.S. firepower and commandos on the ground — a contrast to the comparatively undisciplined and fragmented forces the U.S. has to choose from as allies in Syria.

Raqqa is a smaller city than Mosul, but the militants are believed to have dug in with powerful fortifications there.

In Syria, U.S.-backed predominantly Kurdish fighters known as the Syria Democratic Forces, or SDF, remain Trump's best bet. Aided by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and some 500 U.S. special forces troops deployed in an advisory role, the force has been marching toward Raqqa since November. Closing in on the city from different directions, it is now stationed some eight kilometers (five miles) north of the city.

The U.S. military recently provided a small number of armored vehicles to the U.S.-backed force to give better protection from small arms fire and roadside bombs as they get closer to Raqqa.

Further aid to the rag-tag group, however, raises sensitive questions over how to deal with Turkey, a NATO ally with much at stake in Syria. Turkey considers the main Kurdish militia in Syria — known as the



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YPG, and an affiliate of the U.S.-backed SDF — a terrorist organization, and has vowed to work with Syrian opposition fighters known as the Free Syrian Army to liberate Raqqa.

In a dramatic reversal of years of the Obama administration's calls for the ouster of President Bashar Assad, Trump has hinted he might be willing to work with Assad's army and Russia, whose year-and-a-half military intervention has propped up Assad's government.

Assad's forces are preoccupied with other battles, however, and would likely need significant U.S. military involvement to take on Raqqa. On Wednesday, the Syrian military recaptured the central town of Palmyra, a city located in the desert south of Raqqa that has gone back and forth between control of the military and the extremists several times. The government forces have also clashed with the Turkish-backed Syrian fighters, who block their path to Raqqa.

Syrians are sharply divided over who should enter Raqqa. Many opposition supporters consider the SDF, which maintains a tacit non-aggression pact with Assad's forces, to be a hostile group. There are also fears of tensions if Raqqa, home to a nearly 200,000 mainly Arab population, is taken by the SDF, a coalition of Kurdish, Arab and Christian fighters.

"Let us be frank that any force that will liberate Raqqa, other than the Free Syrian Army, is going to be a new occupation force with different flags and banners," said Mohammed Khodor of Sound and Picture Organization, which tracks atrocities by IS in Iraq and Syria.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim was even more blunt, warning that if the SDF enters Raqqa, it will hurt relations between Ankara and Washington.

"We have said that a terror organization cannot be used against another terror organization," the Turkish leader told the state-run Anadolu news agency.

The Kurds reject that notion and insist that only forces fighting under the SDF banner will liberate Raqqa. "Turkey is an occupation force and has no legitimate right to enter Raqqa," said SDF spokeswoman Cihan Sheikh Ehmed. In a text message exchange from northern Syria, she said the SDF has the experience in fighting IS to finish the operation.

Battlefield victories by the SDF against the Islamic State group have brought growing Western support. Asked if adding more U.S. troops or better arming Syria's Kurds were options, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said he will "accommodate any request" from his field commanders.

In Mosul, the U.S.-led coalition is playing a greater role than ever before in the fight against IS and coalition forces have moved closer to front-line fighting.

U.S. Air Force Col. John Dorrian says the increased support is an effort to "accelerate the campaign" against the Islamic State group, noting that launching simultaneous operations in both Mosul and Raqqa "puts further strain on the enemy's command and control."

"It is a complicating factor when you don't have a partner government to work with," conceded Dorrian, adding that whoever the coalition partners with in the fight for Raqqa is "a subject of ongoing discussions."

Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a Middle East analyst at the Jamestown Foundation who closely follows Kurdish affairs, says the U.S.-led coalition wants to have a quick end to IS in Raqqa, from which external operations against the West are planned. That means it would prefer to work with the Kurdish-led SDF forces "since they are able to mobilize manpower unlike the Turks," he said.

In any case, the battle for Raqqa is sure to be a long and deadly one. It took the SDF nearly 10 weeks to capture the northern Syrian town of Manbij from IS last year. It took Turkish forces and allied groups more than three months to retake the town of al-Bab, a costly battle that killed dozens of Turkish soldiers and many civilians.

Raqqa is much larger than either Manbij or al-Bab. Some Syrian opposition activists say the extremists dug a trench around it to make it difficult for attackers to storm it.

"It would be difficult for any troops," said Itani of the Atlantic Council.

"Witness the slow and ugly progress in Mosul as well. Raqqa would be tough," he said.

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Associated Press writer Susannah George in Mosul, Iraq, contributed to this report.

## Mischief in the Capitol as GOP rebels stir up trouble

By ERICA WERNER, AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Capitol is suddenly awash with troublemakers and rebels — and that's just the Republicans.

Whatever GOP unity was produced by Donald Trump's victory in November has all but disappeared, and Republican leaders are confronting open rebellion in their ranks as they try to finalize health care legislation. Trump's speech to a joint session of Congress this week was well-received, but did little to repair divisions.

In the Senate, a trio of conservatives that's been a thorn in the side of leadership is back at it again. And in the House, recalcitrant conservatives are banding together and threatening to foil House Speaker Paul Ryan's plans for swift passage of the legislation to repeal and replace former President Barack Obama's health law.

"Currently there are not enough votes to pass it in the House," Rep. Mark Meadows of North Carolina, head of an influential group of conservatives, declared in an interview Friday.

Meadows said leaders appeared to believe they could jam the bill through by twisting arms and getting Trump to make calls, but insisted such tactics wouldn't work on him without substantial change to the bill. His opposition is such that his wife sent out an email urging opposition to the bill, as reported by Politico this week. "It will end up being Ryan care and the disaster will be wrapped around Republican's necks," Debbie Meadows wrote.

Rep. Meadows said Friday that his wife sent the email to a small group of friends and relatives in an effort to support him. "She was trying to help her husband, she is distraught that this is a distraction and she probably is more distraught because she really respects and admires Paul Ryan," Meadows said.

Another GOP rebel, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, said that at a presentation Thursday, leaders played clips of Trump's joint session speech, with the goal of convincing lawmakers that they are aligned with the president on the pending bill. But Massie dismissed the effort as "very unconvincing."

The lawmakers are criticizing the developing legislation as "Obamacare lite." They object in particular to a system of refundable tax credits that form the centerpiece of the legislation, and which they say would amount to a costly new entitlement. Instead they're demanding a vote on a straightforward repeal-only bill.

Ryan and other GOP leaders, who are aiming to pass the legislation through the House and Senate by early April, have tried to keep a game face despite the turmoil.

"I am perfectly confident that when it's all said and done, we're going to unify, because we all, every Republican, ran on repealing and replacing, and we're going to keep our promises," Ryan told reporters Thursday.

Maybe so, but first there will be some drama. And this week, there was plenty.

After mostly lying low and playing nice for the last several months, Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky, Mike Lee of Utah and Ted Cruz of Texas are now uniting against the health legislation, and like their conservative counterparts in the House, they command the votes to frustrate leadership efforts if they don't back down.

On Thursday, Paul infuriated GOP leaders on both ends of the Capitol by marching over to the House with a crowd of reporters and his own copy machine to demand to see the draft health bill, and criticize leadership for keeping it under wraps. He held an impromptu press conference outside a ground-floor room in the Capitol he dubbed "the secret office for the secret bill," which angry House leadership aides insisted was no such thing.

The Kentucky senator's chaotic gaggle was followed by a bizarre and apparently spontaneous scavenger hunt by House Democrats who made a futile search.

Paul kept up his campaign over Twitter on Friday, posting a picture of himself pointing quizzically at a closed door with the message, "We are continuing our search for the Obamacare Lite bill! Do you know where the secret location might be? Has anyone seen the bill?"

Paul's stunt provoked thinly concealed irritation from GOP colleagues, including Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who chairs the health committee, of which Paul is a member. Alexander, a senior leadership ally, has been part of a group working on the replacement health care bill.

"Well, Sen. Paul is a valuable member of the committee and I think I'll give him a call and see if he'd like to have more information," Alexander said.

Many Republicans say it's time, urgently, for the party to pull together and get behind a repeal-and-replace bill, after spending fully seven years promising exactly that to voters.

"We do have some problems with two or three people on our side that make it so if this becomes a partisan vote we won't have the votes," said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, another senior lawmaker. "It's a problem, it's a big problem."

Democrats who lived through their own share of drama before finally passing the Affordable Care Act can only stand back and jeer.

"Who would have thought, one month into the fight over the ACA, it's the Republicans, not the Democrats, who are in disarray and pointing at one another like an Abbott and Costello show," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York.

Follow Erica Werner on Twitter <https://twitter.com/ericawerner>

## Art of the parse: How politicians talk their way out of jams

By NANCY BENAC, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In Washington, it's the art of the parse.

Everyone splits rhetorical hairs from time to time, but politicians are especially adept at trying to dance their way out of a bind with carefully crafted explanations.

Now, here comes Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who met with the Russian ambassador twice last year, maintaining that he was truthful when he told a Senate committee during his January confirmation hearing that he "did not have communications with the Russians." He was an adviser to Donald Trump's campaign at the time.

Sessions said at a news conference Thursday that his statement was "honest and correct as I understood it at the time" but that he'd be sending senators a clarification of his remarks.

He said his answer was truthful because the question had focused on Trump campaign contacts with the Russians, while he had met with the ambassador in his role as a senator, not as a Trump supporter.

"In retrospect, I should have slowed down and said, 'But I did meet one Russian official a couple of times,'" Sessions added as he announced that he would recuse himself from any investigation related to the campaign. The announcement came after Democrats and Republicans had called for Session to recuse himself, and some Democrats pressed for his resignation.

"It definitely was extremely misleading to say the least," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, one of those seeking Sessions' resignation.

Sessions' insistence that he "did not have communications with the Russians," even though he did, bore a striking resemblance to another famous denial in political history: the televised response of former President Bill Clinton after allegations surfaced of an affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

"I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky," Clinton declared. But turns out, that depended on the definition of sexual relations.

Clinton, who had attracted the unwanted nickname of "Slick Willie" for his well-known abilities to talk himself out of a jam, also argued that he wasn't lying when he claimed, "There is no relationship." He later said that was the truth because their relationship was over by the time he spoke.

As Clinton explained it: "It depends upon what the meaning of the word 'is' is."

Rutgers professor David Greenberg, author of the book "Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency," thinks Sessions' statements are a more serious matter than Clinton's.

"Clinton was parsing; Sessions is retroactively trying to change what he said," Greenberg said in an email. "The former is something that everyone does, especially but not only in politics. The latter is perhaps also a human instinct but is complicated by the oath to be truthful."

The book "The Stupidest Things Ever Said by Politicians," by Ross Petras and Kathryn Petras, offers plenty of other eyebrow-raising examples of hair splitting. Among them:

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—David Dinkins, before he was New York mayor, answered accusations that he had failed to pay his taxes by saying: "I haven't committed a crime. What I did was fail to comply with the law."

—Richard Allen, national security adviser to President Ronald Reagan, offered this clarification about cash he was given by Japanese journalists for arranging an interview with Nancy Reagan: "I didn't accept it. I received it."

—Clinton administration Justice Department nominee Bill Lann Lee insisted the term "forced busing" was a misnomer because school districts "do not force children to ride a bus, but only to arrive on time at their assigned schools."

More recently, Republicans tied themselves in verbal knots last year trying to keep their distance from candidate Trump without completely abandoning their party's nominee.

New Hampshire Sen. Kelly Ayotte's solution was to promise to vote for Trump and support him, but not endorse him.

"There's actually a big distinction," Ayotte insisted. "Everyone gets a vote. I do, too. And an endorsement is when you are campaigning with someone."

Ayotte lost by a razor-thin margin to Democratic Gov. Maggie Hassan.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a University of Pennsylvania professor specializing in political communication, says that where many politicians use highly precise words to protect themselves, Trump uses the opposite strategy of being "notoriously imprecise."

In both cases, though, the speakers may intend for listeners to hear something different from what they actually said.

Jamieson says people hold speakers to different standards, depending on their backgrounds and the setting. They may cut Trump some slack because he comes from the business world, she said, but not Sessions.

"You've been a lawyer, a prosecutor, a senator, you're in a hearing, speaking under oath, you speak with precision," she said. "When you engage in ambiguity, it's calculated."

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## Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 4, the 63rd day of 2017. There are 302 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 4, 1917, Republican Jeannette Rankin of Montana took her seat as the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, the same day President Woodrow Wilson took his oath of office for a second term (it being a Sunday, a private ceremony was held inside the U.S. Capitol; a second, public swearing-in took place the next day).

On this date:

In 1789, the Constitution of the United States went into effect as the first Federal Congress met in New York. (The lawmakers then adjourned for lack of a quorum.)

In 1791, Vermont became the 14th state.

In 1797, John Adams was inaugurated the second president of the United States.

In 1837, the Illinois town of Chicago was incorporated as a city with a population of 4,170.

In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge's inauguration was broadcast live on 21 radio stations coast-to-coast.

In 1937, at the 9th Academy Awards, "The Great Ziegfeld" was named outstanding production of 1936 and its leading lady, Luise Rainer (RY'-nuhr), best actress; Paul Muni won best actor for "The Story of Louis Pasteur."

In 1940, Kings Canyon National Park in California was established.

In 1952, Ronald Reagan and Nancy Davis were married in San Fernando Valley, California.



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In 1960, an explosives-laden French freighter, La Coubre, exploded in Havana's harbor, killing at least 75 people.

In 1977, some 1,500 people were killed in an earthquake that shook southern and eastern Europe.

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan addressed the nation on the Iran-Contra affair, acknowledging that his overtures to Iran had "deteriorated" into an arms-for-hostages deal.

In 1998, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that sexual harassment at work can be illegal even when the offender and victim are of the same gender.

Ten years ago: NAACP President Bruce S. Gordon announced he was quitting the civil rights organization after just 19 months at the helm, citing growing strain with board members over the group's management style and future operations. Former Sen. Thomas Eagleton, who resigned as George McGovern's running mate in 1972 after it was revealed he'd been hospitalized for depression, died in St. Louis at age 77.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, in an address to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington, said he didn't want war but that he would not hesitate to attack Iran if that were the only option left to stop it from getting a nuclear weapon. Vladimir Putin scored a decisive victory in Russia's presidential election to return to the Kremlin and extend his hold on power for six more years. Nearly 300 people in the Republic of Congo were killed after a series of blasts at an arms depot in the capital Brazzaville.

One year ago: The U.S. Supreme Court blocked enforcement of a Louisiana clinic regulation law placing new restrictions on abortion. Bud Collins, the tennis historian and American voice of the sport in print and on TV for decades, died in Brookline, Massachusetts, at age 86. Pat Conroy, author of "The Great Santini" and "The Prince of Tides," died in Beaufort, South Carolina, at age 70.

Today's Birthdays: Former Congressional Budget Office director Alice Rivlin is 86. Actress Paula Prentiss is 79. Movie director Adrian Lyne is 76. Singer Shakin' Stevens is 69. Author James Ellroy is 69. Energy Secretary Rick Perry is 67. Singer Chris Rea is 66. Actor/rock singer-musician Ronn Moss is 65. Actress Kay Lenz is 64. Musician Emilio Estefan is 64. Movie director Scott Hicks is 64. Actress Catherine O'Hara is 63. Actor Mykelti (MY'-kul-tee) Williamson is 60. Actress Patricia Heaton is 59. Actor Steven Weber is 56. Rock musician Jason Newsted is 54. Actress Stacy Edwards is 52. Rapper Grand Puba is 51. Rock musician Patrick Hannan (The Sundays) is 51. Rock singer Evan Dando (Lemonheads) is 50. Actress Patsy Kensit is 49. Gay rights activist Chaz Bono is 48. Actress Andrea Bendewald is 47. Actor Nick Stabile (stah-BEEL') is 47. Rock musician Fergal Lawler (The Cranberries) is 46. Country singer Jason Sellers is 46. Jazz musician Jason Marsalis is 40. Actress Jessica Heap is 34. Actor Scott Michael Foster is 32. TV personality Whitney Port is 32. Actress Margo Harshman is 31. Actor Josh Bowman is 29. Actress Andrea Bowen is 27. Actress Jenna Boyd is 24.

Thought for Today: "It is almost impossible to state what one in fact believes, because it is almost impossible to hold a belief and to define it at the same time." — William Carlos Williams, American poet (born 1883, died this date in 1963).