

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Wednesday, March 15

**Senior Menu:** Roast turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, broccoli, pumpkin bar, whole wheat bread.

**School Lunch:** Hot dog wraps, baked beans, fruit, romaine salad.

**School Breakfast:** Cereal, yogurt, fruit, juice, milk.

**Emmanuel Lutheran:** Lenten meal at 6 p.m. (men serve), worship at 7 p.m.

**St. John's Lutheran:** Confirmation at 3:45 p.m., Lenten Service at 7 p.m.

## Thursday, March 16

**Senior Menu:** Mulligan stew, cornbread, pistachio pudding, pineapple, cookie.

Spring break - No School

**Emmanuel Lutheran:** WELCA at 1:30 P.M.

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

## Friday, March 17

**Senior Menu:** Hot pork sandwich, coleslaw, baked beans, sherbet.

Spring Break - No School



## DAIRY QUEEN HELP WANTED

Dairy Queen in Groton is now hiring. If you're looking for a fun job with part-time hours, flexible scheduling, please stop in for an application.

**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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## Groton City Council March 13 Meeting Minutes

March 13, 2017

The Groton City Council met on the above date at 7:00pm at the Groton Community Center for their regular first monthly meeting because on March 6, a quorum could not attend. The following members present March 13 were: Fliehs, Opp, McGannon, Glover, Blackmun, and Mayor Hanlon presiding. Peterson was absent. Also present were: Finance Officer Lowary, Asst Chief Bjerke, Attorney Johnson, Justin Olson and Kathy Sundermeier.

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

The financial report was approved on a motion by Fliehs and seconded by Opp. All members present voted aye.

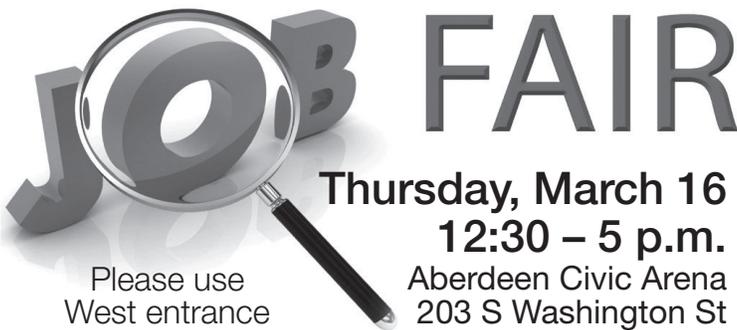
Moved by McGannon and seconded by Opp to authorize the following bills for payment. All members present voted aye.

Executive Payroll 567.61 salaries; Administrative Payroll 5,078.01 salaries; Public Safety Payroll 15,576.32 salaries; Public Works Payroll 17,997.91 salaries; Cultural & Recreational Payroll 799.69 salaries; City of Groton 397.35 postage, dep ref, util, savings; Cons Fed Cr Union 1,125.00 emp savings; First State Bank 7,873.51 ss & wh; US Post Office 199.52 postage; Ann Rolie 229.67 deposit refund; Marti Seurer 100.00 deposit refund; Willow Seurer 260.60 overpayment refund; A & B Business 359.10 copier rent; Abeln, April 74.21 dep flex, supplies; Ameripride 31.70 rug rent; Badger Meters 2,025.98 reading equip; Border States 36.00 ground strap; Chase Visa 4,256.33 hub, cable, post, bks, umbrella; Dakota Electronics 3,040.65 cable, car installations; Dollar General 47.90 supplies; Eaton/Cannon Tech 4,500.00 LM comp support; Farmers Union Coop 1,065.90 dsl; Galls 53.98 rifle case, seat organizer; Heartland Waste Management 6,546.75 garbage hauling; Terry Herron 804.00 med flex; David Hunter 32.00 meals; James Valley Telecomm 510.69 telephone, internet; Johnson, Drew 925.00 legal services; Kens Food Fair 577.65 gas; Paul Kosel 90.00 med flex; Shawn Lambertz 96.60 meal, mileage supt conf; Locke Electric 165.30 generator repairs; NW Energy 10.58 nat gas; S&S Lumber 139.58 supplies; SD Dept of Health 30.00 testing; SD Retirement 9,098.40 retirement; SD State Treasurer 10,992.80 sales tax; SD Federal Surplus Property 30.00 supplies; Share 200.78 cleaner; Stan Houston 204.34 wand, blade, tape, lite; Dan Sunne 555.00 med flex; Verizon Wireless 41.81 gate comm; Web Water 10,323.05 water

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Justin Olson came before the Council to report on the skating season. New hockey goals have been donated at a value of \$300 from fund raising efforts of the Weismantel family.

Finance Officer Lowary presented the 2016 annual report and discussed the automatic fund transfers for debt service from general fund. Moved by Blackmun and seconded by Glover to accept the annual report and direct the publication and filing of the report. All members present voted aye.

Terry Herron, and Shawn Lambert enter the meeting and gave department reports. Discussion was held on water meters reading repairs, a house moving through Groton, options for striping of Main St, baseball playground equipment, snow removal, mower conditions, school transformers, a transformer with PCB contamination, and a request for underground at MJs. The spring garbage route will not go into effect for another week.

Moved by Opp and seconded by Fliehs to declare the following property as surplus with these values: 5 - 50 lb bags of Wheatcrest grass seed at \$150.00 each; 3 - 100 lb propane cylinders at \$100.00 each; 2 John Deere 725 mowers at \$200.00 and \$300.00; and a 2008 Chevy Tahoe at \$5,000.00. All members present voted aye. Bids will be opened April 3 on the vehicle.

Terry and Shawn leave the meeting at this point.

Jerry Bjerke, Asst Police Chief, reported on the new vehicle and some of the issues with the car camera. An additional 2 body cameras have been ordered. Jerry leaves the meeting at this point.

Moved by Opp and seconded by McGannon to authorize the Mayor to sign the contracts with Clark Engineering for planning grants for water, sewer, and storm water drainage for the small community planning grant. All members present voted aye.

Discussion was held on the Paint South Dakota Program, a Code Enforcement training in May, and the United Way is arranging for NSU athletes to come for a Community Service Day on April 22 and a food distribution in Groton on May 1.

Equalization will be held March 20 and 21 at 7pm at the Community Center. Anyone needing an appointment must contact the Finance Officer by Mar 16.

Four nominating petitions were filed by the Feb 24 deadline for Ed Opp, Jay Peterson, Mary Fliehs, and Karyn Babcock. No election will be held in Wards 1 or 2, but Ward 3 will have the election on April 11 at the Community Center. Lowary will contact possible poll workers and report back at the next meeting.

At 8:23pm the Council adjourned into executive session on a motion by Glover and seconded by Blackmun to discuss legal matters SDCL 1-25-2 (3) and personnel matters under SDCL 1-25-2 (1). All members present voted aye. Council reconvened at 9:06pm.

Moved by Glover and seconded by Opp to hire the following people for summer employment: All members present voted aye. Public Works & Cemetery: Brian Gravatt and Aaron Severson; Swimming Pool Managers: Kami Lipp, Brenda Madsen, and Karla Pasteur; Swimming Pool Lifeguards: Tricia Keith, Kelly Hanson, Ann Thorson, Rebecca Fliehs, Cody Swanson, Nikki Koehler, Taryn Rossow, Audrey Wanner, Emma Donley, Jackson Oliver, Sydney Thorson, Jasmine Schaller, Luke Thorson, Marlee Jones, Seric Shabazz, Darien Shabazz, Eliza Wanner, Tylan Glover, Tady Glover, Thomas Cranford, Jasmine Schinkel, Kaycie Hawkins, and Tayon Maine; Legion Baseball Coach: Travis Kurth; Asst Legion Baseball Coach: Bary Keith; Jr Legion Baseball Coach: Mason Madsen; Youth (Midget/PeeWee) Coach: Seth Erickson; Baseball Coordinator and U8 and U10 Softball Coach: Matt Locke; Softball Coordinator and U12 Softball Coach: Kathy Bjerke; Baseball Groundskeepers: Bennett Shabazz, Brandon Keith, Truit Rogers, and Wyatt Locke; Baseball Concessions Randy and Becca Padfield and Baseball Gatekeeper: Katie Hansen.

Moved by Glover and seconded by Blackmun to give 2nd Reading to Ordinance No 710, The 2017 Summer Salary Ordinance. All members present voted aye.

Meeting adjourned.

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Scott Hanlon, Mayor

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Anita Lowary, Finance Officer

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Sun Dial Manor in Bristol has openings for an RN or LPN, full time, part time or PRN. Increased wage based on previous experience. May be eligible for \$10,000 recruitment bonus. We also have openings for CNA's, training for certification provided. For more information, please call Connie Brown RN, DON at 605/492-3615. EOE. DFW.

## Full-Time Job Opportunity

This unique full-time position will provide for cross organizational support of accounting, marketing, and loan processing. May be based out of Sisseton, Webster, or Aberdeen. Regular travel to the Sisseton office will be required. Experience beneficial, but will train. Applications taken until Friday, March 17. To request a job application and job description, contact GROW South Dakota, 104 Ash St. E., Sisseton, SD 57262, [www.growSD.org](http://www.growSD.org), or call (605)-698-7654. EOE



**GDI Living Fitness**  
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Call or Text  
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or Tina at  
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for  
membership  
Information

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## Groton Coffee Cup

**March 13 Team Standings:** James Valley 35, Kens 23, Jungle Lanes 21, Ten Pins 17

**High Games:** Vickie Kramp 194, Vicki Walter 191, Sue Stanley 177

**High Series:** Sue Stanley 508, Vickie Kramp 495, Vicki Walter 491

## Conde National

**March 13 Team Standings:** Braves 28, Pirates 27, Mets 23 1/2, Cubs 23, Giants 22, Colts 20 1/2

**Men's High Games:** Bryce Dargatz 189, Justin Kesterson 181, Lance Frohling 174

**Men's High Series:** Justin Kesterson 516, Tim Olson 493, Bryce Dargatz 491

**Women's High Games:** Nancy Radke 183, Joyce Walter 175, Hope Dargatz 161

**Women's High Series:** Joyce Walter 474, Mary Larson 439, Nancy Radke 432

## Groton Senior Citizens

Groton Seniors met February 13 at the Community center. Nineteen members attended. President Ruby Donovan opened with allegiance to the flag. Lee Schinkel played a song. Minutes and treasurers report were read and accepted. Get well cards were sent to Jan Raap, Cindy Gemmill, Beulah Hoops, Ivan and Carolyn Morehouse. Meeting was adjourned and cards played. The winners of the games. Pinochle- David Kliensossor, Whist- Lee Schinkel Tony Goldade and Ruby Donavon. Canasta -Pat Larson, Door prizes- De-Loris Knoll, Eunice McColister and Elda Stange. Lunch was served by Ruby Pray, Mary Walker and Ruby Donavon. February 20 Seniors had their pot luck dinner nineteen members attended. In the afternoon bingo was played. Lois Pasch won the black out. Cards were played after Bingo. Door prizes went to Mary Walker, Bert Raap, Tony Goldade. Lunch committee was Beulah Hoops, Eunice McColister and Elda Stange. February 27 seniors met at the community center. Twenty one members were present. Cards were played. The winners of each game. Pinochle- Ruby Donavon and Ivan Morehouse. Whilst - Ruth Pray, Bridge-Wally Fisher lunch was served by Beulah Hoops , Ella Johnson and Mary Walker.

## News from Janice Fliehs

This is a news article from an old Independent reporter who worked for Mr. Spencer. I just returned from a five week trip to Sunny Florida at Fort Myers Beach. Here I visited with family and friends and enjoyed many evening meals watching the sunset and the grilling of food done by the male members of the South Dakota group. The younger group which included Brooklyn, Braxton and Breanna children of Mike and Dawn Imrie and too great grand children Madeline, Elizabeth, Zachary and Sophia children of Jeff and Bridget Fliehs kept the pool busy. Also vacationing at Fort Myers Beach were Larry and Valerie Fliehs, Shirlee Briggs, Bill and Eilene Schuelke of Groton and daughter Nickie and children; also of Sioux Falls were Amy and Nick Flowers. Janice's Grand daughter Amber and husband Matt Cooper and Great-grand daughter Kassidi Stumpf. all of Des Moines, Iowa. I made my trip home to Des Moines by car with my Grand daughter Amber followed by a brief visit at the home of Matthew and Janelle Wegner, Kaitlyn and Keegan at Nevada, Iowa, a short distance from Ames, Ia. We all attended a 5-12th grade Band Festival at the Nevada School with great- grandson Keegan participating after getting back in South Dakota I visited at the home of Sarah and Nick Adamson and little Will who I was able to wish Happy 1st Birthday of course after returning to Groton I got in on the big snow of the Season- the first for me in a few years. A little kid bit- i was very much surprised Sunday after moon when seeing the first Robin of the Spring season,trying to find shelter.

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## Gov. Daugaard Signs More Bills Into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – In addition to the Initiated Measure 22 replacement measures, Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed six other bills into law yesterday. You can click on the bill number to see more information about the legislation.

[SB 25](#) – An Act to provide for the release of certain booking photographs.

[SB 28](#) – An Act to revise the exceptions to presumptive probation.

[SB 80](#) – An Act to regulate the use of drones under certain conditions and to provide a penalty therefor.

[SB 128](#) – An Act to provide an exception for alcohol manufacturer and wholesaler licensees to participate in certain retail events and to declare an emergency.

[HB 1170](#) – An Act to revise certain provisions regarding conflicts of interest for authority, board, or commission members.

[HB 1173](#) – An Act to revise the distribution of funds from the building South Dakota fund.

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## City Summer Salary Ordinance

An Ordinance entitled Supplemental Summer Salary Ordinance, An Ordinance Amending Ordinance 703.

BE IT ORDAINED by the City of Groton, South Dakota, that Ordinance No. 703 be amended to read as follows:

Section I: Schedule of Salaries. The salaries and time of payment of employees shall be as follows:

Swimming Pool Manager \$13.25/hr Biweekly; Swimming Pool Lifeguard - First Year \$9.00/hr Biweekly; Swimming Pool Lifeguard - Second Year \$9.25/hr Biweekly; Swimming Pool Lifeguard - Third Year \$9.50/hr Biweekly; Swimming Pool Lifeguard - Fourth Year \$9.75/hr Biweekly; Swimming Pool Lifeguard - After Fourth Year \$10.00/hr Biweekly; WSI Lifeguards during Swimming Lessons Regular Salary Plus \$1.00/hr Biweekly; WSI Assist Lifeguards during Swimming Lessons Regular Salary Plus \$.50/hr Biweekly.

Baseball Concessions Manager \$50/day Plus 50% Taxable Sales Semimonthly; Baseball Coordinator \$3,000.00/yr Monthly; Softball Coordinator \$1,000.00/yr Monthly; Legion Baseball Coach \$3,500.00/yr Monthly; Assistant Legion Baseball Coach \$2,000.00/yr Monthly; Jr Legion Baseball Coach \$1,500.00/yr Monthly; Jr Teeners Baseball Coach \$1,500.00/yr Monthly; Midget/PeeWee Coach \$2,500.00/yr Monthly; Girls Softball Coach \$800.00/yr/team Monthly; Baseball Grounds Keepers-First Year \$9.00/hr Biweekly; Baseball Grounds Keepers-Second Year \$9.25/hr Biweekly; Baseball Grounds Keeper ?Third Year \$9.50/hr Biweekly; Baseball Grounds Keeper - Fourth Year \$9.75/hr Biweekly; Baseball Grounds Keeper After Fourth Year \$10.00/hr Biweekly; Baseball Gatekeeper \$9.00/hr Biweekly; Public Works Laborers - First Year \$10.25/hr Biweekly; Public Works Laborers - Second Year \$10.50/hr Biweekly; Public Works Laborers-Third Year \$10.75/hr Biweekly; Public Works Laborers - Fourth Year \$11.00/hr Biweekly; Public Works Laborers - After Fourth Year \$11.25/hr Biweekly; Cemetery Caretaker \$13.25/hr Biweekly

Section II: Requirements. Final payment of wages will be two weeks after completion of all duties of all seasonal employees.

Passed First Reading - February 21, 2017  
Passed Second Reading - March 13, 2017  
Published March 15, 2017  
Effective April 5, 2017

\_\_\_\_\_  
Scott Hanlon, Mayor  
Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Anita Lowary, Finance Officer

## Gas Prices in a Lazy 10-Day Decline

March 14, 2017 – South Dakota’s average pump price for regular gasoline has fallen two cents over the last ten days but still remains in a narrow price band of between \$2.34 and \$2.31 per gallon, where it’s stayed since Jan. 24, 2017.

“However, today we’re starting to see even lower prices in some areas of the state due to falling crude oil prices and a well-supplied market,” said Marilyn Buskohl, spokeswoman for AAA South Dakota. “But as refineries conduct their annual seasonal maintenance over the next few weeks, we may see some upward motion in these retail prices.”

### Current Price Averages per Gallon of Regular Gasoline

Sioux Falls – \$2.23, down 2 cents in the past month ... up 33 cents since 3/14/16  
Rapid City – \$2.31, unchanged over the past month ... up 48 cents since 3/14/16  
South Dakota – \$2.32, down 1 cent in past month ... up 39 cents since 3/14/16  
U.S. – \$2.29, up 1cent in the past month ... up 36 cents since 3/14/16

After remaining relatively flat, the national average price for regular gasoline has now fallen for 11 straight days to today’s average of \$2.29 per gallon, one cent less than one week ago. The nation’s most dramatic weekly change in prices include: Indiana (-11 cents), Ohio (-8 cents), Michigan (-8 cents), Kentucky (-8 cents) and Oregon (+8 cents).

### Global Market Dynamics

Crude prices declined again today as the global oil market remains oversupplied, and relatively high U.S. production levels continue to support bearish market sentiment. The possibility of continued production compliance by OPEC is likely to keep the market relatively fickle in the near term. Traders will continue to keep a close eye on OPEC compliance and U.S. supply and production. At the close of Friday’s formal trading session on the NYMEX, WTI was down 79 cents to settle at \$48.49 per barrel.

[www.AAA.com](http://www.AAA.com)

[www.facebook.com/AAASouthDakota](http://www.facebook.com/AAASouthDakota)

[www.twitter.com/AAASouthDakota](http://www.twitter.com/AAASouthDakota)

AAA is North America’s largest motoring, leisure travel and safety advocacy organization with more than 56 million members. A not-for-profit, fully tax-paying organization, AAA South Dakota provides its nearly 95,900 South Dakota members with emergency roadside assistance and auto travel services. Plus, the auto club offers members and the general public a wide range of personal insurance, worldwide travel and financial services at branch offices across South Dakota and online at AAA.com.

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## Today in Weather History

March 15, 1941: Beware the Ides of March. The most severe blizzard in modern history strikes North Dakota and Minnesota. The blizzard began on a Saturday night while many are traveling, and thus claims 71 lives. Winds gust to 75 mph at Duluth, Minnesota, and reach 85 mph at Grand Forks, North Dakota. Snow drifts twelve feet high are reported in north central Minnesota. A cold front traveling 30 mph crosses Minnesota in just seven hours. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History Channel.

March 15, 2010: Snowmelt runoff from an expansive snow cover flooded many creeks, roads, along with thousands of acres of pasture and cropland throughout northeast South Dakota. There were numerous road closures. The flooding lasted through the end of the month and for many locations into April. The counties mainly affected were Brown, Marshall, Day, Spink, and Roberts. Numerous communities were affected including Aberdeen, Claremont, Waubay, Amherst, Kidder, and the Richmond Lake area. The Claremont, Amherst, and Britton areas were the hardest hit with flooded land and roads. Several farms were surrounded by water with some people stranded. Between Aberdeen and Britton, sixty percent of the land was under water. Thousands of acres of cropland will not be planted due to too much water with estimates that 20 to 25 percent of Brown county cropland would not be planted. Many people in northeast South Dakota have had too much water for many years. The road damage was extensive and repairs will be in the millions of dollars. Many roads across the area will also have to be raised. Many people had extra-long commutes due to flooded roads with some people having to move out of their homes. Across Day and Marshall Counties, rising lakes threatened many homes and cabins with sandbagging taking place. Most lakes and rivers across northeast South Dakota were at or near record levels.

1938: A tornado hit McPaul, Iowa while moving from southeast to northwest. Another tornado raced through Batesville, Illinois at 60 to 65 mph. Another tornado causing F4 damage killed 10 and injured 12 in St. Clair County, Missouri. This tornado was part of an outbreak that produced four different tornadoes and was responsible for 11 deaths and 42 injuries.

1941 - The most severe blizzard in modern history struck North Dakota and Minnesota. The blizzard hit on a Saturday night while many are traveling, and thus claimed 71 lives. Winds gusted to 75 mph at Duluth MN, and reached 85 mph at Grand Forks ND. Snow drifts twelve feet high were reported in north central Minnesota. A cold front traveling 30 mph crossed Minnesota in just seven hours. (15th-16th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1952: On Reunion Island, some 400 miles east of Madagascar 127.56 inches of rain fell in a three-day period in the spring of 1952. This set a world record for the most rain in a 72 hour period. Also from the 15th to the 16th 73.62 inches of rain fell in this 24 hours period at Cilaos, La Reunion Island in the South Indian Ocean to set a world record.

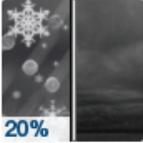
1987 - A winter storm in the western U.S. produced heavy snow in central Nevada, with 23 inches reported at Austin. High winds raked the desert areas of southern California and southern Arizona. Winds gusted to 59 mph at Douglas AZ. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - More than one hundred hours of continuous snow finally came to an end at Marquette MI, during which time the city was buried under 43 inches of snow. Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., with forty-one cities reporting record low temperatures for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from Alabama to the Middle Atlantic Coast. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 at Virginia Beach VA. Low pressure in southeastern Ontario produced high winds in the northeastern U.S. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Saint Albans VT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Mostly Cloudy	Slight Chance Wintry Mix then Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny
High: 31 °F	Low: 28 °F	High: 41 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 43 °F	Low: 22 °F	High: 45 °F

## Snow Melt on the Way

Highs today in the 30s

High in the 40s on Thursday

**Much Warmer Temps Further West**

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD



[weather.gov/Aberdeen](http://weather.gov/Aberdeen)

Updated: 3/15/2017 5 am

Published on: 03/15/2017 at 5:31AM

Warmer temperatures will begin to move into northeastern South Dakota today with highs climbing into the 40s. High temperatures on Thursday will warm into the 40s. Much warmer temperatures can be expected in western South Dakota.

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## Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 24.9 F at 3:49 PM

Low Outside Temp: 4.3 F at 12:03 AM

High Gust: 19.0 Mph at 1:17 PM

Snow: Precip: 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 79° in 2015

Record Low: -29 in 1897

Average High: 39°F

Average Low: 20°F

Average Precip in March.: 0.47

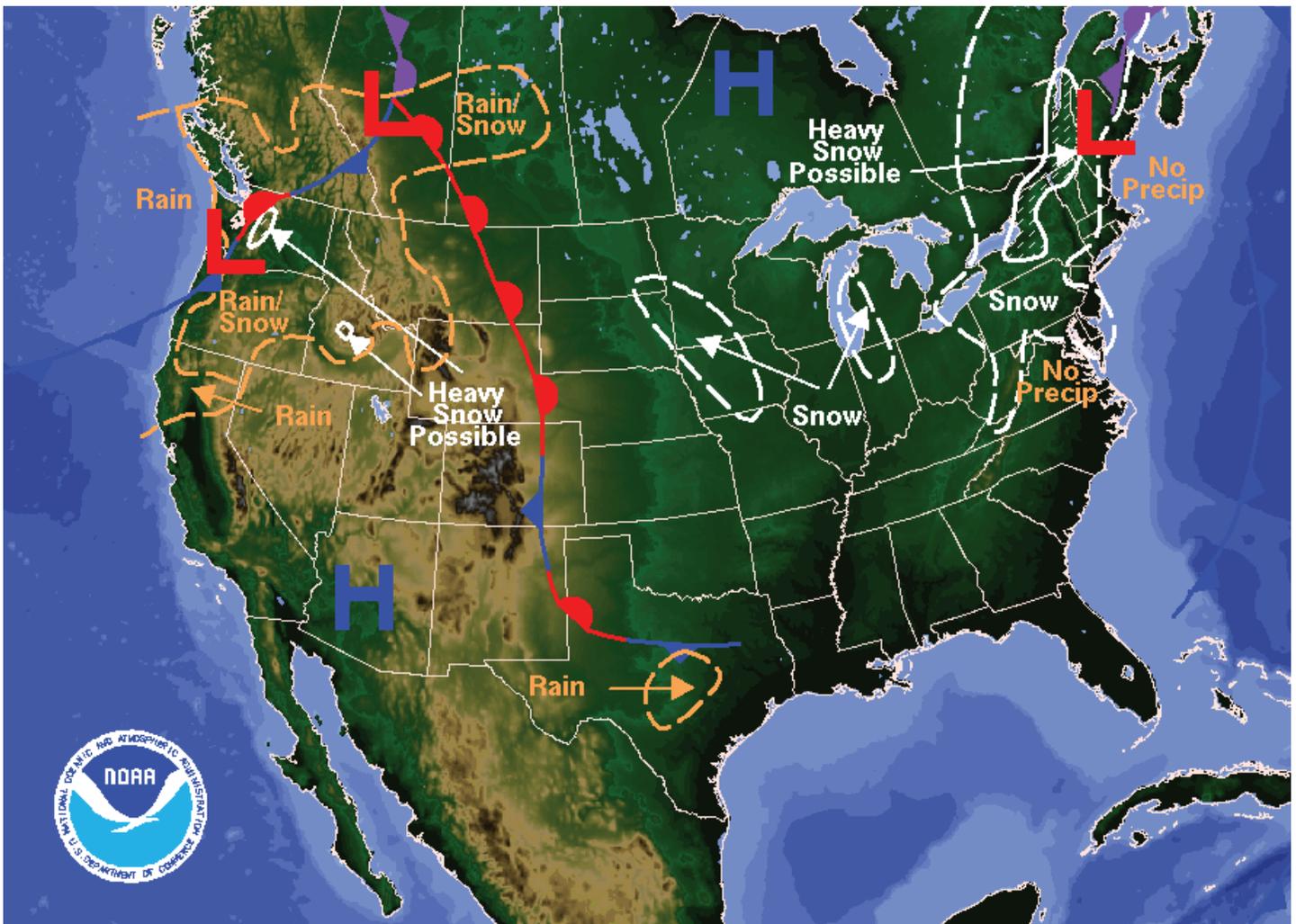
Precip to date in March.: 0.59

Average Precip to date: 1.49

Precip Year to Date: 0.59

Sunset Tonight: 7:40 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:43 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Wed, Mar 15, 2017, issued 4:51 AM EDT  
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center  
Prepared by McCreynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



## LIVING IN THE SHADOW

There is nothing more certain than death and nothing more uncertain than life or the time of one's death. Although we cannot prepare for the events that will come into our lives, we can prepare for the day that our life will end. So, it's wise to be prepared for that unknown day when we will meet God face to face.

In Psalm 23 David wrote, "Even though I will walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid for You are close beside me." David was prepared for "the valley."

David said with confidence that "I will walk through." Death was not a dead-end street for David nor is it a dead-end street for the Christian. It is a throughway to heaven.

For many the "shadow of death" is a very frightening thought. Its dampening effect reminds us that we are entirely helpless as we face its uncertain hour. There are many enemies in life that we can face and fight – pain and sorrow, suffering and grief, hunger, rejection and abandonment. But death? Fighting against it is useless. It is beyond our control.

But even though we may be helpless as we face the certainty of death, Christians are not hopeless as we face eternity. There is a Person who will meet us at the "appointed time" and walk us safely through the "valley of the shadow."

Prayer: We rejoice, Father, in Your promise that for the Christian "to die is gain!" We thank You for Your presence in our lives and the peace that we have in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) \_ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

16-23-28-33-59, Mega Ball: 13, Megaplier: 3

(sixteen, twenty-three, twenty-eight, thirty-three, fifty-nine; Mega Ball: thirteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$119 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$123 million

### Vikings sign ex-Packers 1st-round pick DE Datone Jones

The Minnesota Vikings have signed defensive end Datone Jones, the former first-round pick of the rival Green Bay Packers. Jones was selected 26th overall out of UCLA in the 2013 draft. He has primarily been a backup but should give the Vikings more pass-rushing depth. Jones has nine sacks in his career.

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. (AP) — The Minnesota Vikings have signed defensive end Datone Jones, the former first-round pick of the rival Green Bay Packers.

The Vikings finalized the one-year deal on Tuesday with Jones, who was selected 26th overall out of UCLA in the 2013 draft. The 6-foot-4, 285-pound Jones played in 59 of a possible 64 regular-season games, mostly as a backup.

He was primarily a defensive end in Green Bay's 3-4 scheme but also played some outside linebacker. The versatility developed will serve him well for the rest of his career, but he never quite found the right fit with the Packers. The Vikings could also use him as a defensive tackle in passing situations.

"There's never been a steady role or steady position for me," Jones said on a conference call with Minnesota reporters. He added: "I've got a chance to actually prove myself."

Jones has nine sacks and seven passes defended in his career. The Packers previously declined their fifth-year option on his contract that is built into every first-round pick's deal.

Jones was a college teammate of Vikings starting linebackers Anthony Barr and Eric Kendricks, whom he peppered with questions about the coaches, scheme and team as he was considering signing with the Vikings. Now he'll join them in trying to retake the NFC North title from Aaron Rodgers and the Packers.

"Aaron knows," Jones said. "He knows I'm coming hungry."

For more NFL coverage: <http://www.pro32.ap.org> and [http://www.twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](http://www.twitter.com/AP_NFL)

### State lawmakers restrict pocketing leftover campaign cash

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed a bill Tuesday in part meant to restrict South Dakota politicians from pocketing the money in their campaign accounts.

Campaign funds shouldn't be rolled into a politician's personal account, the Republican governor said in a statement. The new law goes into effect July 1, removing South Dakota from the short list of states including neighboring North Dakota where withdrawals are legal.

The wide-ranging measure Daugaard signed includes provisions saying that politicians can only use contributions for campaign-related purposes, expenses incident to being a current or former public official or donations to charities or other political campaigns.

Senate Democratic Leader Billie Sutton, who pushed for the law change, said that those new regula-

tions are a lot "better than what we had in place prior — which is nothing." To allow people to just walk away with campaign funds is unethical, he said.

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

Former Gov. Bill Janklow in 2011, not long before he died, 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, has said the money went to charities and the University of South Dakota Foundation.

## **Daugaard's office: State reaches settlement with SDRC**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota has settled two civil lawsuits for roughly \$1.5 million with a private company that handled the state's investment-for-visa program.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard's office said Tuesday the lawsuits sought to enforce the state's contract with SDRC Inc. and to recover expenses the Board of Regents incurred from a California arbitration case.

The governor's office says SDRC must immediately pay nearly \$550,000 to the state, and another \$81,000 by September 2019.

The state has separately recovered nearly \$900,000 in indemnification funds owed by SDRC. An attorney for the company didn't immediately return a telephone message requesting comment.

Joop Bollen, who once led South Dakota's participation in the EB-5 visa program, recently reached an agreement with prosecutors in a financial misconduct case.

## **Trademark infringement award for Sturgis rally set aside**

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A federal judge has vacated a nearly \$1 million trademark infringement award made to the owners of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally brand.

Sturgis Motorcycle Rally Inc., which owns the Sturgis logo, sued Walmart and a Rapid City retailer for allegedly improperly using the Sturgis trademark on merchandise. A jury awarded \$912,500 to SMRI following a civil trial in October 2015, the Rapid City Journal reported (<http://bit.ly/2mnnZYY>).

Federal Judge Jeffrey Viken upheld SMRI's trademark rights, but set aside the jury award against the defendants.

In the trial, the two companies said that the Sturgis Chamber of Commerce lied when it convinced the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to grant the "Sturgis" trademark. The argument was that because Sturgis is a geographical name, it could not be trademarked.

The jury still disagreed, deciding in favor of SMRI.

Minneapolis attorney Aaron Davis represented Rushmore Photos & Gifts in Rapid City and Walmart.

"Judge Viken upheld SMRI's trademark rights per se, but the damages finding against the defendants has been vacated, dismissed basically," Davis said. "There is no money judgment that survives this court order."

He said the ruling doesn't mean the case is over, pending an appeal by the plaintiffs. But he said the judge's decision is "a huge burden off of our clients."

"We weren't overjoyed with the judge's ruling deferring to the jury that SMRI had the (trademark) rights and that may be a point of appeal in the future," Davis said. "We feel strongly that they don't have any rights to this trademark at all."

## Company asks judge to reject tribal plea on oil pipeline

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press**

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The company building the Dakota Access pipeline has asked a federal judge to reject the latest attempt by two American Indian tribes to halt the project, with oil likely to begin flowing early next week.

Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners argues in court documents filed Monday that it has endured enough delays and that the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes are employing “a last-gasp litigation tactic.”

The tribes have appealed a decision by U.S. District Judge James Boasberg to not stop construction of the pipeline’s final segment under Lake Oahe, a Missouri River reservoir in North Dakota from which they get their water. They’ve asked Boasberg to head off the imminent flow of oil through the four-state pipeline until the appeal is resolved.

The tribes maintain that an oil pipeline under the lake they consider sacred violates their right to practice their religion.

In its response, ETP argues that the tribes’ religion-based argument is flawed and that they introduced it too late in the legal process.

“The tribe fails to explain how the added ‘burden’ of a pipeline that crosses this part of the Missouri River could itself produce irreparable harm to the purity of Lake Oahe’s waters when so many other oil pipelines, gas pipelines, refineries, power lines, railroad tracks and other man-made intrusions have burdened the same waters for so long,” company attorney William Scherman wrote.

The tribes initially sued over the project last summer, arguing that it threatens cultural sites and their water supply. Those claims are not yet resolved. The tribes added the religion argument last month.

In his decision last week, Boasberg said the tribes didn’t raise the religion argument in a timely fashion and he questioned its merits. The tribes are appealing his reasoning to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and say that if oil flows before the appeal is resolved, they will lose any chance to defend their free exercise of religion.

In court documents, ETP said the hole under the lake is nearly finished, and crews anticipate pulling pipe through this week and doing final testing.

“As a result, Dakota Access projects that oil may be introduced in this part of the line between Monday, March 20, 2017 and Wednesday, March 22, 2017, depending on the success of the testing,” Scherman wrote.

The pipeline will carry North Dakota oil through South Dakota and Iowa to a shipping point in Illinois, 1,200 miles away.

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

## Daugaard: GOP health plan could help with federal budget

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard said Tuesday he doesn’t like that House Republicans’ health care plan would require South Dakota to take on more financial risk under proposed funding changes for the Medicaid program.

But the Republican governor said that it’s important to get control of the federal deficit, which he said would be difficult without overhauling entitlements including Medicaid. The Congressional Budget Office says that the legislation would reduce budget deficits by \$337 billion over a decade.

“I don’t like the aspect of the more risk, but I think from a more nation-centric viewpoint, it’s probably necessary,” Daugaard said.

Kim Malsam-Rysdon, a senior adviser to the governor, said that state officials are working through the bill’s potential impact related to Medicaid in South Dakota.

It would convert Medicaid coverage from an open-ended federal entitlement to one that operates under a per-capita cap. Some governors are concerned that the overhaul doesn’t give states the extra flexibility needed to live within the budget constraints such a system would impose, Daugaard said.

It would also phase out former President Barack Obama's expansion of Medicaid to millions of additional low earners. South Dakota didn't expand the program, limiting the impact compared to states that did, Daugaard said.

Daugaard did say that the measure would offer some "upside" from a state budget perspective. A fund designed to stabilize state markets and decrease patient costs would give South Dakota options including helping offset high premiums for high-risk people or providing assistance to reduce out-of-pocket costs, he said.

Daugaard said that he has teleconference discussions Tuesday with other governors about the proposal.

## Gov. Dennis Daugaard signs protest measure into law

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard has signed into law a bill that he proposed to address potential oil pipeline protests in South Dakota.

The Republican this week signed the measure, which imposes new penalties for standing in the highway to stop traffic or trespassing in posted emergency areas.

Under some circumstances, it also allows the commissioner of school and public lands, at the request of the governor and local sheriff, to block groups larger than 20 people from gathering on land under the office's supervision.

Daugaard says he brought the bill to protect peaceful protesters and the people who live and travel in South Dakota. The governor sent letters to tribal leaders inviting conversation on potential protests.

Critics argue the measure could target Native Americans. An emergency provision means it takes effect immediately.

## 10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

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

### 1. WHAT TRUMP PAID IN TAXES IN 2005

The U.S. president earned \$153 million and paid \$36.5 million in income taxes that year, according to two pages from his tax return released by a reporter, and also reported a business loss of \$103 million that year.

### 2. NETHERLANDS HOLDING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Polls are being closely watched as a possible indicator of the strength of far-right populism ahead of national votes in France and Germany later this year.

### 3. WHERE GOP HEALTH OVERHAUL WOULD PUT PRESSURE

Cuts to Medicaid would mean people who can no longer afford coverage are likely to end up in emergency rooms, a cost that in many cases would come back on the states.

### 4. TRUMP TRAVEL BAN FACES KEY TEST

In Maryland, a U.S. judge will hear arguments from the ACLU, while more than a half-dozen states are trying to derail the executive order affecting travelers from six Muslim-majority nations.

### 5. TRACTION A CONCERN AFTER NOR'EASTER

Plunging overnight temperatures threatened to turn the snow, sleet and sloppy mix into a slippery mess, raising fears of black ice for morning motorists.

### 6. ALGAE BLOOM IN ARABIAN SEA TIED TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Stretching from Oman to India, the microscopic organisms threaten fish stocks, oil rigs, desalination plants and entire ecosystems.

### 7. TRUMP HITS THE ROAD

The U.S. president is headed to Michigan, where he's expected to take aim at fuel-economy standards pivotal to Obama's strategy to combat global warming.

### 8. WHO DIDN'T LET THE DOGS OUT

Ousted South Korean President Park's unpopularity takes another hit after it emerges she moved out

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of the presidential palace and left her nine dogs behind.

## 9. JAPANESE WHISKY A HIT AROUND GLOBE

Suntory distillery near Kyoto is winning awards that have made it one of the world's best, joining Scotch, Bourbon, Irish and Canadian.

## 10. MARCH MADNESS FLUMMOXES VEGAS TOO

Sports books have alternated between Duke, North Carolina and Kansas as the odds-on pick to win college basketball's national championship.

## Plunging temps lead to icy conditions following storm

By COLLEEN LONG and DENISE LAVOIE, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Concerns about falling temperatures and icy conditions on roads and sidewalks across the Northeast followed a late-season storm that plastered the region with sleet and snow.

Tuesday's powerful nor'easter paralyzed much of the Washington-to-Boston corridor, but fell short of the predicted snowfall totals in New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

The storm, which followed a stretch of unusually mild winter weather, dumped 1 to 2 feet in many places, grounded more than 6,000 flights and knocked out power to nearly a quarter-million customers from Virginia northward.

By the time it reached Massachusetts, it had turned into a blizzard, with near hurricane-force winds gusting to over 70 mph along the coast. Boston ended up with 6.6 inches of snow, far less than what was predicted.

Plunging overnight temperatures threatened to turn the snow, sleet and sloppy mix into a slippery mess, raising fears of black ice for motorists and slick sidewalks for pedestrians.

Boston canceled school for a second day as cleanup efforts continued. Mayor Marty Walsh said he made the call out of "an abundance of caution."

The storm was easily the biggest in an otherwise merciful winter that had mostly spared the region. Many, like retired gumball machine technician Don Zimmerman, of Lemoyne, Pennsylvania, weren't happy.

"It's horrible," Zimmerman said, using a snowblower to clear the sidewalk along his block. "I thought winter was out of here. ... It's a real kick in the rear."

While most people heeded the warnings to stay off the roads, police said a 16-year-old girl was killed when she lost control of her car on a snowy road and crashed into a tree in Gilford, New Hampshire.

In East Hartford, Connecticut, an elderly man died after being struck by a snow plow truck.

The storm closed schools in cities big and small, Amtrak suspended service and the post office halted mail delivery. The number flight cancellations reached more than 3,000 in the New York City area alone, stranding hundreds of passengers.

Philadelphia and New York City got anywhere from a few inches of snow to around half a foot before it switched over to sleet. Forecasters had predicted a foot or more. In New Jersey, which saw rain or just a little snow, Gov. Chris Christie called the storm an "underperformer." But officials still warned of dangerous ice.

Inland areas, meanwhile, got hit hard. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Worcester, Massachusetts, received a foot or more of snow. The Binghamton, New York, area got over 2 feet, while Vernon, New Jersey, had at least 19 inches.

The storm came just days after the region saw temperatures climb into the 60s, and less than a week before the official start of spring.

In the nation's capital, non-essential federal employees were given the option of reporting three hours late, taking the day off or working from home. The city got less than 2 inches of snow.

A few days ago, workers on Washington's National Mall were making plans to turn on the fountains.

"Obviously all that has to come to an abrupt stop until we get all the snow cleared," said Jeff Gowen, the acting facility manager for the National Mall and Memorial Parks. "The cherry blossoms, they're right on the cusp of going into bloom here. I had a feeling this was going to happen."

As the storm closed in, the National Weather Service used terms like "life-threatening" and urged people to "shelter in place," language that has come to be associated with mass shootings. In the end,

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the line between snow and rain shifted slightly to the west, sparing some of the Northeast's big cities. Government meteorologists realized by late Monday afternoon that there was a good chance the storm wasn't going to produce the giant big-city snow totals predicted. But they didn't change their forecast for fear people would mistakenly think the storm was no longer dangerous, said Greg Carbin, chief of forecast operations at the Weather Prediction Center.

In Pennsylvania, snowplows and state troopers escorted a 23-month-old child in need of a heart transplant 80 miles between hospitals. Gov. Tom Wolf said the youngster made the trip safely.

In Narragansett, Rhode Island, high winds buckled a state-owned wind turbine. In New York City, two homes under construction collapsed near the waterfront in Far Rockaway. No injuries were reported. In Longmeadow, Massachusetts, a town public works employee was killed after the snow plow he was driving was hit by an Amtrak plow train clearing the tracks.

And two ponies broke out of their stables and roamed the snowy streets of Staten Island until an off-duty police officer wrangled them with straps normally used to tow cars and tied them to a lamppost. They were taken back to the stables.

The storm coincided with New Hampshire's Town Meeting Day, a Yankee tradition in which voters in more than 100 communities elect local politicians and set budgets.

Some towns postponed the meetings because of the snow. But in Hopkinton, a steady stream of voters braved the blustery conditions.

"You know, they're hardy New Englanders, and they're coming to vote," said Debbie Norris, a candidate for the Hopkinton Budget Committee.

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Lavoie reported from Whitman, Massachusetts. Associated Press writers Mark Scoloro in Lemoyne, Pennsylvania; Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Michael Hill and John Kekis in Albany, New York; Mark Pratt in Boston; Bruce Shipkowski in Trenton, New Jersey; Michelle R. Smith and Jennifer McDermott in Providence, Rhode Island; Dave Collins in Hartford, Connecticut; Shawn Marsh in Manasquan, New Jersey; Kristen DeGroot in Philadelphia; Holly Ramer in Hopkinton, New Hampshire; Ted Shaffrey in Newark, New Jersey; Ben Nuckols in Washington; Bob Bukaty in Yarmouth, Maine; and Michael Rubinkam in northeastern Pennsylvania contributed to this report.

## Dutch voting in election seen as barometer of populism

By **MIKE CORDER** and **RAF CASERT**, Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Prime Minister Mark Rutte and anti-Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders cast Wednesday's Dutch parliamentary elections as a litmus test for populism in Europe, only months ahead of crucial votes in France and Germany.

As the nation went to the voting stations on a bright spring morning, two-term premier Rutte's right-wing VVD party was leading in the latest polls, with the anti-Islam Party for Freedom of firebrand lawmaker Geert Wilders a close second.

Coming after last's year British vote to leave the European Union and the election of U.S. President Donald Trump — two stunning successes for populists — Rutte now hopes to slow the momentum of what he called the "wrong sort of populism."

"This is a chance for a big democracy like the Netherlands to make a point to stop this toppling over of the domino stones of the wrong sort of populism," Rutte said after his vote.

Despite positive poll results in recent days Rutte was wary of the results. "There is still a risk that we wake up Thursday morning and seeing that Geert Wilders is leading the biggest party," he said.

Wilders sought to dampen expectations for himself — but insisted that whatever the result of Wednesday's election, the kind of populist politics he and others in Europe represent will be here to stay.

"The genie will not go back into the bottle. People feel misrepresented," he said, predicting this would show in elections later this year in France and Germany too.

"Despite what the elite wants, politicians are getting strong who have a totally different concept of what the people want them to do," he said.

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Rutte has framed the election as a choice between continuity and chaos, portraying himself as a safe custodian of the nation's economic recovery, while casting Wilders as a far-right radical who would not be prepared to take tough decisions.

The chance of Wilders becoming leader in this country where the proportional representation voting system all but guarantees coalition governments is small — all mainstream parties, including Rutte's VVD, have ruled out working with Wilders.

Wilders' one-page election manifesto includes pledges to close borders to immigrants from Muslim nations, shuttering mosques and banning the Quran, as well as taking the Netherlands out of the European Union.

The final days of campaigning were overshadowed by a diplomatic crisis between the Dutch and Turkish governments over the refusal of the Netherlands to let two Turkish government ministers address rallies about a constitutional reform referendum next month that could give President Recep Tayyip Erdogan more powers. It showed Rutte as refusing to bow to pressure from outside, a stance which has widespread backing in the nation.

"It is my task to keep the nation safe and stable and deal with these kinds of people," said Rutte.

The 12.9 million Dutch voters can cast their ballots until 9 p.m. (2000 GMT). They have plenty to choose from; there are 28 parties fielding candidates in the splintered political landscape.

The election in the Netherlands comes ahead of polls in France and Germany later this year, when right-wing nationalists will also be key players.

Voting in Amsterdam, Sam Godfried said he tried to turn the tide away from the far right. "The thing is, I think the whole world around us is getting more extreme and it is just getting more polarized," he said. He did not say who he voted for.

During a final televised debate Tuesday night among leaders from the parties vying for seats and control of the government, Wilders piled on the anti-Islam invective while Rutte played up his leadership experience.

Rutte has driven through unpopular austerity measures over the last four years, but the Dutch economic recovery has gathered pace and unemployment has fallen fast. So the prime minister is urging voters to stick with him.

Wilders, meanwhile, is tapping into discontent among voters who say they are not benefiting from economic recovery.

With such a knife-edge vote expected, only one thing appeared certain: Talks to form the next ruling coalition will take a while.

"The longest coalition formation was seven months," said Amsterdam Free University political analyst Andre Krouwel. "It wouldn't surprise me if this results leads to a very complicated and long formation process."

## Trump earned \$153m and paid \$36.5m in taxes in 2005

By JILL COLVIN and JEFF HORWITZ, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump earned \$153 million and paid \$36.5 million in income taxes in 2005, paying a roughly 25 percent effective tax rate thanks to a tax he has since sought to eliminate, according to highly sought-after newly-disclosed tax documents.

The pages from Trump's federal tax return show the then-real estate mogul also reported a business loss of \$103 million that year, although the documents don't provide detail. The forms show that Trump paid an effective tax rate of 24.5 percent, a figure well above the roughly 10 percent the average American taxpayer forks over each year, but below the 27.4 percent that taxpayers earning 1 million dollars a year average were paying at the time, according to data from the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation.

The tax forms were obtained by journalist David Cay Johnston, who runs a website called DCReport.org, and reported on MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show." Johnston, who has long reported on tax issues, said he received the documents in the mail, unsolicited.

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Trump's hefty business loss appears to be a continued benefit from his use of a tax loophole in the 1990s, which allowed him to deduct previous losses in future years. In 1995, Trump reported a loss of more than \$900 million, largely as a result of financial turmoil at his casinos.

Tax records obtained by The New York Times last year showed the losses were so large they could have allowed Trump to avoid paying taxes for up to 18 years. But Trump's 2005 filing shows that another tax prevented him from realizing the full benefit of those deductions.

The bulk of Trump's tax bill that year was due to the Alternative Minimum Tax, a tax aimed at preventing high-income earners from paying minimal taxes.

The AMT requires many taxpayers to calculate their taxes twice — once under the rules for regular income tax and then again under AMT — and then pay the higher amount. Critics say the tax has ensnared more middle-class people than intended, raising what they owe the federal government each year.

Were it not for the AMT, Trump would have avoided all but a few million dollars of his 2005 tax bill.

Trump's campaign website called for the end of the AMT, which is expected to bring in more than \$350 billion in revenues from 2016 to 2025.

As a candidate and as president, Trump has refused to release his tax returns, breaking a decades-long tradition. Although he initially promised to do so, he later claimed he was under audit by the Internal Revenue Service and said his attorneys had advised against it — though experts and IRS officials said such audits don't bar taxpayers from releasing their returns.

The White House pushed back even before the release of the documents Tuesday night, saying that publishing the information was illegal.

"You know you are desperate for ratings when you are willing to violate the law to push a story about two pages of tax returns from over a decade ago," the White House said in a statement issued on condition that it be attributed to an anonymous official, although the president has decried the use of anonymous sources.

The unauthorized release or publishing of federal tax returns is a criminal offense, punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and up to five years in jail. But Maddow argued that MSNBC was exercising its First Amendment right to publish information in the public interest.

Trump long insisted the American public wasn't interested in his returns and said little could be learned from them. But Trump's full returns would contain key details about things like his charitable giving, his income sources, the type of deductions he claimed, how much he earned from his assets and what strategies Trump used to reduce his tax bill.

The issue was a major point of attack from his election rival Hillary Clinton, who suggested Trump had something to hide.

The White House has not said whether or not the president plans to release his returns while he's in office. More than 1 million people have signed a White House petition urging the president to release them.

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Associated Press writer Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this report.

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Follow Colvin on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/colvinj>

## Ryan's gambit: Second health care bill to woo the reluctant

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are working on a companion to their bill replacing "Obamacare," a legislative second act that would ease cross-state sale of health insurance and limit jury awards for pain and suffering in malpractice lawsuits.

The problem: the so-called "sidecar" bill lacks the votes in the Senate.

Skeptics abound. Republican Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas called it "mythical legislation" in an interview Tuesday on the Hugh Hewitt radio show. In a tweet, conservative Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., suggested "Easter basket" might be a better description.

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Yet Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wisc., has said he wants to move a companion bill through the House alongside the main GOP legislation that rolls back key parts of Barack Obama's health care law and limits federal spending on Medicaid for low-income people.

That strategy may just help Ryan put together enough votes to get through the House, but then the sidecar would probably get detached in the Senate, where 60 votes would be needed for such legislation. Republicans only have 52 senators and they would need the support of Democrats alienated by the drive to repeal "Obamacare."

"Some of these ideas might take some of the edge off the (main) bill for people on the right in the Republican Party," said economist Joe Antos of the business-oriented American Enterprise Institute. "I don't know that it can possibly overcome the Senate problems."

At a news conference Tuesday, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Democrats will not support any legislation reshaping the health care law until Republicans stop trying to repeal it. If Republicans desist, Democrats would be willing to talk.

Schumer later said he isn't keen on the idea of a House companion bill. "They probably have ideas that would make it worse," he said.

Cutting regulations and spurring private market competition are the main goals behind the GOP's idea for a companion bill. Experts say that while some of the proposals sound appealing, they also have practical problems. No final decisions have been made, but here's a look at some proposals that might be in the "sidecar."

## CROSS-STATE HEALTH INSURANCE

Selling insurance across state lines is a longtime GOP idea now embraced by President Donald Trump as a way to encourage competition by introducing low-premium plans into high-cost areas. Consumer advocates and state regulators warn that would set off a "race to the bottom" as out-of-state insurers flood the market with skimpy plans that circumvent state requirements, for example New Jersey's mandate for autism coverage.

But the idea also gets a surprisingly cool reception from the insurance industry. Why?

It turns out that the price of health insurance, like real estate, reflects local markets. An insurer from Kansas selling policies in Manhattan would have to pay hospitals and doctors in New York according to local rates. Also, building networks of service providers that are attractive to consumers is no easy task for insurers.

## MALPRACTICE LIMITS

Republicans have long advocated capping jury awards for non-economic damages in medical malpractice cases, and \$250,000 is a commonly cited limit. The Congressional Budget Office has previously estimated such caps would reduce health care spending by limiting the practice of defensive medicine.

The \$250,000 reflects a limit that California imposed in 1975. Adjusted for inflation, that figure would now be over \$1 million.

The debate pits two powerful lobbies — doctors and lawyers — against each other. So far the lawyers have gotten the upper hand in Congress.

A criticism of malpractice limits is that they fall hard on those who have suffered the most egregious damage and are likely to face lifetime expenses, for example the family of a brain-damaged infant.

## ASSOCIATION HEALTH PLANS

Small businesses would be able to band together to arrange to buy lower-premium plans tailored to their needs.

The debate around association health plans echoes the one over cross-state insurance policies.

Advocates say their idea would provide a way around regulations that raise the cost of health insurance. But consumer advocates and state regulators say it would undermine protections for patients and undercut state oversight of the insurance industry.

## ANTI-TRUST EXEMPTION

A 1940s federal law offers the insurance industry a qualified exemption from federal anti-trust laws. Proponents of repealing the exemption say it is a barrier to competition. In the past, that idea has had bipartisan support in Congress, but it's unclear what would happen now with the two political parties bitterly divided over health care.

Other ideas being discussed among Republicans may also make it into the sidcar legislation.

But they all seem headed for a roadblock in the Senate. Within the administration, Health Secretary Tom Price is working to loosen regulations.

"The chances that they are going to pass this hodgepodge in a separate bill is pretty much between slim and none," said Bob Laszewski, an industry consultant and blogger. "You are not going to get Democratic support for these things."

## South Korea prosecutors to question ousted leader next week

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM, Associated Press**

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean prosecutors said Wednesday they plan to question ousted President Park Geun-hye next week over a corruption scandal that removed her from office, as the government announced that an election will be held on May 9 to pick her successor.

Park lost her presidential immunity from prosecution after the Constitutional Court ruled Friday to formally end her rule over allegations that she colluded with a longtime confidante to extort money from businesses and allowed her pull government strings from the shadows.

Prosecutors said they told Park's lawyer that they'll summon her next Tuesday as a suspect in the scandal. Park's lawyer later said Park would "faithfully" undergo the questioning, according to a Seoul prosecutors' office.

Dozens of high-profile figures including some top Park administration officials and Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong have already been indicted over the scandal.

Park could also face extortion, bribery and other criminal charges, but she has denied any legal wrongdoing and expressed defiance toward her corruption allegations.

"Although it will take time, I believe the truth will certainly come out," Park said after leaving the presidential Blue House on Sunday.

Park's comments raised worries about a further deepening of the national divide over her fate. Three people died and dozens were injured in violent clashes between Park's supporters and police following Friday's court ruling.

By law, a national vote to find her successor must be held within two months of Friday's court ruling, and the Ministry of Interior said Wednesday that May 9 would be the election date.

Moon Jae-in, a liberal opposition leader who lost the 2012 presidential election to Park, is the favorite to be the country's next leader in opinion surveys.

His campaign got a boost Wednesday when Prime Minister and acting leader Hwang Kyo-ahn, considered the potential leading conservative challenger to Moon, said he won't run.

Hwang told a Cabinet meeting that he decided to focus on managing state affairs and resolving political and economic uncertainties triggered by Park's ouster until a new president is elected. Hwang would have been forced to resign and let a deputy prime minister serve as another interim leader if he had stood for the election.

South Korean conservatives have been badly hurt by Park's scandal. In early February, former U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, also regarded as a conservative candidate, withdrew from consideration amid mounting media speculation over his political competence and corruption allegations.

Trump travel ban faces key test in multiple courtrooms

By **BEN NUCKOLS and GENE JOHNSON, Associated Press**

The day before it is supposed to go into effect President Donald Trump's revised travel ban will be

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scrutinized in federal courtrooms across the country on Wednesday.

In Maryland, a U.S. judge will hear arguments from the American Civil Liberties Union and others who want to stop the new directive and more than a half-dozen states are trying to derail the executive order affecting travelers from six Muslim-majority nations.

Hawaii's lawsuit is heading to federal court in Honolulu, while Washington state, which successfully sued to block the original ban, wants its own hearing before a federal judge in Seattle. Five other states have joined Washington's challenge.

Here's a look at what's going on and the hurdles the new ban faces:

## BUSY DAY IN COURT

Hawaii will argue that the new order will harm its Muslim population, tourism and foreign students. Ismail Elshikh, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, said the ban will prevent his Syrian mother-in-law from visiting.

The federal government will argue that the allegations are pure speculation. Justice Department lawyers also say the president is authorized to restrict or suspend entry into the United States.

In Washington state, Attorney General Bob Ferguson is pushing for a hearing before Judge James Robart, who halted the original ban last month. Ferguson wants Robart to apply the ruling to the new ban.

Ferguson says the new order is unconstitutional and harms residents, universities and businesses, especially tech companies such as Washington state-based Microsoft and Amazon who rely on foreign workers. California, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York and Oregon have joined the claim. Federal lawyers say the revised travel ban is "substantially different" from the original directive.

Immigrant advocacy groups and the ACLU are also suing in Maryland. They will ask a judge there early Wednesday to issue an injunction, saying it's illegal to reduce the number of refugees in the middle of a fiscal year. The lawsuit is broader, but the ACLU expects a ruling on that part of the case even if other aspects of the ban are blocked elsewhere.

## OLD VERSUS NEW BAN

Washington and Hawaii say the order is an effort to carry out the Muslim ban he promised during his campaign and is a violation of the First Amendment, which bars the government from favoring or disfavoring any religion. On that point, they say, the new ban is no different than the old.

They point to statements by Trump's advisers, including former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who said Trump asked him how to implement a Muslim ban legally, and Stephen Miller, who said the revised order was designed to have "the same basic policy outcome" as the first.

The new version tries to erase the notion that it was designed to target Muslims by detailing more of a national security rationale. It is narrower and eases some concerns about violating the due process rights of travelers.

It applies only to new visas from Somalia, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Yemen and temporarily shuts down the U.S. refugee program. It does not apply to travelers who already have visas.

The states' First Amendment claim has not been resolved. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals refused to reinstate the original ban but didn't rule on the discrimination claim.

Some legal scholars have said the order does not apply to all Muslims or even all predominantly Muslim nations — a point 9th Circuit Judge Richard Clifton made during arguments in Washington's case.

## DOES THE PRESIDENT HAVE THE AUTHORITY?

The administration says the travel ban is about national security. The revised order specifies that people from the listed countries "warrant additional scrutiny in connection with our immigration policies because the conditions in these countries present heightened threats."

But intelligence analysts at the Department of Homeland Security have questioned that rationale, concluding that citizenship is an "unlikely indicator" of terrorist ties.

In addition, the states and civil liberties groups say U.S. immigration law generally prohibits the government from discriminating based on nationality when issuing immigrant visas. The president cannot rewrite that law by executive order, the states say.

## ARE THE STATES THE RIGHT ONES TO SUE?

Some legal scholars have questioned whether states have standing to bring their cases, citing limits the Supreme Court has placed on when states can sue the federal government.

Michael McConnell, a constitutional law professor at Stanford Law School, has said he is "highly skeptical" that states can sue over this issue.

The 9th Circuit panel found that Washington and Minnesota, which is part of the original lawsuit, did have standing, at least at that early stage. The judges noted that some people would not enroll in universities or join the faculty, causing real harm for the states.

Hawaii focuses on an additional aspect: the loss of tourism, and thus tax dollars, in the heavily travel-dependent state.

"I don't think standing's a serious problem," said Rory Little, a former Supreme Court clerk who teaches at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. "There's clearly harm to state budgets, harm to state universities."

Associated Press writer Jennifer Sinco Kelleher contributed from Honolulu.

## North Korea threat looms over US envoy Tillerson's Asia trip

By **MATTHEW PENNINGTON, Associated Press**

TOKYO (AP) — On his first trip to Asia as top U.S. diplomat, Rex Tillerson wants to forge cooperation with Japan, South Korea and China against the nuclear threat from North Korea and demonstrate "America First" does not mean a U.S. diplomatic retreat from the volatile region.

Tillerson will find shared anxiety at the North's saber-rattling but less agreement about how to deal with it, and unresolved questions about how the United States and China, the world's two largest economies, can manage growing differences.

Japan and South Korea, which host American troops and are already within range of North Korean missiles, support U.S. efforts to increase diplomatic and economic pressure on Pyongyang. The three navies were also conducting missile defense information-sharing drills Wednesday in seas east of the divided Korean Peninsula and north of Japan to promote interoperability, the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said.

But China remains conflicted about how to treat its traditional ally for fear of triggering its collapse.

Adding to the combustible mix of military tension and the region's historic rivalries is another factor — uncertainty about U.S. foreign policy under the Trump administration.

Tillerson, who arrives in Tokyo late Wednesday at the start of his four-day, three-nation tour, could provide some reassurance to nervy allies. He will meet Thursday with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida.

The former Exxon Mobil CEO has adopted a low profile during his six weeks as secretary of state. The State Department Correspondents' Association expressed disappointment Wednesday that Tillerson was traveling to Asia without a full contingent of the diplomatic press corps or even a pool reporter on his plane — although it is taking a reporter from the conservative-leaning website, the Independent Journal Review.

President Donald Trump's rise to power has raised anxiety in Asian capitals. During last year's election campaign, Trump asked whether allies like Japan and South Korea contribute enough for their own defense or should get their own nuclear weapons. He also questioned the fundamentals of four decades of U.S. diplomacy with China.

Trump has allayed some of those concerns since taking office. Trump hosted Abe at his Florida resort last month, and when Tillerson goes to Beijing Saturday, he is expected to arrange a much-anticipated visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the U.S.

"The U.S. allies, Japan and South Korea, want to know that the United States is going to continue to defend them but also is going to show a certain amount of finesse and diplomatic skills in dealing with

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China and with North Korea," said Robert Dujarric, the director of the Institute of Contemporary Asian Studies at Temple University's campus in Tokyo.

North Korea will be a top priority on all Tillerson's stops. The State Department says Tillerson wants to discuss "fresh" approaches. Administration officials say all options are on the table, including military ones, but signs are that the U.S. for starters wants to see rigorous implementation of existing sanctions against Pyongyang.

There appears to be little desire for now to negotiate with North Korea, unless it commits to denuclearization, which it shows no sign of doing.

The North conducted two nuclear tests and 24 ballistic missile tests last year, deepening concern in Washington that it could soon develop a nuclear-tipped missile capable of reaching the U.S. mainland — something Trump has vowed won't happen.

The U.S. is currently involved in annual military drills in South Korea that North Korea regards as rehearsal for invasion. In a show of defiance, the North fired four ballistic missiles into ocean off Japan last week. The next day, the U.S. began bringing in equipment for the long-planned deployment in South Korea of a missile defense system, known by its acronym, THAAD.

That has raised tensions with China, which says the THAAD's radar could peer into Chinese territory, weakening its own nuclear deterrent. The U.S. says the system is intended to be used only against North Korea.

After Tokyo, Tillerson visits South Korea, caught up in political upheaval after last week's ouster of its president, Park Geun-hye, over a corruption scandal. Park had been in lockstep with Washington's efforts to isolate Pyongyang. The favorite to succeed her is Moon Jae-in, a moderate who wants to engage North Korea's government.

Tillerson's final leg involves meetings with several senior Chinese officials in Beijing. China recently announced it was suspending for the rest of the year coal imports that are an important source of revenue for North Korea. That is to comply with U.N. sanctions aimed at restricting the North's nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday called for all parties to return to talks. Aid-for-disarmament negotiations have been stalled for years. Last week China's foreign minister warned the U.S., South Korea and North Korea could be heading for conflict.

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Associated Press writer Ken Moritsugu contributed to this report.

## **GOP health overhaul puts pressure on state governments**

**By GEOFF MULVIHILL, Associated Press**

CHERRY HILL, N.J. (AP) — The Republican health care plan means less money for states and gives them a tough choice: Find a pot of cash to make up the difference or let coverage lapse for millions of lower-income Americans.

Governors and state lawmakers analyzing the Republican plan to replace former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act fear a return to the past, when those without health coverage used emergency rooms for their medical needs. That uncompensated care that was written off by hospitals or billed to the state.

The ax would fall especially hard on Medicaid, the state-federal program that provides health care to the poor and lower-income workers.

In Washington, for example, state officials say they would have to come up with \$1.5 billion a year starting in 2020 to keep coverage in place for about 600,000 residents who gained coverage through the Medicaid expansion that was a key part of Obama's health care law.

"It would actually leave our nation worse off than before the ACA was implemented," Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, said in a written statement.

Most states don't yet have firm cost estimates on the consequences of the proposal by Republicans in the U.S. House. A Congressional Budget Office analysis released Monday said the GOP plan would

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lead to 24 million Americans losing health care coverage over the next decade but did not provide a state-by-state breakdown.

In addition to Medicaid, states are concerned about the Republican plan to replace federal premium subsidies for people who buy private insurance with tax credits that would be adjusted based on age, with older people paying more. If the cost of health insurance is too great under the GOP plan, people might drop coverage and rely instead on emergency rooms.

Connecticut estimates that 34,000 people who buy policies in the insurance marketplace would drop their coverage under the GOP plan. Overall, it would add about \$1 billion in annual costs for the state, equivalent to 5 percent of its budget.

It is the GOP's proposed changes to Medicaid, which has become the largest source of federal revenue for states, that have drawn the most reaction since the CBO report was released.

Under the Affordable Care Act, 31 states and the District of Columbia expanded their Medicaid programs, providing coverage to about 11 million Americans. That included a number of Republican-led states, including Indiana under Vice President Mike Pence when he was governor there.

Among those benefiting from Indiana's expansion is Michael Boone, a 55-year-old cook from Gary.

Boone said it was the first time he has had health coverage as an adult, and it allowed him to get treatment for medical problems he didn't know he had. They included high cholesterol, high blood pressure and a hernia.

His coverage could be a casualty if the Medicaid cuts take effect and Indiana cannot find a way to pay for a larger share.

"I really don't have a full grasp of the situation yet," Boone said. "But right now, I'm scared to death."

The federal government paid the entire cost of the Medicaid expansion for three years under Obama's law and was to continue paying 90 percent of the cost starting in 2020.

The Republican plan, which is supported by President Donald Trump, calls for getting rid of the higher match in 2020 for new enrollees who are eligible under the expanded standards.

A second Medicaid change would limit the federal aid per enrollee for everyone on Medicaid, with the caps varying by state. Under the caps, states would be locked into the choices they will make now for the structure of their Medicaid programs, reducing their flexibility in the future, said Barbara Lyons, a senior vice president at Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonpartisan group that studies health policy.

New Jersey state Sen. Joe Vitale, a Democrat who chairs a legislative health committee, said the costs of the proposed federal cuts to Medicaid could be dramatic for his state.

"It's not sustainable for New Jersey," he said. "How would we also make our pension payment and pay for everything else?"

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam, a Republican, is among a group of governors calling for more flexibility on caps in federal Medicaid funding to allow for changes in the number of people being covered or costs for expensive new drugs.

Several other Republican governors are calling on Congress to rethink the House approach.

"This certainly signals that there's more work to be done," Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson said in an interview Tuesday on CNN. "And there needs to be some adjustments to relieve some of that cost shift to the states and to make sure that we don't go back to where we were before — which was we just had our emergency room filled with those who didn't have any coverage."

Dennis Daugaard, the Republican governor of South Dakota, a state that opted against the Medicaid expansion, doesn't like that costs would shift to the states but sees a benefit in restraining federal spending.

"I don't like the aspect of the more risk," he said, "but I think from a more nation-centric viewpoint, it's probably necessary."

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Associated Press writers Brian Slodysko in Indianapolis, Erik Schelzig and Sheila Burke in Nashville, Tennessee, and Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas, contributed to this report.

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Follow Mulvihill at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>

## Tax story puts spotlight on MSNBC's Rachel Maddow

By DAVID BAUDER, AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For a brief, breathless moment Tuesday night, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow was at the center of the political media universe.

With a single tweet, she set in motion a social media storm, compelled the White House to undercut her by releasing some of President Donald Trump's tax return information, was accused of breaking the law, was attacked by Fox News Channel and likely drew one of her biggest audiences.

Less than 90 minutes before her show on Tuesday, Maddow tweeted that "we've got Trump's tax returns ... (Seriously)," advertising her program. That teaser spread like wildfire, and within the hour, MSNBC was running a countdown clock on its screen counting down the minutes to a "Trump Taxes Exclusive."

It was actually another reporter's exclusive, and more limited than the tweet made it sound. David Cay Johnston, founder of the web site DCReports.org and a longtime investigative reporter and author of the critical book, "The Making of Donald Trump," had received a copy of two pages from Trump's 2005 federal tax return in the mail from an unknown source.

Before Maddow even went on the air, the White House confirmed the documents were real and stole the headline by saying that Trump's income exceeded \$150 million in 2005 and that he paid \$38 million in income taxes that year.

"It's been a hullabaloo around here," Maddow said as she opened her show. "I'm sorry if I'm a little flustered."

She spent nearly 20 minutes explaining why many people believe it important that Trump release his tax returns, as presidents have done since Richard Nixon in the 1970s. She pieced together theories on what his returns could show — sources of his income and whether he was beholden to any foreign sources, whether he personally stood to gain from any changes in tax policies that the Trump administration sought to enact.

It felt vaguely like a bait-and-switch and there were some complaints on social media that Maddow was taking too long to get to the point. For long-time watchers of her show, the structure was familiar: Maddow frequently opens with long, detailed stories that follow many paths. This has been a winning formula lately, since Maddow's ratings in February were the highest in the nine years her show has been on the air.

The exclusive she eventually revealed in the tax returns was little more than the White House had announced before she had gone on the air. She said she hoped it could be a first step toward more information about Trump's taxes being released.

Trump failed to release his taxes during the campaign, claiming that he was under audit by the Internal Revenue Service and he had been advised against it.

"It ought to give you pause that his explanations have never made any factual sense," Maddow said.

The White House pronounced Maddow desperate for ratings and said she had violated a law against the unauthorized release or publishing of federal tax returns. Maddow said that First Amendment protections of the press gave her the right to broadcast the information.

She brought Johnston on her show to discuss the return. He speculated that Trump — or someone authorized by the president — could have been a possible source of the leaked document which he said "came in the mail over the transom."

Maddow wasn't even off the air — MSNBC kept her on for more than her hour to continue discussing the story — when she came under attack by one of Trump's most vocal defenders on television: Fox's Sean Hannity.

Hannity, on his show, called Maddow's story "a flat-out, pathetic conspiratorial attempt to smear the president." He said NBC News was part of the "deep state" looking to undermine Trump's presidency.

"Night after night this false narrative keeps getting reported," he said. "There's something really twisted and sick that they call themselves a news organization."

## OAS head urges bloc suspend Venezuela over elections

By **LUIS ALONSO LUGO** and **JOSHUA GOODMAN**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of the Organization of American States wants regional governments to suspend Venezuela from the Washington-based group unless general elections are held soon to break a political impasse that he said Tuesday is destroying the country's democracy.

OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro made the request in a 75-page report on Venezuela's political crisis, in which he accused President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government of systematically violating human rights and standards of democracy enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to which Venezuela is a signatory.

Maduro's government, which has long accused Almagro of doing the bidding of the U.S. government, said the OAS leader was overstepping his authority in an effort to pave the way for an "international intervention" in Venezuela. Almagro "is guided only by the hatred he professes toward Venezuela and his complicity with the coup-mongering, extremist and anti-democratic Venezuelan opposition," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Almagro asked the OAS's 34 member states to intervene in Venezuela's crisis almost a year ago after Maduro's government disavowed a landslide loss to the opposition in legislative election and then suspended a constitutionally allowed recall campaign seeking to force him from office before the 2018 election.

But regional governments, many of them ideologically aligned with Maduro's leftist administration or recipients of subsidized Venezuelan oil shipments, voted against intervention and instead threw their weight behind an attempt at dialogue between his government and the opposition.

Those talks, which were sponsored by the Vatican and enjoyed the support of the Obama administration, broke down after little progress on key opposition demands, including freedom for dozens of jailed activists and a commitment to hold gubernatorial elections that were supposed to have taken place last year.

"The repeated attempts at dialogue have failed and the citizens of Venezuela have lost even more faith in their government and the democratic process," Almagro wrote in his report. "The absence of dialogue is the first sign of the failure of the political system, because democracy can't exist when voices aren't heard or have been silenced."

Whether there is enough support to suspend Venezuela is unclear.

A suspension requires the support of two-thirds of the OAS members. The vote last year to open proceedings against Venezuela's government for violating the Inter-American Democratic Charter fell three votes short of the 23 required to be adopted, with many poor Caribbean nations who receive Venezuelan oil siding with Maduro.

But since then a center-right government has won elections in Haiti and a conservative, anti-Maduro businessman is ahead in polls to become Ecuador's president in next month's election. Regional governments have also taken a tougher stance, with the Mercosur trade bloc led by Argentina and Brazil voting in December to suspend Venezuela.

U.S. President Donald Trump has also shown a greater willingness than Obama to confront Venezuela, as evidenced by his decision last month to slap drug sanctions on Maduro's vice president and his Oval Office meeting with the wife of jailed activist Leopoldo Lopez.

OAS members have kicked out only two nations before. Communist Cuba was expelled in 1962 and Honduras was suspended briefly following a 2009 military coup. The ban of Cuba, a close ally of Maduro, was lifted in 2009 but President Raul Castro's government has rejected rejoining the hemispheric group.

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Associated Press writer Luis Alonso Lugo reported this story in Washington and AP writer Joshua Goodman reported from Bogota, Colombia.

## Mexican official: 250 skulls found in clandestine graves

By MARK STEVENSON, Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — More than 250 skulls have been found over the last several months in what appears to be a drug cartel mass burial ground on the outskirts of the city of Veracruz, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Veracruz state's top prosecutor, Jorge Winckler, said the clandestine pits appeared to contain remains of cartel victims killed years ago.

The news came as no surprise to Lucia Diaz, one of the mothers of people who have disappeared whose group is known as Colectivo Solecito.

The mothers pushed authorities to investigate the fields where the skulls were found because they suspected more than a year ago that the wooded area known as Colinas de Santa Fe was a secret burial ground.

In the face of official inaction, the activists themselves went to the fields starting in August 2016, sinking rods into the ground to detect the telltale odor of decomposition, and then digging.

When they find what they believe are burial pits, they alert authorities, who carry out the final excavations.

"We dig holes, but we try not to touch the remains," Diaz said, because DNA may be the only hope of identifying the dead and touching the bones might contaminate them.

Some remains had been found in the area even before the group started its work.

So far, Diaz said, searchers have found about 125 pits that contain about 253 bodies. Nobody knows when the burials began, but Diaz said some were quite recent.

"Some of the bodies had a lot of connective tissue. You could see an ear, or recognize part of a face," she said.

Winckler, in the first official recognition, seemed to say the burials occurred before the new state administration took office in December.

"For many years, the drug cartels disappeared people and the authorities were complacent," Winckler said in an interview with the Televisa network, in apparent reference to the administration of fugitive former Gov. Javier Duarte and his predecessors.

Duarte resigned as governor two months before his term ended last year and disappeared. He faces charges that include money laundering and organized crime and officials have accused him thoroughly looting state coffers. Winckler said that resources needed for DNA tests in criminal investigation had vanished, leaving officials to depend on help from the federal government and groups such as the Red Cross.

So far only two sets of remains — a police detective and his assistant — have been identified, Winckler said.

The prosecutor said excavations have covered only a third of the lot where the skulls were found, and more people may be buried there.

"I cannot imagine how many more people are illegally buried there," Winckler said, noting the state has reports of about 2,400 people who are still missing.

"Veracruz is an enormous mass grave," he said.

Diaz also said "it is impossible to say" how many people are buried, and isn't sure the burial ground wasn't used recently. "We don't know when it stopped, or if it stopped." She said searchers found eight bodies just 10 days ago.

Her group has criticized state authorities both past and present for doing little to try to find or identify the state's missing people, many of whom were kidnapped and never heard from again.

The state had long been dominated by the ferocious Zetas cartel. But the Jalisco New Generation cartel began moving in around 2011, sparking bloody turf battles.

Drug cartels in other parts of Mexico have deposited victims' bodies in mass graves before. In the northern state of Durango, authorities found more than 300 bodies in a clandestine mass grave in the state capital in excavations starting in April 2011. Those burial pits were excavated in part with the use of backhoes.

More than 250 bodies were discovered in April 2011 in burial pits in the town of San Fernando, in

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Tamaulipas state, close to the U.S. border.

Drug gangs in some places in Mexico have taken to burning or dissolving their victims' bodies in corrosive substances in order to avoid discovery.

Diaz joined the effort after her own son, Guillermo Lagunes Diaz, was kidnapped from his home in 2013. No trace of him was ever found. "He was kidnapped. Beyond that I know nothing," Diaz said. Despite pleading with state officials, they were slow to investigate the case and didn't bother even to track his phone, which might have helped locate him.

But she and other mothers and volunteers in Colectivo Solecito have never flagged in the search, at least for the bodies of their loved ones.

"We mothers say they are still alive, until we find out otherwise," Diaz said. But she suspects that corrupt police may have been involved in the disappearances; several groups of police in the state have been arrested for kidnapping people and turning them over to the drug gangs.

"It is either the criminals, or police, or both" that dumped the bodies in Colinas de Santa Fe, she said. "In Veracruz, it's kind of hard to tell the difference."

## The Latest: Trains returning; cold threatens cherry blossoms

NEW YORK (AP) — The Latest on a strong winter storm hitting the Northeast (all times local):

5:15 p.m.

New York's governor says aboveground subway service and some Metro-North commuter rail service shut down by the snowstorm hitting the East Coast will be restored soon.

Democrat Andrew Cuomo (KWOH'-moh) says Metro-North will resume limited hourly service at 6 p.m. Tuesday until 11 p.m. Full service will resume Wednesday.

The storm has clobbered the Northeast with sleet and heavy snow, crippling much of the Washington-to-Boston corridor.

The National Park Service says the snow didn't appear to do damage to Washington's cherry blossoms but upcoming cold temperatures are concerning.

The National Weather Service says Washington's low temperature is forecast to be around 22 degrees Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

4:15 p.m.

Workers at a Maryland zoo say they stayed there all night and through a power outage to keep the animals safe in the storm hitting the East Coast.

Nick Lacovara owns the small Plumpton Park Zoo in Rising Sun, Maryland. He said by phone Tuesday zookeepers and maintenance workers shoveled snow and ice to keep paths clear for animals to reach water and food.

When the power went out about 6 a.m. staff members set up portable generators to keep water flowing. Power was back shortly after noon.

Lacovara says tigers and some other animals aren't bothered by the cold. The Bactrian camels have two humps and are from the Gobi Desert, a cold desert.

3:30 p.m.

A 23-month-old in need of a heart transplant has been escorted by snowplows and state police troopers through a heavy snowstorm from one hospital to another in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Gov. Tom Wolf says the Tuesday afternoon trip was made between hospitals in East Stroudsburg and Danville, some 80 miles apart.

The governor says the child made the trip safely.

The storm dropped more than 20 inches of snow and sleet in parts of eastern Pennsylvania, and snow was continuing to fall Tuesday afternoon.

3 p.m.

Math lovers are still celebrating the unofficial holiday Pi Day, despite a blizzard that closed schools

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throughout the Northeast.

The faux holiday on March 14 celebrates the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter, or 3.14. Maine high school math teacher Jon Jacques normally brings a few pies to class at Biddeford High School to celebrate.

After school was canceled Tuesday, Jacques had to settle for tweeting about the holiday from Portland Pie Company, a pizza company offering 10-inch pies for \$3.14.

The deal lured hungry customers despite heavy snow.

The teacher has previously marked Pi Day by releasing parodies of songs, including Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" and Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive."

2:15 p.m.

Police say a 16-year-old girl has been killed in a traffic accident in New Hampshire after losing control of her car on a snowy road and hitting a tree.

A late-winter storm featuring snow, ice and high winds has caused dangerous driving conditions from the mid-Atlantic to the Northeast.

New Hampshire State police say the accident happened about 7 a.m. Tuesday in Gilford. The girl was transported to a hospital, where she was pronounced dead. Her identity was being withheld until her family could be notified.

Around the region, officials have urged people to stay off the roads. Connecticut Gov. Dannel P. Malloy imposed a travel ban on state roads but says he expects to end it later Tuesday as the storm winds down.

1:45 p.m.

Strong winds have toppled a wind turbine at a Rhode Island beach.

Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo says the wind knocked over the turbine at Salty Brine Beach in Narragansett on Tuesday. It's owned by the state Department of Environmental Management.

A photo of the turbine posted by the town's emergency management agency showed the turbine's metal base twisted and bent over the snow-covered beach.

Raimondo says no one was hurt and the state will fix it once the storm is over.

Winds in the area are gusting up to 55 mph.

Approximately 215,000 customers were without power Tuesday from Virginia to New England.

12:50 p.m.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is thanking what he's calling the police department's "cowboy officer" for wrangling two ponies who got loose amid a winter snow storm that's pounding the Northeast.

Two ponies broke free from their stables and were roaming the streets of Staten Island in the snow Tuesday when an off-duty police officer noticed them.

NYPD chief of patrol Terence Monahan says the officer had straps used in towing cars, and he wrangled the horses, tied them to a lamppost and called for backup. A police radio car arrived and the ponies were transported safely back to the stables.

Elsewhere in New York, two new homes under construction collapsed near the waterfront in Far Rockaway in New York City. Officials say no injuries were reported.

12:15 p.m.

The storm that's pounding parts of the Northeast has dropped almost 2 feet of snow in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains and the northern reaches of New Jersey, yet it didn't perform to forecast expectations in New York City, the rest of New Jersey and Philadelphia.

That's because the line between a rainy wintry mix and snow ended up farther west than anticipated. The rain-snow line on Tuesday was a 50-mile wide swath where cold Arctic air from the north and west clashed with warm moist air from the Atlantic Ocean.

Private meteorologist Ryan Maue of Weather Bell Analytics says it's tough to forecast the location of the line, because it undulates and computers models only have a few data points over a width of 50 miles.

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He also says much of the storm is over the Atlantic Ocean, where fewer observations can be made.

Maue and other experts say missing where the rain-snow line winds up doesn't make the blizzard forecast a bust.

11:20 a.m.

The winter storm pelting the northeast with snow, sleet and high winds is disrupting some local elections in New Hampshire.

Tuesday is New Hampshire's traditional Town Meeting Day, when voters in more than 100 communities elect boards of selectman, library trustees and other local positions.

A number of towns rescheduled their elections, but others have stayed open, on schedule.

Republican Gov. Chris Sununu had said those who rescheduled their elections risked lawsuits alleging voter suppression, but also said that given differing opinions, the state isn't in a position to mandate that the towns stay open.

Sununu's town, Newfields, postponed its elections until Tuesday, March 21, saying the safety of voters and election workers is "paramount."

11 a.m.

Broadway producers in New York City have decided to keep theaters open Tuesday night for the hardy folks willing to brave snow and sleet from a late-season storm hitting the Northeast.

More than two dozen shows will play as scheduled, including "Hamilton," "Dear Evan Hansen" and "Waitress."

Charlotte St. Martin, president of The Broadway League, says that for visitors who can't get home, it's a great time to see a show.

Tuesday's storm was bringing less snow than forecast to New York City, but had caused more than 5,000 flight cancellations, and was hitting areas of upstate New York and elsewhere hard.

The last time Broadway was shuttered was in January 2016, when New York was hit with a one-day record of 26.6 inches of snow.

10:30 a.m.

Parts of Atlantic City and other towns in southern New Jersey are dealing with tidal flooding from the nor'easter.

A homeowner posted video on Twitter of water streaming down the block, and one major roadway was closed because of the flooding.

The tide reached 7.8 feet in Atlantic City on Tuesday morning, just short of the 8-foot threshold that can lead to major flooding.

More than 35,000 customers are without power in New Jersey because of the storm. More than 100,000 customers in other states stretching down to Virginia also are without electricity.

Southern New Jersey did not get much snow, but a blizzard warning is in effect in the northwest part of the state.

10:05 a.m.

Connecticut Gov. Dannel P. Malloy says it's a good day to make brownies or read a book, and to stay off the roads.

The winter storm hitting the Northeast is forecast to dump as much as 2 feet of snow on parts of Connecticut on Tuesday, with possibly more in higher elevations.

Malloy says most people seem to be following a travel ban he imposed in the state. All flights to and from Bradley International Airport north of Hartford have been canceled, and transit bus service has been suspended statewide.

State police and the National Guard were ready to help stranded motorists, and utility companies were prepared to respond to power outages.

More than 120,000 customers had lost power from Virginia to New Jersey.

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9:45 a.m.

New York City is expected to get less snow than forecast in a late-winter storm that has slammed other parts of the mid-Atlantic and Northeast.

Snow changed over to pelting sleet in the city early Tuesday, and the National Weather Service says to expect 4 to 6 inches of snow, after earlier forecasts of 18 inches or more.

Elsewhere, forecasters were still expecting lots of snow. Around 100,000 customers had lost power from Virginia to New Jersey, and more than 5,000 flights were canceled.

In Massachusetts, officials warned Tuesday morning that the storm was just getting started. In the western part of the state, the National Weather Service forecast as much as 2 ½ feet of snow.

Maryland State Police said troopers responded to 101 crashes, none serious.

8:45 a.m.

Nearly 100,000 customers are without power in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast, as a late-winter storm brings a mix of snow and sleet with strong winds.

Dominion Power reports more than 50,000 customers in the dark in Virginia on Tuesday morning, with more than 40,000 of those outages in the Richmond area.

Maryland officials report about 30,000 outages. Thousands more were reported in Delaware, New Jersey and around Philadelphia.

Blizzard warnings have been issued for parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont.

The storm is expected to dump 12 to 18 inches of snow along a large swath of the region. Parts of New England could see snow totals of 18 inches to 2 ½ feet.

8:15 a.m.

U.S. airlines have scrapped about 5,400 flights Tuesday as a late-winter storm dumps snow on some of the nation's busiest airports.

Southwest Airlines, which carries more domestic passengers than any other airline, doesn't expect to operate any flights Tuesday at 14 airports stretching from Washington to Portland, Maine. Southwest cancelled about 900 flights, while American Airlines, JetBlue Airways and United Airlines each cancelled more than 500.

Tracking service FlightAware.com says Tuesday's cancellations bring the total for the week to around 7,740 flights. An additional 650 flights have been cancelled for Wednesday, a number that FlightAware expects to rise as the airlines scramble to resume operations.

7:30 a.m.

A mix of snow, sleet and freezing rain is delaying school and work in Washington.

Officials are urging people to stay off the roads Tuesday while crews clear them. While many surrounding counties called off classes, District of Columbia Public Schools are opening two hours late. Federal workers are reporting three hours late and city government offices are opening two hours late.

President Donald Trump tweeted a photo of his Monday evening meeting with Mayor Muriel Bowser and Metro General Manager Paul Wiedefeld to discuss storm preparations. In a statement, Bowser expressed pride in the agencies and employees working to keep residents safe.

Metro rail is running on a Saturday schedule. Metrobus started the day on a "severe" snow service plan, but it's now moving to a "moderate" plan.

7:15 a.m.

The attorney general in New York and in Pennsylvania issued a warning about price-gouging during the snowstorm.

Eric Schneiderman in New York says consumers should contact his office about "excessive increases" in the price of goods and services. Examples include food, water, gas, generators, hotels and transportation.

The price-gouging law also could apply to snow removal and equipment, salt and contractor services

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for storm-related damage.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro also alerted consumers and businesses about potential scams, urging people to report any "suspicious activity" about home repairs, snow plowing, government assistance programs and fraudulent disaster-related fundraising to his office's Bureau of Consumer Protection.

7 a.m.

Hundreds of school districts from Buffalo to New York City have cancelled classes and authorities are advising people to stay off the roads as a nor'easter starts to pummel the Northeast.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has declared a state of emergency Tuesday for all of New York's 62 counties, including New York City's five boroughs. The Democrat also directed non-essential state employees to stay home from work.

The National Weather Service says the storm will drop more than a foot of snow across much of the upstate region, with some areas getting up to 18 inches and higher elevations in the lower Hudson Valley expected to get 2 feet or more.

Blizzard warnings have been issued for much of the region south of Albany, where high winds could produce whiteout conditions

6:30 a.m.

The National Weather Service says the dividing line between snow and a wintry mix from a nor'easter pushing through the southern New Jersey-Pennsylvania region has moved farther inland, cutting down the anticipated snow accumulation, but increasing the chance of icing.

NWS Meteorologist Sarah Johnson, in Mount Holly, New Jersey, says the dividing line between snow and a mix of snow, sleet and rain has pushed west, from the Jersey coast into Philadelphia. She says that lowers anticipated snow totals, but increases the threat of icing from sleet and freezing rain along the Interstate 95 corridor.

While the snow totals might be lower, Johnson warns that New Jersey shore areas can still expect strong winds, with gusts between 50 and 55 mph. The I-95 corridor could get wind gusts of up to 40 mph.

6 a.m.

Rain, sleet and snow are sweeping across New Jersey as a late-winter storm slows the morning commute.

State government offices are closed Tuesday and non-essential employees were told to stay home after Republican Gov. Chris Christie declared a state of emergency. Many schools are closed.

Plows are on the highways and the speed limit is restricted to 45 mph on the Garden State Parkway between Cape May and Brick Township.

NJ Transit has suspended bus service and all trains, except for the Atlantic City Rail Line, are operating on a weekend schedule.

A blizzard warning is in effect, basically north of Interstate 195. Forecasters say 18 to 24 inches of snow are possible. A winter storm warning covers other portions of the state, save for coastal south Jersey.

4 a.m.

A late-season snowstorm has prompted the U.S. Office of Personnel Management to allow a 3-hour delayed arrival for non-emergency employees at federal offices in and around the nation's capital.

OPM also announced early Tuesday that non-emergency federal employees also have the option to take unscheduled leave or to conduct unscheduled telework.

For those non-emergency workers headed to offices, the agency told them on its website that they "should plan to arrive for work no more than three hours later than they would be expected to arrive."

The agency added that emergency federal employees in the Washington, D.C., area are expected to report on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies. Emergency and telework-ready employees should follow their agency's policies, the office added.

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2:35 a.m.

A winter storm expected to dump several inches of snow on Delaware made an impact even before it arrived: Delaware lawmakers decided to scrap plans to reconvene a key budget committee hearing Tuesday after a weeklong break.

In Newark, Delaware, authorities declared a snow emergency effective early Tuesday, ordering residents and businesses on snow emergency routes to remove all vehicles from the street to avoid being towed. The city also announced a two-hour delayed opening for city offices.

Forecasters expect between 8 and 12 inches of snow in some areas of Delaware, while areas near the Atlantic seaboard faced a threat of coastal flooding.

2 a.m.

The snow threat in the Northeast is causing college basketball teams to alter their travel plans.

Teams chasing a college basketball title are contending with an unexpected wrinkle that's making last-minute travel plans difficult — a fierce storm bearing down on the Northeast that could dump up to two feet of snow in some places.

"We are closely tracking the weather and working with our travel partners and teams in the tournament to ensure the safety of our student-athletes, coaches, administrators, officials and fans," the NCAA said in a statement.

Villanova, top overall seed in the men's NCAA Tournament, left Philadelphia on Monday afternoon for Buffalo, New York, to get ahead of the storm.

There is less of a chance that the women's tournament would be affected. UConn is the only Northeast team hosting and they play Saturday, giving teams more time to arrive in Connecticut.

U.S. airlines canceled thousands of flights ahead of the storm. Teams in the men's and women's NCAA Tournaments have chartered flights so any backlog on commercial planes shouldn't be a problem.

## Gorsuch's environment record: Neither a clear friend nor foe

By HOLBROOK MOHR and MITCH WEISS, Associated Press

By the time a lawsuit over pollution from a nuclear weapons plant had reached Judge Neil Gorsuch, it had crawled through the courts for more than two decades, outliving some of the landowners who said the contamination destroyed their property values.

That pace didn't sit well with Gorsuch, a judge for the Denver-based 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and now President Donald Trump's nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court.

"This long lingering litigation deserves to find resolution soon," Gorsuch wrote for the panel, which sent the case back to a lower court to be handled "promptly" in favor of the landowners.

Many conservation groups say Gorsuch is too conservative and too much like the man he would replace, the late Justice Antonin Scalia, to be considered a friend of the environment. But when it comes to his record on issues like pollution and environmental regulations, he can't be painted as someone who always finds in favor of businesses, according to an Associated Press review of his rulings.

In 2010, Gorsuch sided with the Environmental Protection Agency when a magnesium company challenged the EPA's new interpretation of a rule regulating byproducts created by the company's mining operation in Utah. The company argued the EPA couldn't change the rule without public notice and comment. It said the byproducts were exempted under a previous interpretation, but Gorsuch said that interpretation was "at best" tentative, so the agency was free to change its mind and issue a new one.

In 2015, he voted to uphold a Colorado law that requires 20 percent of electricity sold to consumers in the state to come from renewable sources. The law was challenged as a threat to out-of-state coal companies under a federal provision known as the dormant commerce clause, which is related to interstate commerce.

Gorsuch conceded the law would hurt some energy producers. "But as far as we know, all fossil fuel producers in the area served by the grid will be hurt equally and all renewable energy producers in the

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area will be helped equally. If there's any disproportionate adverse effect felt by out-of-state producers or any disproportionate advantage enjoyed by in-state producers, it hasn't been explained to this court," Gorsuch wrote.

He has ruled against the EPA, too, as in a 2010 case in which he wrote for a majority of the court that the agency was wrong to classify a company's land in New Mexico as Indian country when the company sought to obtain a permit for mining. If the land, which was not on a reservation, was classified as Indian country, the company would have needed to obtain a permit from the EPA rather than the state.

More broadly, Patrick Gallagher, legal director of the Sierra Club, said Gorsuch would try to limit conservation groups' access to the courts, which the judge has shown a willingness to do when organizations have sought to be heard in some cases involving the use of public lands.

"His limited record, and I have to stress it is very limited, supports our position that he would limit access to the courts," Gallagher said.

Pat Parenteau, a professor at Vermont Law School, said he wouldn't call Gorsuch a staunch ally of business, "but I think he's certainly going to require the government to justify the costs of what they are imposing" through regulations.

Parenteau said Gorsuch might frustrate those on either side of an issue, depending on the case, and noted that the judge is a fly fisherman, a hobby that often comes with a keen awareness of the importance of a healthy environment.

A ruling that most worries some environmental groups came in a case that had nothing to do with the environment. In a much-noted immigration case, Gorsuch was critical of the longstanding Chevron doctrine, which gives deference to federal agencies' interpretations of ambiguous statutes. Conservationists say that could be trouble for agencies like the EPA, which have the task of interpreting and implementing rules.

"If you look back at the Supreme Court's rulings involving Chevron, most of those are environmental cases," said Billy Corriher, deputy director of legal progress at The Center for American Progress, a non-profit liberal advocacy group. "And I think that's because the EPA really enforces a lot of statutes that are pretty broad, it gives them broad authority to regulate certain pollution and it leaves it up to the experts to determine exactly what threshold of pollution is acceptable and what threshold is dangerous. Judge Gorsuch would want to get rid of that standard and basically allow judges to substitute their own judgment for the judgment of the agency experts."

As for the long-running class action lawsuit over nuclear waste at the Rocky Flats plant, the case is notable for its duration, and as Gorsuch observed, a legal twist that "put the defendants in a pickle."

The lawsuit was filed in 1990 by people who lived near the plant northwest of Denver, which had produced triggers for nuclear weapons during the Cold War. The plant was originally operated under a government contract by Dow Chemical Company and later Rockwell International Corporation.

Federal authorities raided the facility in 1989, finding years of haphazard handling of plutonium waste that polluted the ground and water.

Property values crashed, and nearby landowners sued.

Gorsuch wrote that after the "titanic fifteen years" it took to reach a trial, the landowners won more than \$900 million in damages and interest based on a federal law, a verdict that was thrown out on appeal.

The issue was whether the pollution should have been considered a "nuclear incident" covered by the federal law, which the companies' lawyers argued it should not. An appeals court panel vacated the award.

"But that's when things took an interesting turn," Gorsuch wrote in 2015. "Trying their hand at a little judicial jiu-jitsu, the plaintiffs sought to turn the defendants' victory against them."

The landowners argued that once the federal law was out of consideration, the companies were liable under Colorado state law.

Gorsuch and the three-judge panel agreed and sent the case back to the trial court.

Writing for the panel, Gorsuch lamented the "staggering delay and (no doubt) equally staggering expense the parties endured" from the long-enduring litigation.

"Injustice not only in the needless financial expense and the waste of judicial resources, but injustice in the human costs associated with trying to piece together faded memories and long since filed away evidence, the emotional ordeal parties and witnesses must endure in any retrial, the waste of the work already performed by a diligent and properly instructed jury, and the waiting — the waiting everyone

would have to endure for a final result in a case where everyone's already waited too long," Gorsuch wrote.

Merrill Davidoff, the landowners' attorney, said Gorsuch was a "well-prepared and brilliant judge" who helped move the case toward a conclusion.

"He follows the law," Davidoff said. "And in this case the law favored the plaintiffs — the landowners — not the government or the government contractors."

An attorney for the companies did not respond to messages.

The plant contractors settled last year for \$375 million, to be split among thousands of property owners. Under provisions in their contracts, the companies have been reimbursed by the Department of Energy. A public hearing is scheduled for April 28 about distribution of the funds to homeowners.

Find AP's reporting on Neil Gorsuch here: <http://apne.ws/2mfXk4V>

The AP National Investigative Team can be reached at [investigate@ap.org](mailto:investigate@ap.org)

## Somali pirates demand ransom for oil tanker, EU force says

By **ABDI GULED** and **JON GAMBRELL**, Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Armed men are demanding a ransom for the release of an oil tanker they have seized off the coast of Somalia and the crew is being held captive, the European Union anti-piracy operation in the region announced late Tuesday.

An EU Naval Force statement said the operation had finally made contact with the ship's master, who confirmed that armed men were aboard the Comoros-flagged tanker Aris 13.

Monday's hijacking was the first such seizure of a large commercial vessel off Somalia since 2012. It came as a surprise to the global shipping industry as patrols by the navies of NATO countries, as well as China, India and Iran, had suppressed Somali pirate hijackings for several years.

However, the United Nations warned in October that the situation was fragile and that Somali pirates "possess the intent and capability to resume attacks." One expert said some in the region had let down their guard as the situation calmed. NATO ended its anti-piracy mission off Somalia in December.

A Somali pirate who said he was in touch with the armed men aboard the tanker said the amount of ransom to demand had not yet been decided.

Bile Hussein told The Associated Press that the armed men have locked most of the crew in one room and cut off communication lines. "Their main concern now is a possible rescue attempt, so that's why all communications were cut off in the afternoon," he said.

The Aris 13, manned by eight Sri Lankan sailors, was carrying fuel from Djibouti to Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, when it was approached by men in two skiffs, said John Steed, the director of Oceans Beyond Piracy. The EU statement said the ship's master issued a mayday alert.

An official in Somalia's semiautonomous state of Puntland said over two dozen men boarded the ship off the country's northern coast, an area known to be used by weapons smugglers and members of the al-Qaida-linked extremist group al-Shabab. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to journalists.

The ship was anchored Tuesday off the town of Alula, said Salad Nur, a local elder. "The ship is on the coast now and more armed men boarded the ship," he told the AP by phone.

The EU Naval Force said it had passed the information from its contact with the ship's master to the oil tanker's owners and an investigation was underway.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry said in a statement it was in touch with shipping agents and officials abroad for more information to help ensure the crew's "safety and welfare."

A U.N. shipping database shows the Aris 13 is owned by Armi Shipping SA, whose address is listed in care of Aurora Ship Management FZE, a company based in the United Arab Emirates. Calls and emails to Aurora went unanswered.

Australian government records from 2014 list the ship's owner as Flair Shipping Trading FZE in the UAE.

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An address listed for Flair Shipping in Dubai was for a company called Flair Oil Trading DMCC. A woman there told an AP reporter the firm wasn't connected to the ship and directed him to another office.

When no one answered there, the reporter returned to find Argyrios Karagiannis, the managing director of Flair Shipping, entering the first office. "We will not be releasing any information," Karagiannis said before shutting the door.

The incident involving the Aris 13 represents the first commercial pirate attack off Somalia since 2012, Steed of Oceans Beyond Piracy said.

"The pirates never went away, they were just doing other forms of crime and if any of the measures reduce (which they have, or ships take risks) the pirates are poised to exploit the weakness," he said in an email.

Somali pirates usually hijack ships and crew for ransom. They don't normally kill hostages unless they come under attack.

Piracy off Somalia's coast was once a serious threat to the global shipping industry. It has lessened in recent years after an international effort to patrol near the country, whose weak central government has been trying to assert itself after a quarter-century of conflict. In that time, concerns about piracy off Africa's coast have largely shifted to the Gulf of Guinea.

But frustrations have been rising among local fishermen, including former pirates, at what they say are foreign fishermen illegally fishing in local waters.

Nur, the local elder, told the AP that young fishermen including former pirates have hijacked the ship. "They have been sailing through the ocean in search for a foreign ship to hijack since yesterday morning and found this ship and boarded it," he said. "Foreign fishermen destroyed their livelihoods and deprived them of proper fishing."

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Associated Press writers Adam Schreck in Dubai; Bharatha Mallawarachi in Colombo, Sri Lanka; Rodney Muhumuza in Kampala, Uganda and Ben Curtis in Nairobi, Kenya, contributed to this report.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/jongambrellap](http://www.twitter.com/jongambrellap). His work can be found at <http://apne.ws/2galNpz>.

## AP FACT CHECK: Both sides loose with facts in health debate

By CALVIN WOODWARD and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Congressional Budget Office report on a Republican health care bill set off an intense reaction in Washington, and some on both sides of the debate are playing loose with the facts.

Republicans are overlooking President Donald Trump's promise to deliver "insurance for everybody," which the CBO makes clear will not happen if the legislation becomes law. Democrats are assailing Republicans for "attacking the messenger," seeming to forget all the times they assailed the budget office themselves.

The Congressional Budget Office is respected for nonpartisan rigor in its estimates of the costs and impacts of legislation. But no projection is infallible, particularly when it comes to large, complex programs. For example, the agency in 2010 overstated the number of people expected to buy insurance under President Barack Obama's health care law, misjudging how many would join because of the threat of tax penalties.

Yet, CBO's neutrality has been valued by both parties — though not always at the same time. It depends whose ox is being gored.

A look at statements in the debate and how they compare with the CBO's estimates and the underlying facts:

TRUMP: "We're going to have insurance for everybody. There was a philosophy in some circles that if you can't pay for it, you don't get it. That's not going to happen with us." — To The Washington Post, Jan. 15.

CBO: It estimates the bill would leave 14 million fewer people insured in the first year, 24 million

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fewer by 2026.

In the first year, the biggest reason more people are uninsured would be repeal of penalties Barack Obama's law imposes on those deemed able to afford insurance but who don't buy it. Still others would decide to forgo coverage because of higher premiums or do without Medicaid.

In following years the main reason for a drop in the number of insured would be that the Republican bill scales back Medicaid for low-income Americans. Altogether, CBO estimates 52 million people would be uninsured by 2026, a vast distance from "insurance for everybody."

SEAN SPICER, White House press secretary, Tuesday: "Having a card and having coverage that when you walk into a doctor's office has a deductible of \$15,000, \$20,000 a year isn't coverage. That's a car. That doesn't get you the care you need."

THE FACTS: He's wrong about deductibles under Obama's law.

Out-of-pocket expenses for consumers are limited. Deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance together can't exceed \$7,150 this year for an individual plan sold through HealthCare.gov or similar state markets. For a family plan it's \$14,300. After that, the insurance plan pays the full cost of covered benefits.

In addition, more than half of customers in these plans get subsidies to help with their out-of-pocket costs.

SEN. CHUCK SCHUMER, Senate Democratic leader: "CBO is virtually unassailable. Everyone, Democrats and Republicans, whether it be George Bush, Barack Obama or anyone else has gone along with CBO. ...CBO speaks the truth. They've been speaking the truth for decades and to try to attack CBO is simply attacking the messenger." — Comments to reporters Monday.

REP. NANCY PELOSI, House Democratic leader, on Republican reaction to the CBO: "Some of them are trying to pin a rose on this report and make it sound like it's a good thing and the others of them are trying to discredit the CBO, but it's completely wrong, completely wrong. ... Numbers are quite elegant things, you know. They speak very clearly." — Comments to reporters Monday.

THE FACTS: Democrats have not hesitated to attack this messenger when its conclusions have not suited them.

"The Congressional Budget Office never gives us any credit," President Obama said in 2009 when the CBO pointed to the expense of Democratic health overhaul proposals. Complained Pelosi at the time: "The CBO will always give you the worst-case scenario."

Again in 2014, Pelosi did not consider CBO's numbers "elegant," or correct, when they forecast job losses from a Democratic effort to raise the minimum wage. She accused the CBO of making arguments that "contradict the consensus among hundreds of America's top economists" and said it "ignored new perspectives in the wide array of analysis on the minimum wage."

TRUMP: People covered under the law "can expect to have great health care. It will be in a much simplified form. Much less expensive and much better... lower numbers, much lower deductibles."

CBO: It says cost-sharing payments in the individual market, including deductibles, "would tend to be higher than those anticipated under current law." Cost-sharing subsidies would be repealed in 2020, "significantly increasing out-of-pocket costs for nongroup (private) insurance for many lower-income enrollees."

TRUMP, at a Cabinet meeting Monday: "Obamacare, all of a sudden, the last couple of weeks, is getting a false rep that maybe it's OK. It's not OK, it's a disaster and people understand that it's failed and it's imploding. And if we let it go for another year, it'll totally implode."

CBO: Not in the view of the budget experts. They described the market for individual policies under Obama's health care law as "stable." They said it is likely to remain stable under the proposed GOP replacement legislation, too.

MICK MULVANEY, Trump's budget director: "If you have coverage that doesn't allow you to go to the

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doctor, what good is it in the first place? ...Democrats took all of this credit for giving people coverage, but ignored the fact that they had created this large group of people that still could not go to the doctor." — Tuesday on MSNBC's "Morning Joe."

THE FACTS: Republicans gloss over reality when they make this argument. While deductibles are high for the Affordable Care Act's private insurance plans (averaging \$3,000 last year for a standard silver plan), the law requires preventive care to be covered at no charge. And more than half of the people enrolled in the health law's insurance markets get an extra subsidy when they go to seek care. It can reduce a deductible from several thousand dollars to a few hundred. The GOP bill would repeal those subsidies.

Other evidence points to tangible benefits from Obama's coverage expansion. For example, government researchers have found fewer Americans struggling to pay medical bills. A 2015 report found that problems with medical bills had declined for the fourth year in a row. Most of the improvement was among low-income people and those with government coverage, and it coincided with the ACA's big coverage expansion.

TOM PRICE, health and human services secretary: "I firmly believe that nobody will be worse off financially in the process that we're going through." — NBC's "Meet the Press," Sunday.

CBO: There are losers as well as winners, the analysts found. Generally, older people are bound to face higher costs because the legislation would let insurance companies charge them up to five times more for premiums than they charge young people. They can only be charged three times more now. The bottom line, the analysts say, would be "substantially reducing premiums for young adults and substantially raising premiums for older people."

MULVANEY: "Actually I don't think the costs will go up at all." — ABC's "This Week," Sunday.

CBO: It estimates that some costs indeed will go up, at least for a few years. The analysts say average premiums in the private insurance market would rise in 2018 and 2019 by 15 percent to 20 percent, compared with current law, then start to come down. By 2026, average premiums could be 10 percent lower, compared with the existing law. One reason: insurers could eliminate a current requirement to offer plans that cover a set percentage of the cost of certain benefits.

Associated Press writers Jim Drinkard and Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

Find all AP Fact Checks at <http://apne.ws/2kx8bd>

This story has been corrected to reflect that Pelosi and Schumer spoke Monday.

## Lawmaker mocks abortion law with call for masturbation fines

DAVID SALEH RAUF

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas lawmaker is making a point about legislation that restricts women's access to health care and abortions by proposing to fine men \$100 when they masturbate.

Alongside the penalty for wasting semen not resulting in a pregnancy, Democratic Rep. Jessica Farrar's bill would require a "medically unnecessary digital rectal exam" before any man undergoes a vasectomy or can be prescribed Viagra.

The 11th term Democrat said that her bill mimics how a woman seeking an abortion is forced by Texas law to undergo a transvaginal ultrasound, which "has nothing to do with her health care."

While the proposal was meant to mock Republicans, she said it also highlights the obstacles women face "that were placed there by legislatures making it very difficult for them to access health care."

On Tuesday, Farrar said an unrelated bill she is authoring that came up for a floor vote was being targeted by Republicans in retribution for her satirical measure. She said she was warned before debate that a group of about 50 Republican men were "going to give you a hard time, they're going to ride you." She declined to identify who provided the warning.

The bill narrowly passed on a 75-70 vote, a margin that surprised Farrar who said an identical proposal only garnered seven votes against it in 2015.

"This was a retaliatory event," she said. "I will continue to speak out."

Republican Rep. Tan Parker, chairman of the House GOP caucus, said the caucus' policy committee decided Tuesday to take a neutral position on the bill. He declined to comment on whether the votes against the measure were retaliatory.

Republicans opened debate on Farrar's lawyer fees proposal with a shot at her bill mocking legislation that restricts women's access to health care.

"Is this a satirical bill?" Republican Rep. Matt Rinaldi asked on the House floor. "It's my understanding you filed one or more satirical bills."

## Trump White House sees "deep state" behind leaks, opposition

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The White House and its allies are stepping up their attacks on a foe typically associated with fragile democracies, military coups and spy thrillers.

The "deep state," an alleged shadowy network of powerful entrenched federal and military interests, has increasingly become the focus of Republicans who accuse such forces of trying to undermine the new president.

Though senior White House staff members don't use the exact label, the notion behind it has taken hold. President Donald Trump claims his predecessor tapped his phone and America's intelligence agencies have conspired to leak harmful information to embarrass him. His chief strategist has vowed to dismantle the permanent Washington "administrative state." White House spokesman Sean Spicer says "people that burrowed into government" are trying to sabotage the president.

To Trump's critics, these assertions come off as paranoid fear of a non-existent shadow government and an effort to create a scapegoat for the White House's struggles. But to Trump's supporters, this represents an overdue challenge to an elite ruling class concerned only with maintaining its own grasp on power.

"Of course, the deep state exists. There's a permanent state of massive bureaucracies that do whatever they want and set up deliberate leaks to attack the president," said Newt Gingrich, a Trump confidant. "This is what the deep state does: They create a lie, spread a lie, fail to check the lie and then deny that they were behind the lie."

Historians believe the concept of the "deep state" comes from Turkey, where the term "derin devlet" meant a clandestine network, including intelligence and military officers, which protected the ruling class in the 1920s. Similar ideas have taken hold in Egypt, where the military has allied itself with powerful business interests, and Pakistan, with its robust intelligence service.

In its current use, the concept has been twisted and broadened, encompassing a resistant bureaucracy and a regulatory regime rather than foreshadowing some sort of military intervention. Chief Trump strategist Steve Bannon has offered the loudest warnings about the opposition the president is facing from the deep state.

In his only public speech since the election, Bannon told a conservative group that the White House's goal was the "deconstruction of the administrative state," a reflection of his belief that the massive federal government, with its burdensome regulations, does more to hinder than uplift citizens. It also echoes Bannon's oft-stated worldview, frequently on display at his former news site Breitbart, that a global power structure — including government institutions — has rigged the economy.

Gingrich, who says he has discussed the deep state with Bannon, likens its dangers to the plotline of the new season of "Homeland," in which a conspiracy that includes career intelligence officers tries to subvert a president-elect.

"They are fighting to keep hold of their power," said the former House speaker, who asked a reporter not to spoil the two Homeland episodes of the season he has yet to see.

The sprawling federal government, including its intelligence agencies, has thousands of employees

who predate Trump, a mix of career staffers and those appointed by President Barack Obama whose replacements have yet to be named. Some have offered leaks, including sensitive documents, to reporters that provide a critical take on the president.

Trump has insinuated that those holdovers are working against him — even suggesting that leaks from intelligences agencies were reminiscent of smear tactics utilized by Nazi Germany.

Asked if the White House believes there is “a deep state that’s actively working to undermine the president,” Spicer said recently, “I don’t think it should come as any surprise that there are people that burrowed into government during eight years of the last administration and, you know, may have believed in that agenda and want to continue to seek it.”

Sean Hannity, a Fox News host who has close to ties to Trump, opened a show last week by claiming there are “deep state Obama holdover government bureaucrats who are hell-bent on destroying this president.”

“It’s time for the Trump administration to begin to purge these saboteurs before it’s too late,” Hannity said.

Trump allies note that is customary for presidents to install loyalists and point to Abraham Lincoln’s move to push out Southerners from the federal bureaucracy on the eve of the Civil War. The government has also gone through previous spasms of internal suspicion, most notably in the 1950s when Sen. Joseph McCarthy led a witch hunt to root out what he claimed were communist sympathizers supposedly trying to undermine Washington from within.

Experts warn that Trump’s attacks could lead to faster erosion of faith in government institutions.

“The more he talks about a deep state cabal against him, the less trust people will have in government,” said Matthew Hale, a political science professor at Seton Hall University. “It’s deleterious to democracy.”

Some of Trump’s allies have, without evidence, seized upon Obama’s decision to remain in Washington after leaving office as evidence that he is leading the resistance. The former president has said he is staying in the nation’s capital until his youngest daughter finishes school.

“He’s only there for one purpose and one purpose only and that is to run a shadow government that is totally going to upset the new agenda,” said Rep. Mark Kelly, a Pennsylvania Republican, at an event in his home district last week. His office later walked back the remarks.

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This story has been corrected to correct ‘administration’ to ‘administrative’ in 3rd paragraph.

## Scientists race to prevent wipeout of world’s coral reefs

By ELENA BECATOROS, Associated Press

SOUTH ARI ATOLL, Maldives (AP) — There were startling colors here just a year ago, a dazzling array of life beneath the waves. Now this Maldivian reef is dead, killed by the stress of rising ocean temperatures. What’s left is a haunting expanse of gray, a scene repeated in reefs across the globe in what has fast become a full-blown ecological catastrophe.

The world has lost roughly half its coral reefs in the last 30 years. Scientists are now scrambling to ensure that at least a fraction of these unique ecosystems survives beyond the next three decades. The health of the planet depends on it: Coral reefs support a quarter of all marine species, as well as half a billion people around the world.

“This isn’t something that’s going to happen 100 years from now. We’re losing them right now,” said marine biologist Julia Baum of Canada’s University of Victoria. “We’re losing them really quickly, much more quickly than I think any of us ever could have imagined.”

Even if the world could halt global warming now, scientists still expect that more than 90 percent of corals will die by 2050. Without drastic intervention, we risk losing them all.

“To lose coral reefs is to fundamentally undermine the health of a very large proportion of the human race,” said Ruth Gates, director of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology.

Coral reefs produce some of the oxygen we breathe. Often described as underwater rainforests, they

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populate a tiny fraction of the ocean but provide habitats for one in four marine species. Reefs also form crucial barriers that protect coastlines from the full force of storms.

They provide billions of dollars in revenue from tourism, fishing and other commerce, and are used in medical research for cures to diseases including cancer, arthritis and bacterial or viral infections.

"Whether you're living in North America or Europe or Australia, you should be concerned," said biologist Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, director of the Global Change Institute at Australia's University of Queensland. "This is not just some distant dive destination, a holiday destination. This is the fabric of the ecosystem that supports us."

And that fabric is being torn apart.

"You couldn't be more dumb ... to erode the very thing that life depends on — the ecosystem — and hope that you'll get away with it," Hoegh-Guldberg said.

Corals are invertebrates, living mostly in tropical waters. They secrete calcium carbonate to build protective skeletons that grow and take on impressive colors, thanks to a symbiotic relationship with algae that live in their tissues and provide them with energy.

But corals are sensitive to temperature fluctuations, and are suffering from rising ocean temperatures and acidification, as well as from overfishing, pollution, coastal development and agricultural runoff.

A temperature change of just 1 to 2 degrees Celsius (1.8 to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) can force coral to expel the algae, leaving their white skeletons visible in a process known as "bleaching."

Bleached coral can recover if the water cools, but if high temperatures persist for months, the coral will die. Eventually the reef will degrade, leaving fish without habitats and coastlines less protected from storm surges.

The first global bleaching event occurred in 1998, when 16 percent of corals died. The problem spiraled dramatically in 2015-2016 amid an extended El Nino natural weather phenomenon that warmed Pacific waters near the equator and triggered the most widespread bleaching ever documented. This third global bleaching event, as it is known, continues today even after El Nino ended.

Headlines have focused on damage to Australia's famed Great Barrier Reef, but other reefs have fared just as badly or worse across the world, from Japan to Hawaii to Florida.

Around the islands of the Maldives, an idyllic Indian Ocean tourism destination, some 73 percent of surveyed reefs suffered bleaching between March and May 2016, according to the country's Marine Research Center.

"This bleaching episode seems to have impacted the entire Maldives, but the severity of bleaching varies" between reefs, according to local conditions, said Nizam Ibrahim, the center's senior research officer.

Worst hit have been areas in the central Pacific, where the University of Victoria's Baum has been conducting research on Kiritimati, or Christmas Island, in the Republic of Kiribati. Warmer water temperatures lasted there for 10 months in 2015-2016, killing a staggering 90 percent of the reef.

Baum had never seen anything like it.

"As scientists, we were all on brand new territory," Baum said, "as were the corals in terms of the thermal stress they were subjected to."

To make matters worse, scientists are predicting another wave of elevated ocean temperatures starting next month.

"The models indicate that we will see the return of bleaching in the South Pacific soon, along with a possibility of bleaching in both the eastern and western parts of the Indian Ocean," said Mark Eakin, coral reef specialist and coordinator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coral Reef Watch, which uses satellites to monitor environmental conditions around reefs. It may not be as bad as last year, but could further stress "reefs that are still hurting from the last two years."

The speed of the destruction is what alarms scientists and conservationists, as damaged coral might not have time to recover before it is hit again by warmer temperatures.

But some may have a chance.

Last month, Hoegh-Guldberg helped launch an initiative called 50 Reefs, aiming to identify those reefs with the best chance of survival in warming oceans and raise public awareness. His project partner is Richard Vevers, who heads the XL Catlin Seaview Survey, which has been documenting coral reefs

worldwide.

"For the reefs that are least vulnerable to climate change, the key will be to protect them from all the other issues they are facing — pollution, overfishing, coastal development," said Vevers, who founded The Ocean Agency, an Australian organization seeking new technologies to help mitigate some of the ocean's greatest challenges. If the reefs remain healthy and resilient, "they can hopefully become the vital seed-centers that can repopulate surrounding reefs."

Nature itself is providing small glimmers of hope. Some of Kiritimati's corals, for example, are showing tentative signs of a comeback.

But scientists don't want to leave it to chance, and are racing ahead with experiments they hope might stave off extinction.

"We've lost 50 percent of the reefs, but that means we still have 50 percent left," said Gates, who is working in Hawaii to breed corals that can better withstand increasing temperatures. "We definitely don't want to get to the point where we don't intervene until we have 2 percent left."

Going a step further, she is also trying to "train" corals to survive rising temperatures, exposing them to sub-lethal heat stress in the hope they can "somehow fix that in their memory" and survive similar stress in the future.

"It's probably time that we start thinking outside the box," Gates said. "It's sort of a no-win game if we do nothing."

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Online:

NOAA Coral Reef Conservation: <http://coralreef.noaa.gov/>

The Ocean Agency: <http://www.theoceanagency.org/>

50 Reefs: <https://50reefs.org/>

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Follow Elena Becatoros on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ElenaBec>

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This story has been amended to correct the spelling of organization's name.

## Obama's final year: US spent \$36 million in records lawsuits

By TED BRIDIS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration in its final year in office spent a record \$36.2 million on legal costs defending its refusal to turn over federal records under the Freedom of Information Act, according to an Associated Press analysis of new U.S. data that also showed poor performance in other categories measuring transparency in government.

For a second consecutive year, the Obama administration set a record for times federal employees told citizens, journalists and others that despite searching they couldn't find a single page of files that were requested.

And it set records for outright denial of access to files, refusing to quickly consider requests described as especially newsworthy, and forcing people to pay for records who had asked the government to waive search and copy fees.

The government acknowledged when challenged that it had been wrong to initially refuse to turn over all or parts of records in more than one-third of such cases, the highest rate in at least six years.

In courtrooms, the number of lawsuits filed by news organizations under the Freedom of Information Act surged during the past four years, led by the New York Times, Center for Public Integrity and The Associated Press, according to a litigation study by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University. The AP on Monday settled its 2015 lawsuit against the State Department for files about Hillary Clinton's time as secretary of state, at AP's request, and received \$150,546 from the department to cover part of its legal fees.

The AP has pending lawsuits against the FBI for records about its decision to impersonate an AP journalist during a criminal investigation and about who helped the FBI hack into a mass shooting suspect's

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iPhone and how much the government paid to do it.

Of the \$36.2 million in legal costs fighting such lawsuits last year, the Justice Department accounted for \$12 million, the Homeland Security Department for \$6.3 million and the Pentagon for \$4.8 million. The three departments accounted for more than half the government's total records requests last year.

The figures reflect the final struggles of the Obama administration during the 2016 election to meet President Barack Obama's pledge that it was "the most transparent administration in history," despite wide recognition of serious problems coping with requests under the information law. It received a record 788,769 requests for files last year and spent a record \$478 million answering them and employed 4,263 full-time FOIA employees across more than 100 federal departments and agencies. That was higher by 142 such employees the previous year.

A spokesman for former President Obama did not immediately respond to an email request for comment late Monday. The White House under Obama routinely defended its efforts under the information law in recent years and said federal employees worked diligently on such requests for records.

It remains unclear how President Donald Trump's administration will perform under the Freedom of Information Act or other measures of government transparency. Trump has not spoken extensively about transparency. In his private business and his presidential campaign, Trump required employees and advisers to sign non-disclosure agreements that barred them from discussing their work. His administration has barred some mainstream news organizations from campaign rallies and one White House press briefing. And Trump broke with tradition by refusing to disclose his tax returns.

Trump's secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, is traveling to Asia this week on a small plane without a contingent of journalists or a designated pool reporter who would send reports to the broader diplomatic press corps, departing from 50 years of practice.

Overall, in the final year of Obama's administration, people who asked for records last year under the law received censored files or nothing in 77 percent of requests, about the same as the previous year. In the first full year after Obama's election, that figure was only 65 percent of cases. The government released the new figures in the days ahead of Sunshine Week, which ends Sunday, when news organizations promote open government and freedom of information.

Under the records law, citizens and foreigners can compel the U.S. government to turn over copies of federal records for zero or little cost. Anyone who seeks information through the law is generally supposed to get it unless disclosure would hurt national security, violate personal privacy or expose business secrets or confidential decision-making in certain areas.

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Submit tips to the AP's investigative team at <https://www.ap.org/tips>

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Online: <https://www.foia.gov/data.html>

## 'SNL' 'Weekend Update' segment gets summer prime-time run

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Saturday Night Live" gets the summer off, but "Weekend Update" will keep the political satire coming in prime time.

NBC said Tuesday that four episodes of "Saturday Night Live: Weekend Update" will air at 9 p.m. Thursday starting Aug. 10.

Michael Che and Colin Hanks, who anchor the segment, will be joined by other "SNL" cast members, the network said.

"Weekend Update" has ventured away from its late-night turf into prime time before, but political tumult makes it an especially ripe opportunity for the faux newscast.

"SNL" is enjoying a ratings bounce from milking President Donald Trump's election and the early days of his administration.

The season to date is the show's most-watched in 24 years, with viewership up 26 percent over last year and averaging 11 million weekly, NBC said.

## City alleges drugmaker let OxyContin flood black market

By PHUONG LE, Associated Press

EVERETT, Wash. (AP) — As deaths from painkillers and heroin abuse spiked and street crimes increased, the mayor of Everett took major steps to tackle the opioid epidemic devastating this working-class city north of Seattle.

Mayor Ray Stephanson stepped up patrols, hired social workers to ride with officers and pushed for more permanent housing for chronically homeless people. The city says it has spent millions combating OxyContin and heroin abuse — and expects the tab to rise.

So Everett is suing Purdue Pharma, maker of the opioid pain medication OxyContin, in an unusual case that alleges the drugmaker knowingly allowed pills to be funneled into the black market and the city of about 108,000. Everett alleges the drugmaker did nothing to stop it and must pay for damages caused to the community.

Everett's lawsuit, now in federal court in Seattle, accuses Purdue Pharma of gross negligence and nuisance. The city seeks to hold the company accountable, the lawsuit alleges, for "supplying OxyContin to obviously suspicious pharmacies and physicians and enabling the illegal diversion of OxyContin into the black market" and into Everett, despite a company program to track suspicious flows.

"Our community has been significantly damaged, and we need to be made whole," said Stephanson, who grew up in Everett and is its longest-serving mayor, holding the job since 2003.

He said the opioid crisis caused by "Purdue's drive for profit" has overwhelmed the city's resources, stretching everyone from first responders to park crews who clean up discarded syringes. The lawsuit doesn't say how much money the city is seeking, but the mayor says Everett will attempt to quantify its costs in coming months.

Connecticut-based Purdue Pharma says the lawsuit paints a flawed and inaccurate picture of the events that led to the crisis in Everett.

"We look forward to presenting the facts in court," the company said in a statement.

Purdue said it is "deeply troubled by the abuse and misuse of our medication," and noted it leads the industry in developing medicines with properties that deter abuse, even though its products account for less than 2 percent of all U.S. opioid prescriptions.

In 2007, Purdue Pharma and its executives paid more than \$630 million in legal penalties to the federal government for willfully misrepresenting the drug's addiction risks. The same year, it also settled with Washington and other states that claimed the company aggressively marketed OxyContin to doctors while downplaying the addiction risk. As part of that settlement, it agreed to continue internal controls to identify potential diversion or abuse.

While numerous individuals and states have sued Purdue, this case is different because Everett is getting at the results of addiction, said Elizabeth Porter, associate law professor at the University of Washington.

She thinks Everett may have a shot at winning, though it will have to overcome some legal burdens, including showing that diverted OxyContin from rogue doctors and pharmacies was a substantial factor in the city's epidemic.

Stephanson said he was "absolutely outraged" after the Los Angeles Times reported last summer it found Purdue had evidence that pointed to illegal trafficking of its pills but in many cases did nothing to notify authorities or stop the flow. That newspaper investigation prompted the city's lawsuit.

In response to the newspaper's reporting, Purdue said in a statement that in 2007, it provided LA-area law enforcement information that helped lead to the convictions of the criminal prescribers and pharmacists referenced by the Los Angeles Times. The company also pointed to court documents that showed a wholesaler alerted the Drug Enforcement Administration about suspicious activity at a sham clinic noted in the newspaper's story.

Still, Everett contends Purdue created a market for addicts that didn't exist until the company let its pills flood the streets.

The region saw two spikes in overdose deaths: first from OxyContin and other opioid painkillers in 2008 and then, after the drug was reformulated in 2010, a spike from heroin as people switched to a

potent but cheaper alternative, officials said.

The city contends Purdue's wrongful conduct fueled a heroin crisis in Everett. Between 2011 and 2013, nearly one in five heroin-related deaths in Washington state occurred in the Everett region.

In response to the drug epidemic, Everett last year began sending social workers on routine patrols with police officers. Sgt. Mike Braley says the community outreach and enforcement team strikes a balance between enforcement and connecting people to addiction treatment, mental health and other services.

"We understand that we can't arrest our way out of problems that addiction is causing our city," Braley said.

Sometimes it takes many follow-ups and hours of handholding to get people help. On their first stop one morning, Braley and his team check under a street overpass, a popular hangout for addicts. They find plenty of needles, drug packaging and mounds of garbage but none of the people they had encountered there recently.

They swing by a woody vacant piece of city property to follow up with a homeless man who told social workers he was on a housing list. He previously was reluctant to talk but opens up this time.

Social worker Kaitlyn Dowd offers to check on the man's housing status with a local nonprofit provider and then punches her number into a cellphone he recently got.

"You can call me, and I have your number," she tells him.

Social worker Staci McCole said they come across many cases where highly functioning residents were introduced to opiates or heroin. "So many of these people — somehow it's taken a hold of them, and their lives now have forever changed," she said.

## Now hear this: Loud sound may pose more harm than we thought

By MALCOLM RITTER, AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Matt Garlock has trouble making out what his friends say in loud bars, but when he got a hearing test, the result was normal. Recent research may have found an explanation for problems like his, something called "hidden hearing loss."

Scientists have been finding evidence that loud noise — from rock concerts, leaf blowers, power tools and the like — damages our hearing in a previously unsuspected way. It may not be immediately noticeable, and it does not show up in standard hearing tests.

But over time, Harvard researcher M. Charles Liberman says, it can rob our ability to understand conversation in a noisy setting. It may also help explain why people have more trouble doing that as they age. And it may lead to persistent ringing in the ears.

The bottom line: "Noise is more dangerous than we thought."

His work has been done almost exclusively in animals. Nobody knows how much it explains hearing loss in people or how widespread it may be in the population. But he and others are already working on potential treatments.

To understand Liberman's research, it helps to know just how we hear. When sound enters our ears, it's picked up by so-called hair cells. They convert sound waves to signals that are carried by nerves to the brain. People can lose hair cells for a number of reasons — from loud noise or some drugs, or simple aging — and our hearing degrades as those sensors are lost. That loss is what is picked up by a standard test called an audiogram that measures how soft a noise we can hear in a quiet environment.

Liberman's work suggests that there's another kind of damage that doesn't kill off hair cells, but which leads to experiences like Garlock's.

A 29-year-old systems engineer who lives near Boston, Garlock is a veteran of rock concerts.

"You come home and you get that ringing in your ears that lasts for a few days and then it goes away," he said.

But after he went to Las Vegas for a friend's birthday, and visited a couple of dance clubs, it didn't go away. So he had the audiogram done, in 2015, and his score was normal.

Last fall, he came across a news story about a study co-authored by Liberman. It was a follow-up to Liberman's earlier work that suggests loud noise damages the delicate connections between hair cells and the nerves that carry the hearing signal to the brain.

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The news story said this can cause not only persistent ringing in the ears, but also a lingering difficulty in understanding conversations in background noise. After the Vegas trip, Garlock sensed he had that problem himself.

"I notice myself leaning in and asking people to repeat themselves, but I don't notice anybody else doing that," he said.

Garlock emailed one of Liberman's colleagues and volunteered for any follow-up studies.

It's hard to be sure that Garlock's situation can be explained by the research. But the seeming contradiction of hearing problems in people with perfect hearing tests has puzzled experts for years, says Robert Fifer of the University of Miami's Mailman Center for Child Development.

He's seen it in Air Force personnel who worked around airplanes and in a few music-blasting adolescents. "We didn't have a really good explanation for it," said Fifer, who's an official of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

But the work by Liberman and others helps solve the mystery, he said.

The connections between hair cells are called synapses, and a given hair cell has many of them. Animal studies suggest you could lose more than half of your synapses without any effect on how you score on an audiogram.

But it turns out, Liberman says, that losing enough synapses erodes the message the nerves deliver to the brain, wiping out details that are crucial for sifting conversation out from background noise. It's as if there's a big Jumbotron showing a picture, he says, but as more and more of its bulbs go black, it gets harder and harder to realize what the picture shows.

The study Garlock noticed is one of the few explorations of the idea in people. Researchers rounded up 34 college students between ages 18 and 41 who had normal scores on a standard hearing test. The volunteers were designated high-risk or low-risk for hidden hearing loss, based on what they said about their past exposure to loud noise and what steps they took to protect their hearing.

The higher-risk group reported more difficulty understanding speech in noisy situations, and they scored more poorly on a lab test of that ability. They also showed evidence of reduced function for hearing-related nerves.

It's a small study that must be repeated, Liberman says, but it adds to evidence for the idea.

One encouraging indication from the animal studies is that a drug might be able to spur nerves to regrow the lost synapses, said Liberman, who holds a financial stake in a company that is trying to develop such treatments.

In the meantime, he says, the work lends a new urgency to the standard advice about protecting the ears in loud places.

"It isn't awesome to have your ears ringing. It's telling you (that) you did some damage," he said.

Liberman's own hearing scores are pretty good, but at age 65, he sometimes can't understand his kids in a loud setting. He figures some of that may be from his years of handyman chores, like using a belt sander or a table saw.

"I wear earplugs when I mow the lawn now."

Follow Malcolm Ritter at <http://twitter.com/malcolmritter> His recent work can be found at <http://big-story.ap.org/content/malcolm-ritter>

## Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 15, the 74th day of 2017. There are 291 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 15, 1767, the seventh president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, was born in the Waxhaw settlement along the North Carolina-South Carolina border.

On this date:

In 44 B.C., Roman dictator Julius Caesar was assassinated by a group of nobles that included Brutus

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and Cassius.

In 1820, Maine became the 23rd state.

In 1917, Czar Nicholas II abdicated in favor of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich, who declined the crown, marking the end of imperial rule in Russia.

In 1922, Sultan Fuad I proclaimed himself the first king of modern Egypt.

In 1937, America's first hospital blood bank was opened at Cook County Hospital in Illinois.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied bombers again raided German-held Monte Cassino.

In 1956, the Lerner and Loewe musical play "My Fair Lady," based on Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion," opened on Broadway.

In 1964, actress Elizabeth Taylor married actor Richard Burton in Montreal; it was her fifth marriage, his second. (They divorced in 1974, remarried in 1975, then divorced again in 1976.)

In 1977, the U.S. House of Representatives began a 90-day closed-circuit test to determine the feasibility of showing its sessions on television. The situation comedy "Three's Company," starring John Ritter, Joyce DeWitt and Suzanne Somers, premiered on ABC-TV.

In 1985, the first internet domain name, symbolics.com, was registered by the Symbolics Computer Corp. of Massachusetts.

In 1999, an Amtrak train slammed into a steel-filled truck at a crossing in Bourbonnais, Illinois, killing 11 people.

In 2011, the Syrian civil war had its beginnings with Arab Spring protests across the region that turned into an armed insurgency and eventually became a full-blown conflict.

Ten years ago: Senate Republicans easily turned back Democratic legislation requiring a troop withdrawal from Iraq to begin within 120 days. Actress Angelina Jolie adopted a 3-year-old boy from an orphanage in Vietnam (Pax Thien was her fourth child with Brad Pitt). Former baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn (BOO'-ee kyoon) died in Jacksonville, Florida, at age 80.

Five years ago: Convicted former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (blah-GOY'-uh-vich) walked into a federal prison in Colorado, where the 55-year-old Democrat began serving a 14-year sentence for corruption. The American campaign in Afghanistan suffered a double blow as the Taliban broke off talks with the U.S., and President Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHHR'-zeye) said NATO should pull out of rural areas and speed up the transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces nationwide.

One year ago: Democrat Hillary Clinton triumphed in the Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Illinois and Missouri presidential primaries; Donald Trump strengthened his hand in the Republican race, winning in Florida, North Carolina, Illinois and Missouri, but falling in Ohio to that state's governor, John Kasich (KAY'-sikh), while Florida Sen. Marco Rubio ended his campaign after his home-state loss. In a major reversal, the Obama administration barred offshore drilling off the Atlantic Coast. Dallas Seavey won his third straight Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in a record time of 8 days, 11 hours, 20 minutes, 16 seconds. Sylvia Anderson, 88, co-creator of the cult classic science fiction TV puppet show "Thunderbirds," died in Bray, Berkshire, England.

Today's Birthdays: Musician DJ Fontana is 86. Former astronaut Alan L. Bean is 85. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is 84. Actor Judd Hirsch is 82. Jazz musician Charles Lloyd is 79. Rock musician Phil Lesh is 77. Singer Mike Love (The Beach Boys) is 76. Rock singer-musician Sly Stone is 74. Rock singer-musician Howard Scott (War; Lowrider Band) is 71. Rock singer Ry Cooder is 70. Actor Craig Wasson is 63. Rock singer Dee Snider (Twisted Sister) is 62. Actor Joaquim de Almeida is 60. Actress Park Overall is 60. Movie director Renny Harlin is 58. Model Fabio is 56. Singer Terence Trent D'Arby (AKA Sananda Maitreya) is 55. Rock singer Bret Michaels (Poison) is 54. Rhythm-and-blues singer Rockwell is 53. Actor Chris Bruno is 51. Rock singer Mark McGrath (Sugar Ray) is 49. Actress Kim Raver is 48. Rock musician Mark Hoppus is 45. Country singer-musician Matt Thomas (Parmalee) is 43. Actress Eva Longoria is 42. Rapper-musician will.i.am (Black Eyed Peas) is 42. Rock DJ Joseph Hahn (Linkin Park) is 40. Rapper Young Buck is 36. Actor Sean Biggerstaff is 34. Rock musician Ethan Mentzer is 34. Actor Kellan Lutz is 32. Actress Caitlin Wachs is 28.

Thought for Today: "The wisdom of man never yet contrived a system of taxation that would operate with perfect equality." — President Andrew Jackson (1767-1845).