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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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Sunday, March 19

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion at 9 a.m., No Sunday School, Emmanuel serving at nursing home with confirmands serving.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with holy communion at 9 a.m.; no Sunday School.

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

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

Monday, March 20

School Lunch: Super nachos, refried beans, romaine salad, fruit.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza, fruit, juice, milk.

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, buttermilk biscuit, peas, pineapple/Mandarin orange sauce, cookie.

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

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle at 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 21

Student Congress at GHS

School Lunch: Submarine, French fries, fruit, carrots and dip.

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

Senior Menu: Hamburger steak, braised onions, mashed potatoes, broccoli, cookie bar, whole wheat bread.



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Looking Back On A Successful Legislative Session

A column by Gov. Dennis Daugaard

Friday, March 10, was the last day of the main run of the 2017 Legislative Session. Although the session was more "low profile" than in some past years, we can all be proud of our legislators' hard work.

South Dakota balances its budget every year, and the Legislature overcame very slow revenue growth to pass a structurally balanced budget again this year. I was very pleased that we were also able to find a way to offer small inflationary increases to K-12 schools and many Medicaid providers.

Perhaps the most important legislation this year received the least attention: a package of bills relating to the South Dakota Retirement System. Unlike many states, South Dakota's pension plan is 100 percent funded. This year, retirement system trustees unanimously recommended legislation to secure our strong footing decades into the future – and it passed the Legislature with bipartisan support and only five dissenting votes.

The Legislature also kept its commitment to South Dakota voters to deal with IM 22, which a judge enjoined from taking effect due to its numerous constitutional problems. A package of replacement bills includes a bipartisan bill sponsored by Democratic Rep. Karen Soli to create a Government Accountability Board to investigate ethics complaints. Other bills reinstated a ban on gifts from lobbyists to elected officials, new whistleblower protections and enhanced ability to prosecute conflict-of-interest cases.

We also took action to confront the scourge of meth. We are adding more treatment capacity for meth addicts, imposing tougher penalties on probationers or parolees who use drugs, educating young people about the dangers of meth and encouraging first-time drug offenders to complete treatment to break the cycle of abuse.

A task force convened by the Chief Justice brought important legislation to help our state do a better job of identifying and responding to mental health issues in the criminal justice system. This will allow counties to handle these cases more quickly and avoid lengthy, unnecessary, expensive jail stays for those affected.

The Legislature also approved the construction of a new state animal diagnostic and research lab at South Dakota State University. This lab is crucial to protecting our public safety and our state's livestock industry. I was very pleased that the ag community and legislators found a way to finance this project, despite the tough budget year, without using new state general funds.

We also made progress in open government. BoardsAndCommissions.SD.gov will become a mandatory portal for all state boards and commissions to post their meeting notices, agenda, minutes and other materials. The Legislature also approved the public release of police booking photos, or "mugshots," for felony cases.

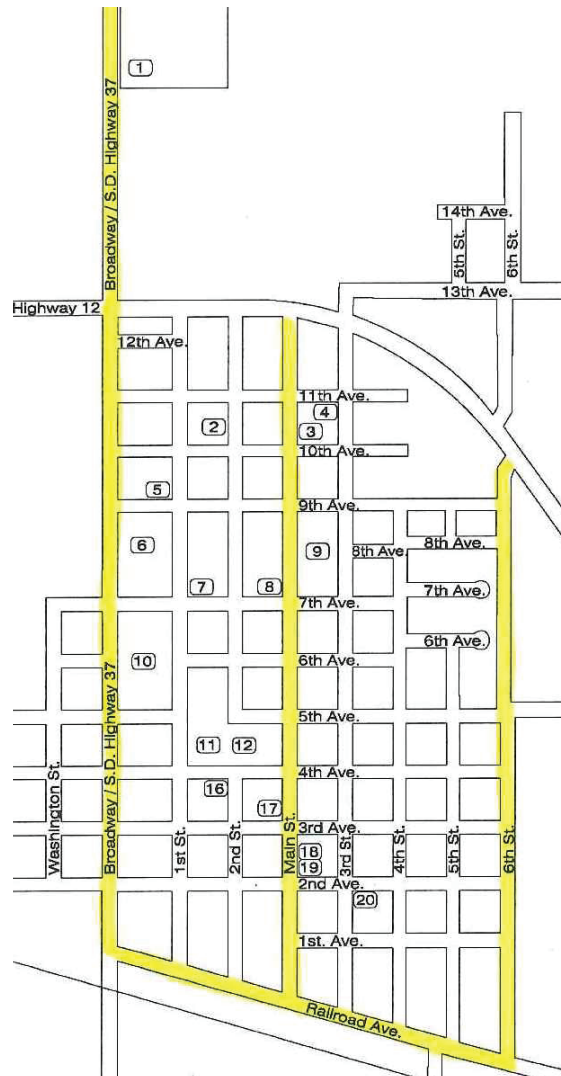
Many other important pieces of legislation passed this year: bills allowing for the sale of state lands and buildings that are no longer needed, a bill to strengthen laws to respond to a potential protest emergency, legislation to create a new Board of Technical Education, and a bill to improve primary care, especially in rural areas, through more independence for nurse practitioners.

Our legislators accomplished all of that, and much more, in just nine short weeks. South Dakotans can be proud that we have a part-time, citizen Legislature. They are not "career politicians." This session, the average state legislator had four years of legislative experience, and 29 of the 105 had never served in the Legislature at all. They are our friends and neighbors, and they take time away from their jobs and families to come to Pierre and serve our state.

If you see one of our state legislators in the next few weeks, please thank them for their hard work and for a job well done.

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EFFECTIVE MARCH 27TH, 2017 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

**To Help Preserve Our Streets
GROTON Garbage Pickup Service
Will only be on Railroad Ave,
Main St, 6th St, & Hwy 37**

Residents of HRH Mobile Home Park need to take their garbage to Highway 37.

Residents north of 13th Avenue (Olson and Jacobson Development) need to bring their garbage to the Bus Barns.

Please bring your garbage bags & cans to these streets for Tuesday pickup
Thank you for your cooperation!!

Bates Township Right-of-Way Notice

Bates Township Board of Supervisors reminds all landowners and tenants that the road right-of-way extends 33 feet from the center of the township road. This ditch is to be maintained and mowed. Any crops planted in the road right-of-way will be mowed and charged to the landowner, effective with the 2017 growing season.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors
Betty Geist
Township Clerk

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, or call (605)-698-7654. EOE

Boisner Bridal Shower

Bridal Shower for Andrea Boisner, bride-to-be of Jeffrey Tobin. Saturday, March 25, 9:30-11:30 a.m. at Evangelical Lutheran Church, Langford. The couple is registered at Target and Bed Bath & Beyond.

Bates Township Equalization Meeting Notice

The Bates Township Board of Equalization will meet at the Clerk's home on Tuesday, March 23rd, 2017 at 6:30 pm.

All persons disputing their assessments are requested to notify the clerk prior to the meeting.

Betty Geist
Bates Township Clerk
14523 409th Ave
Conde, SD 57434

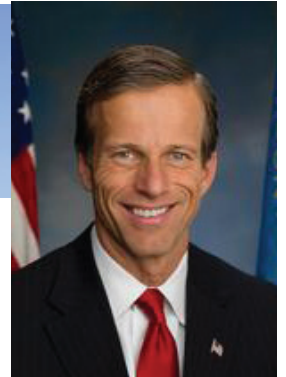


The advertisement features two photographs of gym equipment. The left photo shows a white cable machine with a black seat and a barbell. The right photo shows a row of treadmills in a gym setting. Below the photos is the logo for GDI Living Fitness, which includes a pink heart with a white ECG line. The text 'GDI Living Fitness' is written in a stylized font, with 'GDI' in white and 'Living Fitness' in black. Below the logo, the address '25 Main St., Downtown Groton' is written in yellow. To the right of the photos, contact information is provided: 'Call or Text Paul at 397-7460 or Tina at 397-7285 for membership Information'.

GDI Living Fitness
25 Main St., Downtown Groton

Call or Text
Paul at
397-7460
or Tina at
397-7285
for
membership
Information

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



It's Time to Turn the Page on Obamacare

By Sen. John Thune

I can't think of a more personal aspect of someone's life than that of his or her doctor-patient relationship and the decisions they make together. Whether it's a routine exam or a serious surgery or treatment, each decision – however large or small – can have a lasting effect on an individual and his or her family. The most important and fundamental part of this, of course, is first having access to affordable health care so these relationships can be built and the care can be delivered.

It would be an understatement to say that America's health care system has been on a bit of a roller-coaster ride over the last eight years. I'll be the first to admit that health care in the United States wasn't perfect before Obamacare was implemented, but it certainly didn't make it better. For many Americans, it got worse.

Fixing our health care system is too important to get wrong, which is why I'm working with my colleagues in Congress on a plan that would correct some of Obamacare's greatest shortcomings, like its high premiums and limited choices. The first step in this process, though, is ripping out the old law root and branch. Leaving it intact would be like treating a broken arm with a Band-Aid, two ibuprofen, and a pat on the back.

The American Health Care Act (AHCA), which was recently introduced in the House of Representatives, is a good foundation from which we can work to turn the page on Obamacare. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the AHCA would meet two of my top priorities: It would reduce premiums (by 10 percent) and increase choices. The AHCA would also cut taxes by \$883 billion, reduce the federal deficit by \$337 billion, and make major entitlement reforms that would save taxpayers another \$880 billion.

While this bill represents a great start, I'm working on a proposal that would make it even better. I believe that by making some common-sense adjustments to the bill's tax credit, we can deliver more targeted relief to Americans who need it the most. My plan would simply apply an age and income test to the tax credit, ensuring low-income Americans and seniors receive more robust assistance.

Reforming America's health care system isn't easy, nor should it be. But by focusing on the best policies that deliver the best results, we can finally help reduce the cost of premiums, increase access to affordable care, and create a system of which both doctors and patients can be proud. That's what I'm fighting to achieve.

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GFP to Release Trout Below Oahe Dam

PIERRE, S.D. - Weather permitting, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) will stock approximately 6,500 rainbow trout below Oahe Dam later this month.

The first stocking of approximately 3,250 rainbow trout will be March 23, with the remaining 3,250 released on April 5 in the marina area below the Oahe Dam.

The rainbow trout range between nine and 12 inches in length and bite readily; providing quality opportunities for anglers of all ages; whether fishing by boat or shore.

Forty of these rainbow trout will have a transmitter inserted in them to allow GFP crews to track movements of these fish and help improve stocking strategies to increase the number of these fish caught by anglers.

GFP Mission: The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks provides sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities through responsible management of our state's parks, fisheries and wildlife by fostering partnerships, cultivating stewardship and safely connecting people with the outdoors.

Now Open!
GDI CLEAN!
Downtown
Groton

Paul - 397-7460
Tina - 397-7285

Governor Signs Final Bills Of The Session

PIERRE, S.D. – Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed the last bills of the 2017 Legislative Session into law today:

SB 78 – An Act to revise provisions regarding election petitions for conservation district supervisors.

SB 95 – An Act to add cannabidiol to the list of Schedule IV controlled substances and to exclude it from the definition of marijuana.

SB 124 – An Act to repeal the authority for the Department of Social Services to enter agreements related to the Refugee Act of 1980 and to require certain reports regarding services provided to and arrival of refugees.

For more information about these bills, visit sdlegislature.gov.

Climate Update Predicts Wetter Than Average April

BROOKINGS, S.D. - April is more likely to be wetter than average, according to a climate outlook released March 16, 2017 by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center.

"Of anywhere in the United States, the highest likelihood of wetter conditions is in our area," said Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension State Climatologist. "There is a bulls-eye in eastern South Dakota that is projected to have wetter conditions than average in April."

Edwards explained that this spring outlook is consistent with the long term trend in the region.

"The long term trends in eastern South Dakota over the last several decades has shown more precipitation in the spring and falls seasons," she said. "The good news is that there is no concern about drought development in the spring season for farmers and gardeners."

Edwards added that April precipitation has proven to be critical for pasture, forage and hay production throughout the state.

"Abundant moisture would benefit grasslands and hay for livestock feed this summer," she said.

Due to the above-freezing temperatures throughout February and early March, the soils are now able to absorb some more moisture.

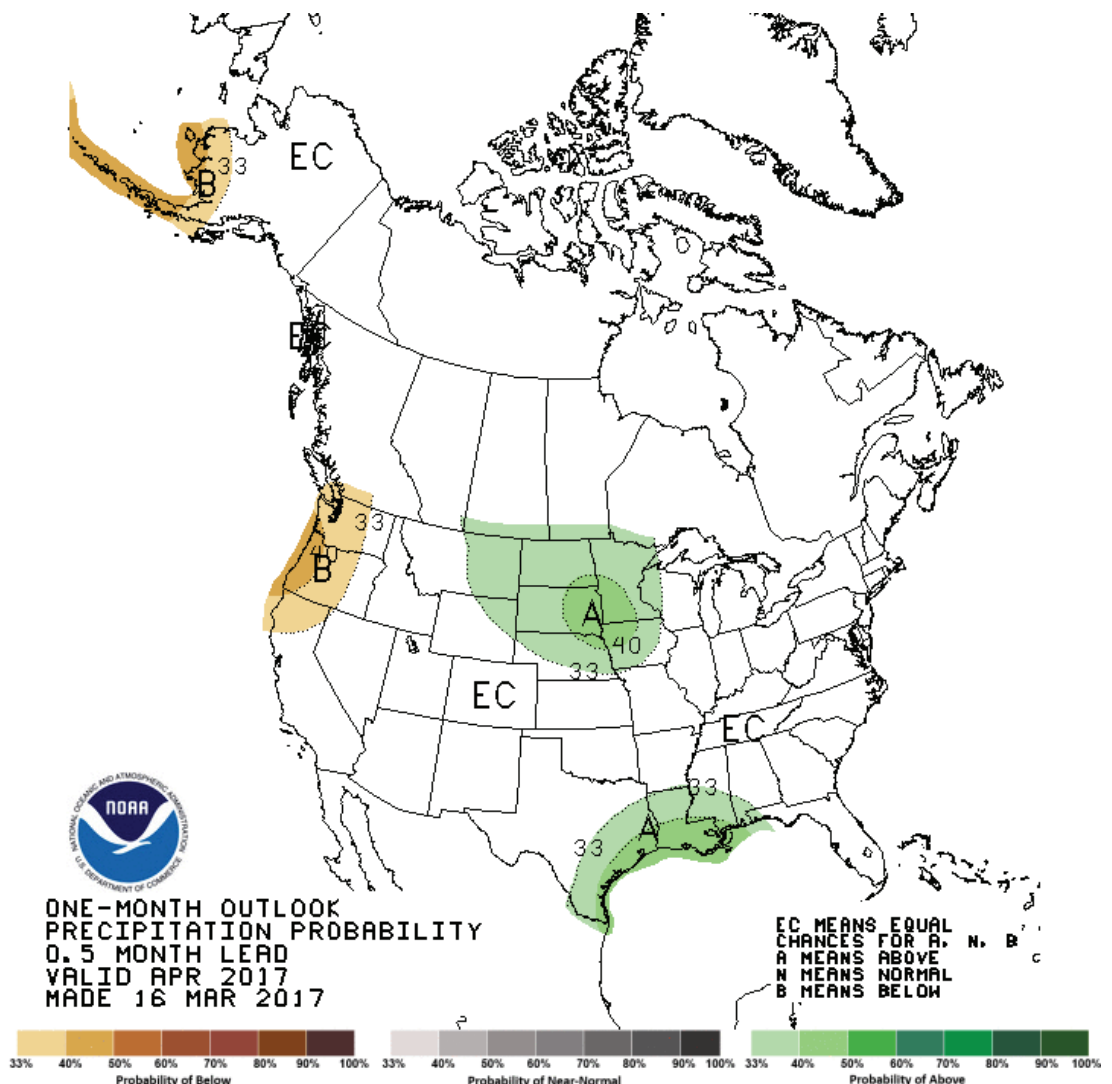
Even though many of the state's eastern counties had a refreeze, with colder temperatures that started around March 10, Edwards said soils will warm up quickly after the new snow melts.

No substantial flood risks

No regions in South Dakota are at risk for substantial flooding at this time. "According to the NOAA Flood Outlook released March 16, only the far eastern areas in the Minnesota River basin have any risk of even minor flooding," Edwards said.

The temperature outlook for April shows warmer than average conditions favored to our south and eastern portions of the U.S. but Edwards said it less clear for South Dakota.

"There is some uncertainty on what lies ahead for spring temperatures, with equal chances of warmer or cooler than average in the next three months," she said.





A Diversity of Issues Impacting Agriculture

I love what Bridger Gordon, a student from Whitewood, SD, wrote about agriculture: "Agriculture encompasses – and enhances – the entire environment, harnessing soil, water, sunlight to produce food, habitat, employment." That observation helped Bridger win a national essay contest this year, which came with a \$1,000 prize and a trip to Washington, DC, to celebrate National Ag Day on March 21.

Bridger is right. The impact of agriculture is expansive, which is why America has offered producers a safety net for decades in the Farm Bill. While the deadline is still more than a year away, work on the next Farm Bill is already underway. Hearings have begun and I'm working closely with Ag Committee Chairman Conaway to be sure South Dakota producers have the support they need.

The 2014 Farm Bill was one of the most reformed we've seen. It maintained strong risk-management programs, strengthened the livestock disaster program, and invested in ag-related research. But improvements are needed. I'm working on legislation, for instance, that would streamline the process for wetland determinations, ensuring producers get a timely response and have an efficient path for appeals.

We also must make sure commodity programs work as they were intended. I've heard many concerns about how ARC-county was administered, so we're looking at possible improvements there.

Changes to conservation programs, like CRP, are also being discussed. During the last general sign up, only 101 acres were accepted into CRP in South Dakota even though producers submitted applications for thousands more. The numbers don't add up.

In addition to the Farm Bill, I want to make the regulatory environment work better for agriculture. Already, Congress and President Trump have delayed, suspended, or reversed more than 90 Obama-era regulations, including many impacting rural South Dakota. The president announced steps to roll back the controversial Waters of the U.S. rule, for example, just weeks after I sent a letter urging him to do so.

I've also been in touch with the administration on the importance of maintaining a strong Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), which helps get ethanol and biodiesel into gas pumps around the country. This is something the Obama administration often fell short on, but I'm encouraged by the Trump administration's repeated commitments to the RFS.

We're also working on comprehensive tax reform. In 2015, we permanently extended Section 179, which many use when purchasing equipment. I've also been supportive of a \$1-per-gallon tax credit for biodiesel to help decrease our reliance on foreign oil and increase support for American-grown fuels. More must be done though.

In the House's blueprint for tax reform, we're looking to lower tax rates for small businesses, simplify the tax code, and repeal the taxes that make it more difficult to pass an ag operation from one generation to the next (this includes the death tax).

While ag policy is largely dictated by Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a lot of influence too. I was pleased to see former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue nominated as USDA Secretary. Sonny and I have hunted pheasants together many times. I know he understands our industry because he's lived it. He was raised on a row-crop farm, became a veterinarian, and at one point even ran a grain and fertilizer business. I'm looking forward to being able to work with him on South Dakota priorities.

I am incredibly proud to represent so many farmers and ranchers, the very people who – as Bridger Gordon observed – grow the world's food, preserve our local habitat, and provide employment for more than 120,000 people in South Dakota. Thank you for all you do.

Today in Weather History

March 18, 1982: Northern Lawrence and Southwest Butte Counties experienced strong winds during the afternoon of March 18, 1982. Winds gusting to 70mph in Spearfish and Belle Fourche areas overturned a trailer house near Belle Fourche. No injuries were reported.

March 18, 2013: A strong surface low-pressure area moving across the region brought widespread accumulating snowfall along with very strong northwest winds to northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 1 to 4 inches along with sustained winds of 25 to 35 mph with gusts up to near 60 mph caused widespread blizzard conditions. Travel was significantly disrupted or halted. Some businesses and schools were also closed. Some snowfall amounts included; 1 inch at Sisseton; 2 inches south of Bristol and at Bowdle; 3 inches near Big Stone City; and 4 inches at Summit. The highest wind gust was 58 mph at Aberdeen and near Summit. The snowfall began between 5 and 7 pm on the 17th and ended between 5 and 9 pm on the 18th.

March 18, 2014: A surface low-pressure area moving off to the east brought some heavy snow into far eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. A narrow band of heavy snow set up across this area bringing from 6 to 11 inches of snow.

1925: The great "Tri-State Tornado" occurred, the deadliest tornado in U.S. history. The storm claimed 695 lives (including 234 at Murphysboro, IL and 148 at West Frankfort, IL), and caused seventeen million dollars property damage. It cut a swath of destruction 219 miles long and as much as a mile wide from east-central Missouri to southern Indiana between 1 PM and 4 PM. The tornado leveled a school in West Frankfort, Illinois and picked up sixteen students setting them down unharmed 150 yards away. Seven other tornadoes claimed an additional 97 lives that day.

1952: 151.73 inches of rain fell at Cilaos, La Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean over a five day period (13th-18th) to set the world rainfall record. This record was broken on February 24th-28th, 2007 when Commerce La Reunion Island picked up 196.06 inches.

1971 - High winds accompanied a low pressure system from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Lakes. Winds gusted to 100 mph at Hastings NE, and reached 115 mph at Hays KS. High winds caused two million dollars damage in Kansas. Fire burned 50,000 forest acres in eastern Oklahoma. (17th-19th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the central U.S. produced up to 10 inches of snow in western Nebraska, and up to six inches of rain in eastern sections of the state. The heavy rains pushed the Elkhorn River out of its banks, submerging the streets of Inman under three feet of water. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Light rain and snow prevailed east of the Mississippi River. Fair weather prevailed west of the Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain in California, with heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range. Venado CA was drenched with 5.40 inches of rain in 24 hours. A dozen cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Baltimore MD with a reading of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990: An intense hailstorm struck the Sydney region in Australia producing strong winds and torrential rains in a swath from Camden to Narrabeen, causing extensive damage. Hailstones were measured up to 3 inches in diameter. The total insured damage was estimated at \$319 million Australian dollars, the third largest loss event in Australian insurance history.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 40.0 F at 5:02 PM

Low Outside Temp: 26.3 F at 4:56 AM

High Gust: 38.0 Mph at 1:00 PM

Snow: Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 85° in 2015

Record Low: -15 in 1923

Average High: 41°F

Average Low: 21°F

Average Precip in March.: 0.59

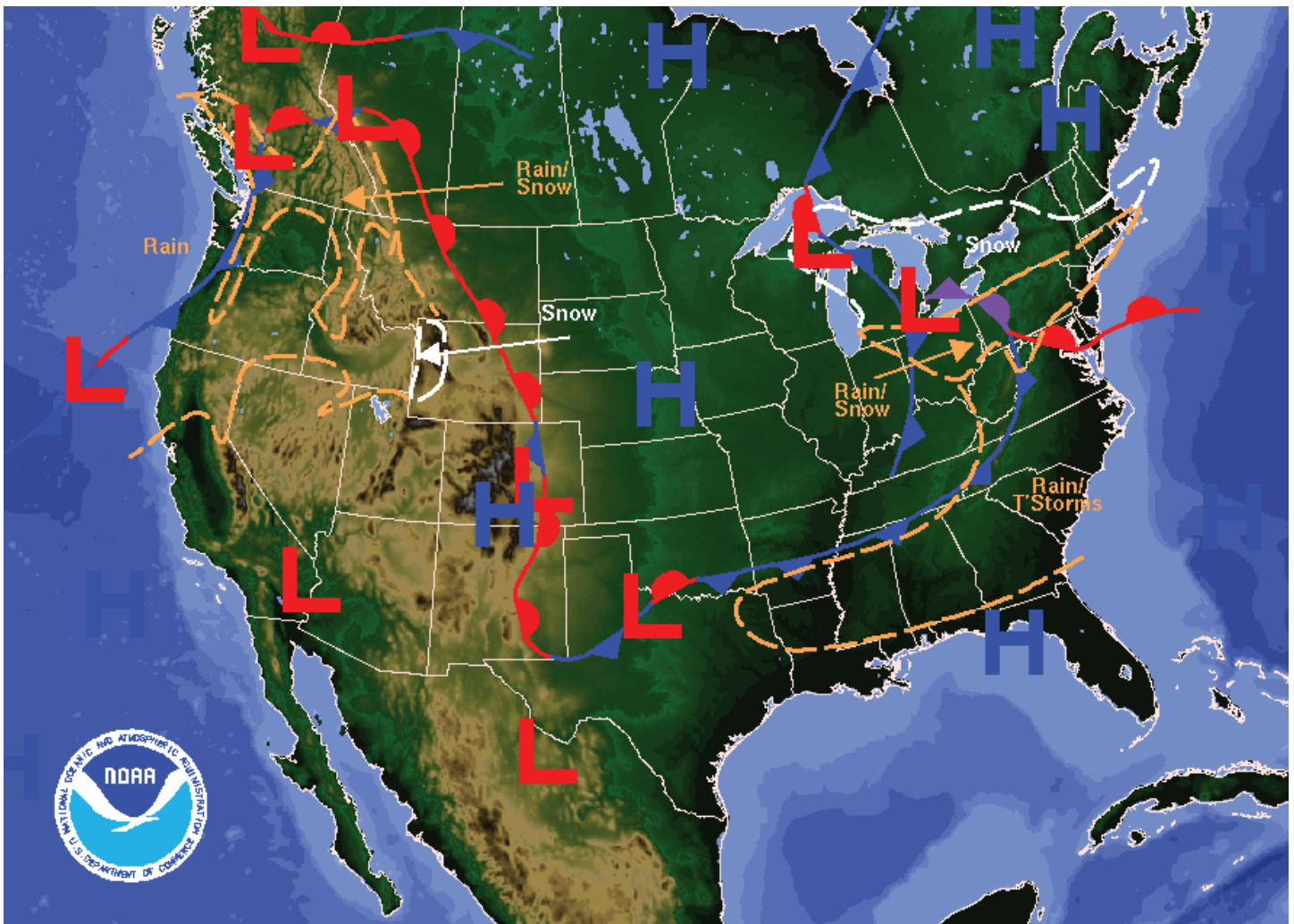
Precip to date in March.: 0.59

Average Precip to date: 1.61

Precip Year to Date: 0.59

Sunset Tonight: 7:43 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:38 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Sat, Mar 18, 2017, issued 4:36 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Krekeler based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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HOW TO GET DOWN TO WORK

He rose from slavery to become one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century. He discovered hundreds of uses for various crops, including 300 products from peanuts, 100 products for the sweet potato, 75 for pecans and introduced crop rotation for plant nutrition and many products for cosmetics.

Quite a legacy for one man.

As the son of a slave he understood one problem that the farmers of the South faced: How to expand the number of crops they could grow. He first thought about peanuts – but realized that there was no market for them. He soon recognized his need for God's help.

So, he prayed: "Mr. Creator, why did You make the peanut?"

One day he said, "God gave me a handful of peanuts and went with me to the laboratory and together we got down to work." That was the beginning of a career that was founded on a simple prayer, a man who honored God and brought great things to the world.

"If you need wisdom," James wrote, "if you want to know what God wants you to do, ask Him and He will gladly tell you!"

The word wisdom means practical, insightful discernment. It begins with recognizing the power of God, respecting His power and depending upon Him to show us what we can do with the gifts He has given us.

Prayer: How blest we are, Heavenly Father, that we do not have to waste time and worry about what to do with our lives. May we look to You for Your guidance every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

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News from the Associated Press

Friday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

State AA Tournament

Consolation Semifinal

Huron 63, Harrisburg 52

Rapid City Stevens 54, Brookings 53

Semifinal

Aberdeen Central 58, Pierre 52

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 44, Sioux Falls Lincoln 27

State A Tournament

Consolation Semifinal

Dakota Valley 56, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 37

St. Thomas More 51, Chamberlain 48

Semifinal

Madison 50, Sioux Falls Christian 39

Tea Area 60, Tri-Valley 47

State B Tournament

Consolation Semifinal

Langford 43, Harding County 37

White River 60, Platte-Geddes 50

Semifinal

Bridgewater-Emery 61, Sully Buttes 58

Wolsey-Wessington 58, Parker 42

SD high court sides with landowners in property rights case

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The state Supreme Court has dealt a blow to South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, ruling the agency can't allow people access to floodwaters or ice that covers private property without legislative approval.

The agency had argued that all water was legally accessible to the public if it could be reached without trespassing on private land. And hunters and anglers had argued that all waters in the state should be accessible to the public.

The Argus Leader reports (<http://argusne.ws/2mBw7p1>) the decision stems from a lawsuit by Day County landowners and a class action against people who had been accessing two sloughs. The sloughs grew in the 1990s after heavy rains and snows, and in 2001, the public began using them for recreation, even though they were on private property.

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

Man dies in plane crash near Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities are investigating a plane crash that killed a northwestern South Dakota man near his home.

According to the Meade County Sheriff's Office, 67-year-old Barry Vig, of Opal, died when his plane crashed near his ranch early Friday. He was the only person on board.

The Rapid City Journal reports (<http://bit.ly/2mBmgzu>) that the Civil Air Patrol was called to look for the plane around 2 a.m. after Vig didn't return home. The plane was en route from Rapid City to Faith when it crashed.

It took the team less than two hours to find the wreckage and recover Vig's body near Opal, about 96 miles northeast of Rapid City.

Officials say the weather was clear when they found the plane, but a rain storm had passed through the area overnight.

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

Gov. Dennis Daugaard vetoes 5 bills passed by lawmakers

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard has vetoed five bills on issues including concealed weapons and the juvenile justice system.

The Republican governor vetoed the measures on Friday. The Legislature will return to Pierre on March 27 to decide whether to accept or override them.

Daugaard rejected a measure that would have allowed a court to put juveniles in Department of Corrections' custody if they presented a significant risk of physical harm to themselves. He says those situations are best dealt with by treatment or counseling.

The two highest-profile vetoes were of bills that would have allowed guns in the state Capitol and let people carry concealed handguns without a permit.

He also dispatched a measure to reduce a fee that is mostly put into a telecommunication fund for the deaf.

South Dakota man sentenced for 2015 death of Nebraska man

VALENTINE, Neb. (AP) — A South Dakota man has been sentenced to prison for the 2015 death of a northern Nebraska resident.

Valentine radio station KVSH reports (<http://bit.ly/2niloEz>) that 30-year-old Tylor Krogman, of White River, South Dakota, was sentenced Friday to 10 to 18 years. He was convicted of manslaughter in the July 11, 2015, death of 64-year-old Ed Mathiesen, of Valentine.

An autopsy showed Mathiesen died of blunt force trauma and neck injuries. Krogman told investigators that he'd gone to Valentine for a bachelor party and gotten into an altercation with Mathiesen, but couldn't remember the details.

Information from: KVSH-AM.

Upgrades coming for South Dakota's animal research lab

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's animal disease research lab is in line for much-needed upgrades after Gov. Dennis Daugaard approved creative funding to provide it with \$50.1 million.

Daugaard signed legislation Friday to upgrade and expand the Animal Disease Research and Diagnostic Laboratory at South Dakota State University in Brookings.

The lab performs daily food safety tests and also tests for disease in pigs, cattle and other livestock. It's used by many farmers and veterinarians in the state and was a key player in the bird flu outbreak of two years ago. That outbreak highlighted the need for upgrades estimated to cost about \$58 million.

To prepare for future outbreaks, lab officials have said they need an improved biosafety room that can handle hazardous pathogens like foot-and-mouth disease and bird flu. The remodel will also allow for new technology that didn't exist when the lab had its last major face-lift in 1993, including things such as molecular-based testing and DNA sequencing.

"The funding for the enhancements and upgrades will address the animal health, biosafety and environmental safety needs of today," said SDSU President Barry Dunn. "This is a game-changer for our state, the region and our university."

The legislation will combine about \$2 million in one-time state funds with \$6 million from SDSU. The remainder will come from a redirection of property tax relief for agricultural land. University officials say construction is slated to begin this fall. State officials have said low commodity prices and a slow agriculture economy were the project's biggest barriers while deciding on funding.

South Dakota governor vetoes bills trying to loosen gun laws

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's Republican governor on Friday vetoed a pair of bills that would have loosened restrictions on carrying concealed guns in the conservative state.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard had warned he would veto the bills — one to let people carry concealed handguns without a permit, the other to allow concealed weapons in the Capitol building. Daugaard has said the state's current gun laws are reasonable.

"As a longtime member of the NRA, I support the right to bear arms," Daugaard said in his veto letter for the permitless carry bill. "It is paramount that our state protect the rights of our citizens while at the same time protecting the lives of our citizens. I believe our current laws appropriately protect both interests, and I ask that you sustain my veto."

Supporters of both bills plan to attempt overrides — and if that's not successful, to try again next year. Neither bill got the two-thirds support that suggests an override would succeed. Both passed one chamber only narrowly.

Daugaard's vetoes are the latest evidence of a split between a more moderate GOP governor and a Republican-held Legislature that grew even more conservative after the last election. Daugaard is in his second term and can't immediately seek a third, and has said he's looking forward to leaving politics in 2019.

The governor rejected a permitless carry bill in 2012. In the sessions since, he has won a pair of tax increases and also vetoed a bill to restrict the school facilities transgender students could use. When a transgender bill came back this session, he threatened another veto before it was pulled.

But Daugaard, described by confidants as a thoughtful, pragmatic leader, has also supported ideas backed by conservative lawmakers. Last week, he signed a bill to give legal protections to faith-based organizations that refuse based on their religious beliefs to place children in certain households.

This session, the so-called constitutional carry bill would have allowed people who can legally carry a concealed handgun in South Dakota to do so without a permit. Right now, it's a misdemeanor for someone to carry a concealed pistol or to have one concealed in a vehicle without a permit.

Republican Rep. Lynne DiSanto, who sponsored the constitutional carry bill, said that it should be a "no-brainer" for the Republican supermajorities in the statehouse to override the veto, urging people to contact their GOP lawmakers to support gun rights.

"Gov. Daugaard just continues to disappoint," she said. "You can call him a Republican governor, because he has the, 'R,' but I wouldn't necessarily agree that he is."

The Capitol carry bill would have let people with an enhanced permit bring concealed handguns inside if they registered beforehand with security. There are no metal detectors or other security checks at the Capitol entrances to enforce the current prohibition on most people carrying guns in the building.

"During the legislative session, meaningful debates among the public and legislators are frequent and oftentimes passionate," Daugaard wrote in his veto message. "Our law enforcement officers are uniquely able to protect the public, and I believe this bill would complicate that work."

House Majority Leader Lee Qualm, its main sponsor, said he hopes to override the veto when lawmakers gather in Pierre on March 27 for the final day of the 2017 session.

South Dakota seizes \$130K from failed oil driller

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A state board has taken final action to seize \$130,000 from a failed oil-drilling company, while acknowledging that an open well left near Wasta could pollute underground water.

The Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2maKghq>) reports the Board of Minerals and Environment approved Thursday the findings of fact, conclusions of law and order in the case of Quartz Operations LLC. The order by the board took away the company's oil and gas permit and required it to forfeit the \$130,000 worth of bonds. The money will be contributed to any future expenses at the company's failed drilling site.

Quartz obtained permits in 2013 to drill two wells in eastern Pennington County, despite the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources' concerns.

"The Department felt that the location, depth and target formation of the proposed wells, coupled with Quartz's lack of experience in the oil and gas field, suggested a higher than typical bond amount should be set," the findings said.

The first well, which now has a potentially dangerous borehole, failed because the company lost drilling fluid circulation after hitting sediment about 4,800 feet below. The second well was never drilled.

The money is not enough to match the \$2 million required to plug the aquifers pierced by the company's borehole.

The unplugged portion of the well's borehole could create a pathway for upward flow of Minnelusa Aquifer water into the Inyan Kara Aquifer. Minnelusa is believed to have more dissolved solids than Inyan Kara, so the borehole could degrade the latter's water quality.

Department officials said they will continue to monitor water wells in the area.

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

Gov. Dennis Daugaard signs cannabidiol measure into law

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard has approved a bill meant to allow people in South Dakota with a prescription to use a non-intoxicating compound found in marijuana if it's approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Daugaard on Friday signed the bill. It excludes cannabidiol, if it receives FDA approval, from the definition of marijuana in state law and classifies it as a Schedule IV controlled substance that could be prescribed.

Republican Sen. Blake Curd, the bill's main sponsor, has said that cannabidiol is an attempt to treat intractable pediatric epilepsy.

London-based GW Pharmaceuticals' Epidiolex, a nearly pure extract of cannabidiol, is scheduled for review by the FDA this summer.

Judge combines 4 tribal suits over Dakota Access pipeline

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON**, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A judge has combined lawsuits filed by four Sioux tribes over the Dakota Access pipeline, streamlining the drawn-out legal battle over the \$3.8 billion project to move North Dakota oil to a distribution point in Illinois.

Meanwhile, a federal appeals court could decide this weekend on a tribal request to stop oil from flowing through the pipeline next week.

The neighboring Standing Rock and Cheyenne River tribes teamed up last summer in the main lawsuit against Texas-based pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency that granted pipeline permits at more than 200 water crossings, including the Missouri River. The Yankton Sioux also sued last summer, and the Oglala Sioux filed its own lawsuit last month.

The four Dakotas tribes make essentially the same claims: The pipeline threatens cultural sites and the Missouri, from which they get water for drinking and religious practices.

"Consolidating the cases would conserve judicial resources, allow the parties to save time and expense, and enable the court and parties to schedule matters more efficiently," Corps attorneys said in asking U.S. District Judge James Boasberg in Washington, D.C., to lump the cases together.

None of the tribes or ETP objected to the move, and Boasberg granted the request Thursday.

The legal battle lingers even as ETP prepares to launch pipeline operations. Crews are wrapping up final pipe work under Lake Oahe, a Missouri River reservoir in North Dakota, and the company has said oil could flow as early as Monday.

Cheyenne River attorney Nicole Ducheneaux asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to issue by Monday an "emergency" prohibition of any oil flow, until it resolves an appeal of Boasberg's recent decision to not stop final construction. Boasberg also rejected a separate tribal request to stop oil from flowing.

The tribes' appeal rests on the religion argument. Boasberg has said he doesn't think the tribes have a strong case on appeal. He also said ETP would be "substantially harmed" by a delay in pipeline operations.

Both the company and Corps filed court documents Friday opposing the tribal request. The appeals court will make a decision sometime after Friday evening, the deadline it set for attorneys to submit written arguments.

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

Nebraska to drop lawsuit over transgender bathroom policy

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska has asked to drop a 10-state lawsuit it led challenging the Obama administration's guidance on locker room and bathroom use by transgender students after the Trump administration ended the protection.

The Nebraska attorney general's office filed the request Thursday. Chief Deputy Attorney General David Bydalek said the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education withdrew the guidance last month, according to the Lincoln Journal Star (<http://bit.ly/2nzyEBL>).

The Obama administration directed schools to allow transgender students to use restrooms and locker rooms according to their expressed gender. Those who didn't would have risked a loss of federal funding.

The Trump administration rescinded the guidance and left it to states and school districts to interpret federal anti-discrimination law and determine whether students should have access to restrooms in accordance with their expressed gender identity, and not just their sex at birth.

"The Department of Justice has restored the proper application of Title IX. Therefore, we dismissed our lawsuit," said Suzanne Gage, a spokeswoman for the Nebraska attorney general's office. "School districts will again have the freedom to fashion policies regarding sensitive privacy issues at the local level."

Nebraska filed the challenge in July. It was joined by Arkansas, Kansas, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota and Wyoming.

The battle began to take shape when officials in Charlotte, North Carolina, passed a sweeping anti-discrimination ordinance that included a provision allowing transgender people to use restrooms corresponding to their gender identity. North Carolina lawmakers passed a law nullifying that ordinance and banning others like it.

Soon after, the Justice Department said the law violated the federal Civil Rights Act and said it couldn't be enforced. Then-U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said North Carolina's law amounts to "state-sponsored discrimination" and is aimed at "a problem that doesn't exist."

Pierre mayor opposes Trump call to end rural air subsidies

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The mayor of South Dakota's capital city says President Donald Trump's call to eliminate subsidized air service to rural communities would be a mistake.

Pierre Mayor Laurie Gill told The Associated Press that she appreciates efficient government, but that the Essential Air Service program isn't a place to cut. She says the program is "vital for rural America."

The EAS program subsidizes airline flights to 171 communities in the continental U.S., including Pierre, Aberdeen and Watertown. They would otherwise have no air service.

Gill says that if Pierre had no service, residents would have to drive more than three hours to the nearest airport. She says the local hunting industry that draws people from around the country also would suffer.

Trump's proposal is expected to run into opposition in the Senate.

South Dakota hay relief headed south

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Truckloads of hay from South Dakota farmers are headed south to states where ranchers have been devastated by wildfires.

More than a dozen trucks loaded with hay bales left South Dakota Wednesday and Thursday destined for ranches in Colorado and Kansas. Organizer Jed Olbertson says a load has already arrived in the southwest Kansas community of Ashland.

Olbertson tells the Capital Journal (<http://bit.ly/2nvjwJ2>) six or more truckloads organized by a rancher from the Garretson, South Dakota area are also headed for Colorado.

Ranchers in Texas alone are facing at least \$21 million in agricultural damages from wildfires that blackened more than 750 square miles.

Governors in Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Kansas have asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to halt grazing restrictions on federal land to give surviving cattle more places to feed.

Information from: Pierre Capital Journal, <http://www.capjournal.com>

Republicans at odds over how to overhaul Medicaid

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House GOP health care bill has competition from other Republicans, a group of governors who've made their own proposal about how to overhaul Medicaid for low-income people. They're hoping GOP senators will find their ideas more persuasive.

It's a gradual approach, with additional options for states. It's likely to involve more federal spending than the House bill, but also keep more people covered. In the end, though, the governors are still talking about fundamental change.

Four GOP governors are pushing the plan, saying they represent most of the 33 Republican state chief executives. There's no inkling of any involvement by Democratic governors, and it's hard to conceive of such major changes without them.

Medicaid is a federal-state program that covers more than 70 million low-income people, about 1 in 5 Americans. Beneficiaries range from elderly nursing home residents to newborns. Former President Barack Obama expanded the program in his health care law, to mainly help low-income adults with no children living at home. About half the 31 states that accepted the expansion have Republican governors.

The House Republican bill would start by repealing Obama's Medicaid expansion. More significantly, it would limit overall federal spending on Medicaid going forward. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says the proposal would result in a cut of \$880 billion from projected Medicaid spending from 2017 to 2026. By that year, 14 million fewer people would have Medicaid coverage, and program spending would be about 25 percent lower than what's currently projected.

The House approach "provides almost no new flexibility for states, does not ensure the resources necessary to make sure no one is left out, and shifts significant new costs to states," Republican Govs. John Kasich of Ohio, Rick Snyder of Michigan, Brian Sandoval of Nevada, and Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas said in a recent letter to congressional leaders.

The future of Medicaid could become a pivotal issue as the health care debate moves to the Senate. Kevin Smith, a spokesman for Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, said his boss "shares (governors') concerns about the need to protect the Medicaid expansion population and give governors more flexibility to

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ensure they can design programs that meet the needs of their states.”

Differences between the House bill and the governors’ approach would have an impact on millions of people. Here’s a look:

MEDICAID EXPANSION

Current law: States can expand Medicaid to cover people making up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$16,640 for an individual. The federal government picks up almost all of the cost, gradually phasing down to a 90 percent share.

House bill: Ends Medicaid expansion. States can continue to receive the higher federal rate only for those enrolled by Dec. 31, 2019.

Governors: States that expanded Medicaid can also keep receiving the higher federal rate for new enrollees into the future if they agree to make other changes to their programs.

MEDICAID SPENDING LIMITS

Current law: Medicaid is an open-ended entitlement program. The federal government pays a share of each state’s cost of providing care for beneficiaries. That share varies among states, but the national average is nearly 60 percent.

House bill: Federal Medicaid funds would be limited under a per-beneficiary cap that takes into account what a state has spent traditionally, adjusted for inflation. House leaders are also expected to introduce an option for states to choose a block grant.

Governors: States could pick a per-beneficiary cap, a block grant or the current system. If they choose the current system, they would lose the more generous matching funds for new beneficiaries covered by expanded Medicaid.

If states choose a per-beneficiary cap or a block grant, they would not have to take a complete plunge.

Initially such limits would apply only to spending for able-bodied adults, including people covered through expanded Medicaid. It would be up to each state to decide whether to accept caps or block grants for sensitive groups of beneficiaries, including children, pregnant women, and elderly and disabled adults.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Current law: State Medicaid programs must cover FDA-approved drugs for medically accepted uses. Pharmaceutical companies pay Medicaid rebates to states under a complex formula. A costly new drug like recent ones for hepatitis C can cause havoc with state budgets.

House bill: Not addressed.

Governors: States would be able to exclude coverage for a given medication. The option to exclude a drug would give them leverage in price negotiations with drug companies.

ELIGIBILITY AND BENEFITS

Current law: Federal government sets threshold for eligibility. States must cover certain basic benefits, including hospitalization, doctor visits, nursing home care and health screenings.

House bill: Not addressed.

Governors: States that accept spending caps would be able to freeze or reduce enrollment, with exceptions. States could impose work requirements for able-bodied adults. States would also gain authority to redesign benefits and require beneficiaries to pay modest amounts for their care.

“The Medicaid program is complex and different (beneficiary) populations have different needs,” said Trish Riley, executive director of the nonpartisan National Academy for State Health Policy, which advises state policymakers. The governors “recognize that you can’t have a hard cap on a program that has a lot of unpredictable costs.”

Man killed after trying to grab Paris airport soldier’s gun

By NICOLAS GARRIGA and JOHN LEICESTER, Associated Press

ORLY, France (AP) — Soldiers at Paris’ busy Orly Airport shot and killed a man who wrestled one of

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their colleagues to the ground and tried to steal her rifle Saturday, officials said.

Thousands of travelers were evacuated and at least 15 flights were diverted to the city's other airport, Charles de Gaulle. No one else was hurt.

Police did not immediately provide a motive or identify the attacker, though the Paris prosecutor's office said he was 39 and had a record of robbery and drug offenses. The office said he did not appear in a French government database of people considered potential threats to national security.

Earlier Saturday, he fired birdshot at officers during a traffic stop in a Paris suburb, wounding one in the face. Then, Paris police said, he stole a woman's car at gunpoint. It was found near Orly.

The prosecutor's office said its anti-terrorism division was handling the investigation and had taken the attacker's father and brother into custody for questioning.

The incident further rattled France, which remains under a state of emergency after attacks over the past two years that have killed 235 people.

French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the attacker, whom he did not identify, assaulted three Air Force soldiers who were patrolling the airport. He said the soldier who was attacked managed to hold on to her rifle and the two soldiers she was with opened fire to protect her and the public. A spokesman for the force later said she was shocked but not hurt.

It happened around 8:30 a.m. Paris time (0730 GMT) in a public area of the airport's South Terminal, before passengers must show tickets or go through security.

Officials said about 3,000 people were evacuated from Orly, where passengers told of gunshots and panic. Traffic was jammed near the airport and people wheeled suitcases down the road.

People on 13 flights that landed around the time the drama was unfolding had to stay on planes for several hours. Augustin de Romanet, president of the ADP airport authority, said they were allowed off around noon, once a search of the airport was complete.

A witness identified only as Dominique told BFM Television that the attacker held the soldier by the throat and held her arm and her weapon.

"We saw it was a serious situation so we escaped," he said. "We went down the stairs and right after we heard two gunshots."

Taxi driver Youssef Mouhajra was picking up passengers at Orly when he heard shots, which he first thought were just a warning.

"We have become accustomed to this kind of warning and to having the soldiers there," he said.

Then he said he saw people rushing out of the terminal.

"I told (the passengers) let's get out of here," he said. As he drove away, he saw soldiers and police rushing toward the airport.

The soldier who was attacked is part of the Sentinelle special force installed around France to protect sensitive sites after a string of deadly Islamic extremist attacks. The force includes 7,500 soldiers, half deployed in the Paris region and half in the provinces.

Saturday was at least the fourth time that Sentinelle soldiers have been targeted since the force was created. It was set up after the attack January 2015 attack on satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and reinforced after the assaults that left 130 people dead in Paris in November of that year.

Orly is Paris' second-biggest airport, behind Charles de Gaulle. It has both domestic and international flights, notably to destinations in Europe and Africa.

The shooting comes after a similar incident last month at the Louvre Museum in which an Egyptian man attacked soldiers guarding the site and was shot and wounded. It also comes just days before the first anniversary of attacks on the Brussels airport and subway that killed 32 people and wounded hundreds of others.

Leicester reported from Paris. Associated Press Writers Angela Charlton in Paris and Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen contributed.

AP FACT CHECK: A Washington week of bluster

By CALVIN WOODWARD and JIM DRINKARD, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's first spending plan for the government and a report by the Congressional Budget Office on Republican health care kicked up quite a fuss in Washington over the past week. Bold claims flew on those developments and more. Many don't hold up to scrutiny:

BUDGET and ECONOMY

TRUMP: "Already, because of this new business climate, we are creating jobs that are starting to pour back into our country like we haven't seen in many, many decades. In the first two job reports since I took the oath of office, we've already added nearly half a million new jobs. And believe me, it's just beginning." — Tennessee rally, Wednesday.

THE FACTS: The president has yet to implement policies that would influence hiring on a national scale, despite his aggressive rhetoric on job creation. Nor has his presidency hurt job growth, judging by declines in unemployment in Barack Obama's last month in office and Trump's first. Trump takes undue credit for hiring that has yet to occur and for the return of jobs from overseas that have yet to come back. He's boasted about hiring plans by General Motors, Ford and other companies that were in the works before he took office.

MICK MULVANEY, Trump's budget director: "Let's talk about after-school programs generally. They're supposed to be educational programs, right? And that's what they're supposed to do, they're supposed to help kids who can't — who don't get fed at home, get fed so that they do better at school. Guess what? There's no demonstrable evidence they're actually doing that. There's no demonstrable evidence they're actually helping results, helping kids do better at school." — Thursday.

THE FACTS: There is such evidence and it comes from the government as well as multiple scientific studies.

Says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for example: "Student participation in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) School Breakfast Program (SBP) is associated with increased academic grades and standardized test scores, reduced absenteeism, and improved cognitive performance (e.g., memory)."

Another example: A Harvard study found that after-school programs in general lead to better grades, social development, health and wellness.

Mulvaney appeared to be referring to 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a \$1.2 billion program that the Trump administration tabbed in its budget proposal for elimination. The program provides after-school meals along with sports, clubs and enrichment activities. Its primary goal is to provide child care for the parents of 1.6 million kids, allowing them to maintain their jobs and incomes.

TRUMP: Speaking of the request in his new budget for a \$54 billion increase for the Pentagon, "Our budget calls for one of the single largest increases in defense spending history in this country."

THE FACTS: Trump's proposed increase, 10 percent higher than the Defense Department's current budget, is large, but a long way from the highest boost ever. In just the past 40 years, there have been eight years with larger increases in percentage terms than the one he's now proposing.

In the early 1980s, for example, defense spending was increased dramatically as the Cold War with the Soviet Union intensified. The 1981 Pentagon budget saw a nearly 25 percent increase.

And the proposed expansion pales in comparison with earlier times. Military spending consumed 43 percent of the economy in 1944, during World War II, and 15 percent in 1952, during the Korean War. It was 3.3 percent in 2015, says the World Bank.

NATO

TRUMP: "Many (NATO) nations owe vast sums of money from past years and it is very unfair to the United States. These nations must pay what they owe." — Friday.

THE FACTS: Other NATO countries do not have a past debt owing to the alliance or to the U.S.

The issue is that most of the 28 NATO member countries have not been living up to a commitment

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to spend 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense. The Trump administration is leaning on them to start meeting that commitment. But the U.S. is not trying to wring money from past years out of them.

HEALTH CARE

TRUMP: Claiming blanket conversion of Republican House members Friday for the GOP health care bill, "We just had a meeting with probably 12 congressmen, and it was an amazing meeting because they were all noes ... all noes or pretty much no ... but after 15 minutes, they went from no to all yeses." Going into the meeting, there were "no yesses."

THE FACTS: Trump is overstating his powers of persuasion. There were actually 13 lawmakers present, according to a White House attendance sheet, and at least five of them were already on board before they went into the meeting.

Two of those present, Reps. Steve Scalise and Patrick McHenry, are members of the House GOP leadership who are in charge of rounding up votes for the GOP replacement for Obamacare. Two others, Reps. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee and Bruce Westerman of Arkansas, had voted for the bill in their committees. And another, Rep. Andy Barr of Kentucky, spoke favorably about the bill in a March 9 speech, calling it a "crucial and necessary first step."

TRUMP, on Obama's health care law: "It's a disaster. Obamacare is dead." "It's just about on its last legs." Insurers are leaving the program and "many states are down to one." — Friday.

THE FACTS: Obamacare has problems, but they're not as dire as Trump describes.

The problems include premium increases and decisions by some insurers to leave the marketplace created by the law for people who buy their own policies. Five states — Alaska, Alabama, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Wyoming — have just one participating insurer across their entire jurisdictions. At the county level, more than 1,000 counties in 26 states are down to one insurer — about one-third of U.S. counties.

Premium increases are offset by subsidies for about 8 in 10 customers who buy individual health insurance policies through government-sponsored markets like HealthCare.gov. But millions who purchase their policies outside the marketplaces get no financial assistance.

A report from the Congressional Budget Office, though, says the market for individual policies in most places is "stable." The report said the market also would probably remain stable under the proposed GOP replacement legislation.

SEAN SPICER, White House press secretary: "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." — Tuesday.

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, on the CBO report that estimates 24 million more people will be without health insurance in a decade under the Republican legislation to replace Obamacare: "CBO is virtually unassailable. Everyone, Democrats and Republicans ... has gone along with CBO. ... They've been speaking the truth for decades and to try to attack CBO is simply attacking the messenger." — 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." — Monday.

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

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suiting 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."

MULVANEY: "If you have coverage that doesn't allow you to go to the 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." — Monday.

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.

IMMIGRATION

TRUMP: "And by the way, aren't our borders getting extremely strong? ... We've already experienced an unprecedented 40 percent reduction in illegal immigration on our southern border, 61 percent — 61 percent since Inauguration Day. Sixty-one percent; think about it. And now people are saying we're not going to go there anymore 'cause we can't get in, so it's going to get better and better." — Rally Wednesday.

THE FACTS: There's not much evidence yet that Trump is driving down illegal immigration. It's true that the number of border arrests dropped about 44 percent from January to February. But it's too early to know if that will hold or what prompted it. Monthly and seasonal fluctuations are common.

Trump hasn't expanded the ranks of the Border Patrol or any other immigration or border-security agency. His orders haven't yet changed the way the Border Patrol operates and so far there is no evidence that more people are being deported. The wall he's promised to build isn't up.

The number of border arrests is the primary measure of the flow of illegal immigration at the border, though an imperfect one. If fewer people are arrested, that's taken to mean fewer people are trying. Over recent decades, presidents have tried to have it both ways. They cite low arrest numbers to illustrate how their policies are dissuading people from crossing illegally. When arrest numbers are high, they say that's because they're being aggressive in enforcing the border.

Associated Press writers Maria Danilova, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Josh Boak and Alicia A. Caldwell contributed.

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

In Beijing, Tillerson urges China-US cooperation on N. Korea

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Saturday pushed for closer China-U.S. co-

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operation on dealing with North Korea's nuclear program in his first face-to-face talks with top Chinese diplomats.

Tillerson's visit to Beijing followed his remarks in South Korea on Friday in which he warned that preemptive military action against North Korea might be necessary if the threat from its weapons program reaches a level "that we believe requires action."

China, the North's biggest source of diplomatic support and economic assistance, hasn't responded directly to his remarks, although Beijing has called repeatedly for all sides to take steps to reduce tensions.

Tillerson stressed the need for a "results oriented" relationship with China in comments following his meeting Saturday with Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

"We renewed our determination to work together to convince North Korea to choose a better path and a different future for its people," Tillerson said.

He said Wang agreed on the need for a "course correction" with Pyongyang. Bringing North Korea "to a different place" is a matter to be approached with "a sense of urgency," Tillerson said.

Wang restated Beijing's calls for dialogue between the U.S. and North Korea and called Tillerson's visit an important step toward a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his U.S. counterpart, Donald Trump, expected next month.

Tillerson met later with Yang Jiechi, Xi's top foreign policy adviser. He is scheduled to meet with Xi on Sunday morning before returning to the U.S.

As North Korea's most important source of diplomatic support and economic assistance, China has grown increasingly concerned about the possibility of conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

Wang warned last week that North Korea on one side, and the U.S. and South Korea on the other, were like "two accelerating trains" headed at each other, with neither side willing to give way.

He floated a proposal that North Korea could suspend its nuclear and missile activities in exchange for a halt in joint U.S.-South Korea military drills. That was swiftly shot down by the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, who said Washington has to see "some sort of positive action" from North Korea before it can take leader Kim Jong Un seriously.

While China has agreed reluctantly to U.N. Security Council resolutions sanctioning North Korea, it is adamantly opposed to measures that might bring about a collapse of the North Korean regime and send waves of refugees into northeastern China while South Korean and American forces take up positions on its border.

That's left Beijing with few options other than to call for renewed dialogue under the Beijing-sponsored six-nation format that broke down in 2009.

In a further sign of its frustration with Pyongyang, China last month banned imports of North Korean coal for the rest of the year, potentially depriving Kim's regime of a key source of foreign currency.

On Friday, Tillerson signaled a tougher strategy toward North Korea that leaves open the possibility of pre-emptive military action.

"Let me be very clear: The policy of strategic patience has ended," he said after visiting the heavily militarized border between the rival Koreas. "We are exploring a new range of diplomatic, security and economic measures. All options are on the table."

Past U.S. administrations have considered military force because of North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them, but rarely has that option been expressed so explicitly as by Tillerson.

North Korea has accelerated its weapons development, violating multiple Security Council resolutions without being deterred by sanctions. The North conducted two nuclear test explosions and 24 ballistic missile tests last year. Experts say it could have a nuclear-tipped missile capable of reaching the U.S. within a few years.

China has stridently opposed the deployment of a U.S. missile defense system to South Korea, saying its X-band radar can peer deep into China to monitor flights and rocket launches. The U.S. says it's a system focused purely on North Korea and poses no threat to the security of other nations.

Tillerson's visit to Beijing is the final stop on his three-nation swing through Northeast Asia, which

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began in Japan. State Department officials have described it as a "listening tour" as the administration seeks to coordinate with its Asian partners on a coherent North Korea policy.

Though it didn't come up in his public remarks, Tillerson was expected to discuss with China its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea, including its building of islands atop coral reefs, complete with airstrips and military installations.

During his confirmation hearings in January, Tillerson compared China's island-building and deployment of military assets to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, and suggested that China's access to its newly built islands should be blocked.

While Trump pledged during his campaign to slap 45 percent tariffs on imports from China and label the country a currency manipulator, there has been little indication of his doing either. His pick for U.S. trade representative, Robert Lighthizer, has said he would use a "multifaceted approach" to cracking down on Chinese trade abuses.

Tillerson's trip also highlights the Trump administration's apparent lack of concern with human rights abuses in countries overseas, formerly a key element of U.S. policy toward China — and a major irritant in bilateral relations.

In a departure from past practice, Tillerson skipped the launch of an annual report on human rights last week that cited numerous abuses by China. He has also said the U.S. would not continue participating in the U.N. Human Rights Council unless it undergoes "considerable reform."

Republican health care plan creates budget problems for GOP

By **ANDREW TAYLOR, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans intent on scrapping Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act have a budget problem.

As it turns out, repealing and replacing the law they hate so much won't save nearly as much money as getting rid of it entirely, the goal they've been campaigning on for seven years. That means trouble for the federal deficit and for Congress' fiscal conservatives who repeatedly warn about leaving their children and grandchildren worse off financially.

President Donald Trump and other GOP leaders know they can't just get rid of the law; instead they've vowed to "repeal and replace" it. So they've come up with a bill that would fix Obama's "disaster" and insist it would give Americans more choices on health coverage.

But it only reduces the deficit by \$337 billion over a decade and doesn't move the federal budget much closer to being balanced, if at all. That's one big reason many budget-conscious Republicans have joined Democrats in opposing the repeal-and-replace version pushed by the White House and House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

In proposing his 2018 budget on Thursday, Trump called for spending billions more on defense while slashing domestic programs. He vowed during the campaign to leave the costly mandatory programs such as Medicare and Social Security untouched, and he won't raise taxes. That budget plan guarantees large deficits.

"Our military is more important to me than a balanced budget," Trump said in a Fox News interview in January.

The initial Republican plan to completely scuttle the 2010 health care law promised a cut of more than \$2 trillion from the deficit over 10 years.

The GOP health care bill cuts the deficit by much less.

"Now that (health care repeal) is actually going to happen, they've changed their priorities greatly so that they're not actually trying to generate any significant savings," said Maya MacGuineas, president of Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a Washington-based advocacy group for budget discipline. "And there's no sign what they can fill it in with."

A senior member of the House Budget Committee, Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., says: "Oh yeah, there's no question. It's much tougher, much tougher" to balance the budget after repealing and replacing the health care law.

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What would be left behind, according to the Congressional Budget Office, is \$9 trillion in projected deficits over the coming decade and fewer ways for Trump and Republicans controlling Congress to cut.

The worsening deficit creates a huge problem for other critical pieces of Trump's agenda, including tax reform, a big infusion of infrastructure spending or helping people with the costs of child care.

First, swelling deficits mean less money for such legislation.

The deepening debt hole also means problems when Republicans try to pass a budget outline this spring, since some tea party Republicans and deficit hard-liners will insist on promising to balance the budget even though the math no longer works. More realistic lawmakers will resist that.

Under the arcane congressional budget process, the yearly budget blueprint doesn't by itself make any changes to government programs, but it makes it easier to enact follow-up legislation like tax reform, which is the top GOP priority after dealing with health care.

But if they can't pass a budget, Republicans can't pass tax reform — at least without help from Senate Democrats — because of Senate rules.

The fiscal picture, meanwhile, has another complication. If Republicans can successfully pass their health care repeal and replacement they will have used up their opportunity to cut Medicaid to generate savings toward a balanced budget. The health measure promises an enormous \$880 billion cut from Medicaid over 10 years and it's not credible to say Republicans could claim more in subsequent legislation.

"They've taken (Medicaid) off the table," said Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a conservative economist and former Congressional Budget Office director.

"The math doesn't work," said Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md. "Just nothing that they're doing adds up right now."

How big is the problem? According to calculations by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, if House Republicans were to simply plug their health repeal and replace bill into last year's budget resolution, they would fall \$350 billion short of balance by the end of their 10-year goal. And if further Medicaid savings are taken off the table, the gap is more like \$500 billion.

"It's going to be extremely difficult," admitted budget panel member Cole.

Fouling flubs mark first 2 days of NCAA Tournament

By STEVE MEGARGEE, AP Sports Writer

Coaches across the country can use the first two days of the NCAA Tournament as examples when they're teaching the importance of knowing when and how to foul in late-game situations.

One day after Northwestern sank the winning free throws in a 68-66 victory over Vanderbilt after an ill-timed foul, Arkansas clinched its 77-71 triumph over Seton Hall after the Pirates got called for a flagrant foul in the final minute.

Arkansas was clinging to a 72-71 lead over Seton Hall with 18.3 seconds remaining Friday when Seton Hall's Desi Rodriguez fouled Arkansas' Jaylen Barford in an attempt to stop the clock and get the Razorbacks to the foul line.

But instead of merely calling a common foul on the play, officials determined Rodriguez had committed a flagrant foul after they looked at replays showing the Seton Hall player putting his hands on Barford's back and left shoulder.

That enabled Arkansas to maintain possession after making two free throws. By the time Seton Hall got the ball back, it trailed by four points with less than 10 seconds remaining.

"I think I made a basketball play," Rodriguez said. "I didn't foul intentionally to hurt anyone. The officials called it another way, and that's that."

J.D. Collins, the NCAA national coordinator of men's basketball officiating, said the right call was made because Rodriguez simply put his hands on Barford without ever making an attempt at the ball.

"If he makes a legitimate attempt to play the ball and the referees see that, they're likely going to say, 'Hey, he was playing the ball, it's OK,'" Collins said.

Arkansas coach Mike Anderson agreed.

"I thought (there) was no play on the ball," Anderson said. "That's as simple as that."

But Seton Hall coach Kevin Willard said the context of the situation should be taken into account. After all, it wasn't any mystery that Seton Hall was going to be trying to foul in an attempt to stop the clock.

"If you've been around the game long enough, you've got to know time, score, you've got to know what's going on," Willard said. "It's an NCAA Tournament game. I think you've really got to understand what's going on. But they (officials) a good game all night. So I can't really complain about whether I agree or not. I'm always going to disagree with it. That's what coaches do."

In the Northwestern game, the problem wasn't with how Matthew Fisher-Davis fouled Bryant McIntosh. It's the fact that Fisher-Davis fouled him at all.

Northwestern had the ball and was trailing 66-65 with less than 15 seconds left when Fisher-Davis fouled McIntosh, who made two free throws to put the Wildcats ahead for good. After Vanderbilt's Riley LaChance missed a 3-pointer and Northwestern made one more free throw, the Wildcats had a 68-66 victory.

Fisher-Davis said afterward he saw Vanderbilt coach Bryce Drew pointing toward McIntosh and forgot that the Commodores had just pulled ahead.

"I actually thought we were down one (point)," Fisher-Davis said. "Coach ... pointed at him, but he was just telling me that was my matchup. I took it as (I should) foul."

Fisher-Davis' situation underscores the costs of making a mistake in these types of circumstances. Fisher-Davis scored 22 points Thursday and played the biggest role in rallying Vanderbilt from a 15-point deficit, but much of that was forgotten once his foul enabled Northwestern to regain the lead.

"It could have been a miscommunication," Drew said "He looked over at me before. But one play doesn't lose the game for you. And I'm proud of the guys fighting back and being in that situation. Without him, we're not even close to being in that situation at the end."

AP Sports Writers Aaron Beard in Greenville, South Carolina, and Eddie Pells in Salt Lake City contributed to this report.

More AP college basketball: <http://collegebasketball.ap.org> and http://www.twitter.com/AP_Top25

Florida prosecutor's anti-death penalty stand surprises many

By MIKE SCHNEIDER, Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The Florida prosecutor who thrust herself into the forefront of the anti-death penalty movement is a political novice who was elected just seven months ago.

Aramis Ayala, a Democrat and former public defender and assistant state attorney, surprised many of her own supporters when she announced this week that her office would no longer seek capital punishment in a state that has one of the largest death rows. In response, the state's Republican governor promptly transferred a potential death penalty case — the killing of a police officer and a pregnant woman earlier this year — to another Florida prosecutor.

"I understand this is a controversial issue, but what isn't controversial is the evidence that led me to my decision," said Ayala, the first black state attorney elected in Florida.

She said there is no evidence that shows the death penalty improves public safety for citizens or law enforcement, and it's costly and drags on for years for the victims' families.

Advocates seeking to abolish the death penalty said Ayala sent a powerful message. Her decision reflects decreasing support for capital punishment in the U.S., said Karen Clifton, executive director of the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty.

"There are some prosecutors who in practice are following her lead. They just haven't spoken out like she has," Clifton said. "It would be wonderful if they spoke out and we could have a louder voice."

Ayala spent the first decade or so of her career as an assistant state attorney and public defender. She was a prosecutor in the state attorney's office for Orange and Osceola counties for about two years before she decided to seek the top job. The county is home to Walt Disney World and other tourist at-

tractions and has grown more liberal over the past two decades.

Ayala was a political newcomer last year when she took on her former boss, then-State Attorney Jeff Ashton, who had been one of the prosecutors in the Casey Anthony case. Anthony was acquitted of murder in the death of her 2-year-old daughter, Caylee.

Ayala didn't run on an anti-death penalty platform when she campaigned, since at the time Florida's death penalty law was in question after the U.S. Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional. A new death penalty bill was signed into law this week.

She instead emphasized during her campaign that she would engage with average citizens if elected. She acknowledged that her husband had served time in prison for drug conspiracy and counterfeiting checks years ago.

Even some of Ayala's supporters said Friday they were taken aback by her decision.

Lawson Lamar, a former state attorney and sheriff, who backed her run for office, said: "Anyone who raises their hand and takes the oath to be state attorney must be able to go with the death penalty even if they feel it's distasteful."

Ayala's campaign was helped by a Washington-based political action committee with ties to liberal Hungarian-born U.S. billionaire George Soros. The committee gave Ayala's campaign almost \$1 million, as well as millions of dollars to candidates in local races around the nation.

When asked if the donations influenced her decision, she said it did not.

Florida has 381 inmates on death and shows no sign of slowing down future prosecutions. The other state attorneys in Florida issued a statement Friday saying they would continue to seek the death penalty.

Rafael Zaldivar, whose son was murdered in Orlando in 2012, said Ayala's decision is part of a political agenda and has no place in the state attorney's office. He demanded her resignation.

"She is an activist. She isn't a prosecutor. She has an agenda," said Zaldivar, whose son's killer was sentenced to death in 2015. Questions over Florida's death penalty law have cast doubt over the sentence. His case is currently on appeal.

After Ayala announced her decision, Gov. Rick Scott transferred the case of Markeith Loyd from her authority to another state attorney in a neighboring district. Loyd is charged in the killing of police Lt. Debra Clayton, as well as Sade Dixon, who was Loyd's pregnant ex-girlfriend.

Dixon's mother said she supported Ayala's decision, saying the death penalty would drag out the process for her family.

"I would love for him to die right now, but that isn't going to happen," Stephanie Dixon-Daniels said at a news conference outside the Orange County Courthouse.

Ayala's decision could play into any future political aspirations. In California, then-District Attorney Kamala Harris faced similar circumstances a dozen years ago when she decided not to pursue the death penalty against a man accused of killing a San Francisco police officer. Harris went on to become the state's attorney general and a U.S. senator.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/mikeschneiderap>. His work can be found at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/Mike-Schneider>

King's Iowa district shrugs off racially charged comments

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE, Associated Press

CARROLL, Iowa (AP) — Outside his rural congressional district stretching over 39 Iowa counties, conservative U.S. Rep. Steve King's stream of inflammatory comments generate outrage and condemnation, but back home they rate little more than a shrug.

"That's just Steve being Steve," was how Tom Reiter put it, looking into a mirror while getting his hair cut Thursday in Carroll. "He doesn't pull any punches."

It's been that way since King, a former construction company owner and state legislator, was elected to Congress in 2002. It's still true, days after King tweeted his support for a far-right Dutch politician who opposes immigration and added, "We can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies."

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Later in a radio interview, King responded to a question about changing demographics that could mean whites will no longer make up a U.S. majority by predicting, "Hispanics and the blacks will be fighting each other before that happens."

King's comments prompted House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to call for Republican leaders to condemn what she called "vile racism," and House Speaker Paul Ryan told Fox News he disagreed with King about "somebody else's babies." The White House also distanced itself from King's comments.

In the 4th Congressional District, dotted with small towns and some of the world's most valuable farmland, King remains popular, typically winning 60 percent or more of the vote with reliable support even from those who feel uneasy about some of his statements. The comments have included opposition to placing an image of black anti-slavery activist Harriet Tubman on the \$20 bill, comments about immigrant children having "calves the size of cantaloupes" because of carrying marijuana across the border and support for fortifying a border wall by placing an electric wire on top.

Although the Hispanic population is growing in cities such as Storm Lake with large meat processing plants, the district remains overwhelmingly white and deeply conservative, with about 70,000 more Republicans than Democrats. It backed Trump in the 2016 election by nearly 2 to 1, with some counties giving the Republican six times more votes than Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Many voters credit King for a willingness to speak his mind despite criticism.

"He's honestly saying what he believes," said Pat Luther, a retired teacher who joined her husband for coffee and a frosted doughnut Thursday at Bunkers Dunkers Bakery in Jefferson.

Her husband, Dave Luther, nodded and added, "Political correctness makes me tired."

The couple have lived most of their lives in Jefferson, a city of 4,200 on the southern edge of the district, and acknowledged some of King's comments "make you cringe."

But Dave Luther, a Republican and retired insurance agent, said he believes King doesn't mean to be offensive.

"He's just concerned about immigration and how our country is changing," he said.

Although the entire district favors Republicans, apart from Ames, home to Iowa State University, it gets more conservative heading north and west.

Heading west to Carroll, hair stylist Amy Riddle agrees with customer Reiter that in a conservative district, voters are willing to overlook statements from a congressman they trust, and agree with on issues.

"If you know the character of a person, you're able to give him a little grace," she said.

Don Kass, the chairman of the Republican Party in Plymouth County, said he sometimes wishes King wouldn't "feed the liberal bears," but adds that most criticism comes from people outside the district.

Since they agree with King on the issues, Gwen Ecklund, a Republican party leader in Crawford County, said voters don't worry about his comments.

"I think there's a skepticism among the voters regarding Washington and the media and because of that, the voters may not seem to take it as seriously as others do," she said.

Not everyone supports King, though it's hard to find someone who thinks voters will reject the congressman.

One who holds out hope is Democrat Kim Weaver, who ran against King in 2016. She lost in 38 of 39 counties but expressed optimism as she edges toward another run next year.

"Maybe it's just that I'm naive, but I don't believe the people in northwest Iowa are horrible racist bigots, not aware of what's going on," said Weaver, who works as an advocate for seniors in care centers.

Weaver said King's recent comments prompted a flood of donations from inside and outside the district to an exploratory committee she has established.

"People are starting to realize, this guy really means this stuff," she said.

Dorla Neiderheiser, a retired nurse from the 200-person city of Paton in Greene County, said she'd like to see King replaced, quipping that "People on the coasts must feel like we're uneducated."

Still, she said, "A lot of people seem to want to hear it that way."

Libertarian Dale Gentry, a retired teacher from Rockwell City who owns an auto restoration business just off the 2,100-person city's town square, is no fan of the congressman, saying "Steve doesn't plug his mind in before his mouth takes off."

But Gentry doesn't have a lot of faith in the two political parties, which he says cater to a left and

right fringe.

"That's not the way it should be," he said. "We've lost the middle of the road guys."

Follow Scott McFetridge on Twitter at: <https://twitter.com/smcfetridge>

Telecom policy tilts in favor of industry under Trump's FCC

By TALI ARBEL, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Trumpism is slowly taking hold on your phone and computer, as newly installed federal regulators begin chipping away at hard-fought protections on privacy and competition.

These protections, put in place during the Obama administration, had upset the phone and cable industries. The new regime at the Federal Communications Commission says consumers win if businesses face less regulation and have more incentives to invest.

But consumer advocates worry these changes give broadband providers that own media businesses more power to favor their own services, among other things.

The changes are small and easily overlooked. But they're the first shots in what could turn into a full-fledged war over Obama-era "net neutrality" rules, which were designed to keep phone and cable giants from favoring their own internet services and apps. Overturning these rules would also likely reverse a privacy measure meant to keep broadband providers from using and selling customer data without permission.

"Death by a thousand cuts is a constantly overused cliché, but that's sort of what they're aiming for right now," said Matt Wood, the policy director of consumer group Free Press, referring to the Republicans now in power at the FCC.

The agency has five commissioners appointed by the president and oversees internet services and the broadcast industry.

DEATH TO NET NEUTRALITY

It's no secret President Donald Trump's hand-picked FCC chief, Ajit Pai, wants to cut regulations that he believes are holding back faster, cheaper internet.

Pai takes special aim at net neutrality rules, which regulate broadband as a utility and bar providers from playing favorites by offering speedier access to, say, their own streaming-video services. Pai considers these rules a mistake that slows investment in internet infrastructure. His goal is to expand internet access, especially in rural areas where choices are limited.

But an aggressive overhaul of net neutrality could be politically and legally difficult. For a telecom policy, net neutrality is popular with consumers, drawing attention from comedian John Oliver and spurring people to flood the FCC with roughly 4 million comments (not all in support, of course). A federal appeals court upheld the rules in June.

This may explain why the FCC has so far opted for a piecemeal attack — an approach that may continue for a while.

NIBBLING AROUND THE EDGES

A broad attack on the landmark 2015 net neutrality rules is expected. But under Pai, the FCC has made only some tweaks to the agency's approach. These rules have barred broadband providers from blocking and slowing some websites and creating faster access for their own services. But the rules also gave the FCC broader powers to stop telecom companies from hurting competition and consumers in other ways that weren't spelled out.

When Barack Obama was president, the FCC used those broader powers to go after "zero-rating" plans, which give subscribers free data so long as they stick with their carrier's own streaming-TV service, like AT&T's DirecTV Now. Zero rating may be popular with consumers — hey, free data! — but the FCC under Obama had argued that letting internet providers play favorites undermines streaming-video competition and ultimately leaves consumers worse off. After Pai took office, the FCC reversed that stance and gave a thumbs-up to AT&T and other carriers with zero-rating policies.

The agency also exempted additional smaller broadband providers from a net neutrality regulation

that required companies to spell out their pricing, such as specifying how long promotional rates last and whether services capped monthly data usage.

Until the FCC or Congress goes full-bore on net neutrality, the agency will likely "stand down" from enforcing it unless there's a "really extreme" violation, said Marc Martin, technology and telecom attorney with Perkins Coie.

ONLINE PRIVACY REDO

The agency has also blocked part of a broadband privacy measure that requires companies like Comcast and Verizon to take "reasonable measures" to secure customer information like financial data or web browsing histories.

The remaining privacy rules, which aren't in effect yet, are now under threat. Under these rules, phone and cable companies must ask permission before using or selling your data. Phone and cable companies have complained that these rules are tougher than what internet-advertising behemoths like Google and Facebook face. Pai says he wants to work with the Federal Trade Commission, another D.C. regulator, to come up with broadband privacy rules that are more in line with the laxer standards for internet companies.

Republican lawmakers have proposed spiking them completely. Democrats say that would leave consumers vulnerable and allow companies like Verizon or AT&T able to sell consumer information to advertisers. There are vaguer privacy requirements that still apply under the net neutrality rules, but the agency may be loath to enforce them, Martin said. And the net neutrality rules are expected to be undone in any case.

BROADBAND ACCESS AND PRISON PHONE RATES

Other efforts that were intended to address inequities, like the high cost of prison phone calls and broadband for lower-income people, are seen as endangered.

The agency refused to defend in court an FCC rule that capped rates for in-state calls made to people in prison. And it has limited the availability of government-subsidized internet service for poorer Americans by pulling nine providers from a program called Lifeline. The agency cited concerns about fraud and waste. The FCC says Lifeline still had dozens of companies offering discounted broadband as of December. The FCC may be open to reconsidering its decision.

Trump OKs changes in GOP health care bill, winning support

By ALAN FRAM and ERICA WERNER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump agreed to add fresh Medicaid curbs to the House Republican health care bill Friday, bolstering the measure with support from some conservative lawmakers but leaving its prospects wobbly. House leaders discussed other amendments calibrated to round up votes and scheduled a showdown vote Thursday.

"I just want to let the world know I am 100 percent in favor" of the measure, Trump said at the White House after meeting around a dozen House lawmakers and shaking hands on revisions. "We're going to have a health care plan that's going to be second to none."

While the rapid-fire events seemed to build momentum for the pivotal GOP legislation, its fate remained clouded. One leading House conservative said the alterations were insufficient and claimed enough allies to sink the measure, and support among moderates remained uncertain.

"My whip count indicates that there are 40 no's," enough to defeat the bill, said Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., who leads the hard-line House Freedom Caucus. He said the change "doesn't move the ball more than a couple yards on a very long playing field."

Across the Capitol, Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., facing re-election next year, became the fourth Republican senator to announce his opposition. That left Senate GOP leaders at least two votes shy of what they'd need to prevail in the chamber, which they control 52-48.

Congressional Democrats remain solidly opposed to the GOP effort.

Thursday will mark the seventh anniversary of when President Barack Obama signed his health overhaul

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into law, one of his milestone achievements enacted over unanimous GOP opposition. Beyond symbolism, Republican leaders want Congress to complete the measure before an early April recess exposes lawmakers to two weeks of lobbying and town hall pressure tactics by activists, doctors, hospitals and other opponents.

The Republican bill would kill much of Obama's health care law, including tax penalties for people who don't buy insurance and its expansion of Medicaid, the federal-state health program for the poor. It would create new tax credits that would be less generous than current federal subsidies for many consumers, and repeal levies on the wealthy and medical firms that helped finance Obama's expansion of coverage to 20 million Americans.

Trump's deal with lawmakers would let states impose work requirements on some of Medicaid's roughly 60 million recipients. The condition would apply to healthy people with no dependents, a White House official said.

The agreement would let states accept lump-sum federal payments for Medicaid, instead of money that would grow with the number of beneficiaries. The program currently costs the federal government around \$370 billion annually and covers costs no matter the amounts.

Also, any additional states that expand Medicaid would not receive the additional federal money Obama's law provided them for doing so. Thirty-one states have enlarged their Medicaid rolls under the law.

"These changes definitely strengthen our numbers," said the House GOP's top vote counter, Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana. "But they also show that President Trump is all-in now" to help win converts.

Those accepting the agreement included Rep. Mark Walker, R-N.C., leader of the Republican Study Committee, a large group of House conservatives.

It seemed clear that GOP leaders remained short of the 216 votes they'll need, and additional changes were in the works.

Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., said House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., assured him that the bill's tax credit would be focused more on lower-income people. Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Ala., among those who met with Trump, said the president "told his people" to work on changes making the measure more generous for lower-earning and older Americans.

Conservatives seemed unlikely to achieve their demands that the GOP bill's phase-out of Obama's Medicaid expansion — now 2020 — be accelerated to next year and that the credit be denied people with little or no tax liability. Centrists remained wary of yanking constituents from coverage. Many represent states where voters have gained Medicaid and other insurance under the 2010 statute.

Freshman GOP Rep. John Katko, from a closely divided district in New York's Hudson River valley, said late Friday he opposed the measure. He said it would provide inadequate insurance access and cost controls and hurt hospitals.

In a report that weakened GOP support, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has said the legislation would leave 24 million people uninsured in a decade and boost out-of-pocket costs for many.

Heller, whose state has expanded Medicaid, joined three fellow GOP senators in opposing the bill: Susan Collins of Maine, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Mike Lee of Utah. Republican Sens. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Ted Cruz of Texas have voiced strong objections, and Senate moderates don't want to boot constituents off coverage.

Associated Press writers Erica Werner, Kevin Freking, Matthew Daly, Jill Colvin and Kenneth Thomas contributed to this report.

Trump sidesteps blame over wiretap row with Britain

By JULIE PACE and VIVIAN SALAMA, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump defiantly refused to back down Friday from his explosive claim that Barack Obama wiretapped his phones, and sidestepped any blame for the White House decision to highlight an unverified report that Britain helped carry out the alleged surveillance.

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In brushing off the diplomatic row with perhaps America's closest ally, Trump also revived another: the Obama administration's monitoring of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's calls.

"At least we have something in common, perhaps," Trump quipped during a joint news conference with Merkel.

Merkel, who was making her first visit to the White House since Trump took office, looked surprised by the president's comment, which he appeared primed to deliver. The Obama administration's spying infuriated Germany at the time and risked damaging the U.S. relationship with one of its most important European partners.

Trump's unproven recent allegations against his predecessor have left him increasingly isolated, with fellow Republican as well as Democratic lawmakers saying they've seen nothing from intelligence agencies to support his claim. But Trump, who rarely admits he's wrong, has been unmoved, leaving his advisers in the untenable position of defending the president without any credible evidence.

On Thursday, spokesman Sean Spicer turned to a Fox News analyst's contention that GCHQ, the British electronic intelligence agency, had helped Obama wiretap Trump. Fox News anchor Shepard Smith said Friday that the network could not independently verify the reports from Andrew Napolitano, a former judge and commentator who has met with Trump.

The GCHQ vigorously denied the charges in a rare public statement, saying the report was "utterly ridiculous and should be ignored."

According to a Western diplomat, Britain's ambassador to Washington, Kim Darroch, had told the White House Tuesday that Napolitano's assertions were not true. Still, it was among several news reports Spicer referenced in his briefing Thursday as part of an angry defense of the president's claims.

Darroch and other British officials complained directly to White House officials after the episode, Prime Minister Theresa May's office said it had been assured the White House would not repeat the allegations. Spicer was very apologetic when confronted by Darroch at a White House dinner on Thursday, the Western diplomat said.

But Trump himself offered no public apologies and suggested there was nothing wrong with the White House repeating what it had heard.

"All we did was quote a certain very talented legal mind who was the one responsible for saying that on television," Trump said during Friday's news conference. "You shouldn't be talking to me, you should be talking to Fox."

Spicer was also defiant Friday, telling reporters, "I don't think we regret anything."

A White House official confirmed that Darroch and the British prime minister's national security adviser, Mark Lyall Grant, expressed concerns to both Spicer and Trump's national security adviser, H.R. McMaster. Spicer and McMaster said that the press secretary was simply pointing to public reports and not endorsing any specific story, the official said.

The U.S. and United Kingdom are members of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance, which prohibits members from spying on each other. Australia, Canada and New Zealand are the other members.

The diplomat and White House official both spoke only on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

The president is a voracious consumer of news and frequently repeats information he reads or hears on television, often without verifying it first. It was a story in Breitbart — the far-right website once run by his senior adviser Steve Bannon — that appeared to spark Trump's March 4 tweets accusing Obama of wiretapping the New York skyscraper where he lived and ran his presidential campaign.

The White House has asked the House and Senate intelligence committees to investigate the matter as part of their inquiries into Russia's hacking of the presidential election and possible contacts between Trump associates and Russian officials. But the top lawmakers on both committees have said they have seen no indications that Trump Tower was wiretapped.

The Justice Department said Friday that it had complied with congressional requests for information related to any surveillance during the 2016 election. The department would not comment further on what information, if any, was provided.

The chairman of the House intelligence committee, Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., confirmed Friday that the Justice Department had "fully complied" with the committee's request. He, too, declined to provide

details.

Republicans in Congress also said Trump should retract his claims. Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Pa., called the accusation against Britain "inexplicable" and the Trump's accusation against Obama unfounded.

"A president only has so much political capital to expend and so much moral authority as well, and so any time your credibility takes a hit, I think in many ways it weakens the officeholder," Dent said.

FBI Director James Comey is sure to be asked about the wiretapping allegations when he testifies on Capitol Hill Monday. The public hearing is the first of several that the intelligence committees are expected to hold on Russia's interference in the election.

AP writers Jill Lawless in London and Jill Colvin and Erica Werner in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC> and Vivian Salama at <http://twitter.com/vmsalama>

Man charged as run-over medic is mourned as job's matriarch

By COLLEEN LONG and JENNIFER PELTZ, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man accused of crushing a fire department medic to death under the wheels of a stolen ambulance told reporters Friday he'd done nothing wrong, while his lawyer said he was mentally ill and didn't act intentionally.

As colleagues mourned Fire Department Emergency Medical Services technician Yadira Arroyo at a stationhouse draped in black and purple bunting, Jose Gonzalez was arraigned on murder and other charges in her gruesome death. The mom of five sons worked as medic for 14 years, and colleagues said she was devoted to her job and a mother figure to co-workers as well as her own family.

Gonzalez, 25, hopped on the back of Arroyo's ambulance Thursday night, then darted into the driver's seat and ran her over after a man on the street flagged the vehicle down to say Gonzalez had seized his backpack, authorities said.

"I'm innocent. I didn't do nothing," Gonzalez said as he was escorted out of a police station, surrounded by angry, uniformed emergency medical technicians hurling insults.

Police said Gonzalez had been high on drugs during the deadly encounter. His lawyer, Alice Fontier, said he has a severe mental illness. She didn't identify it, saying his history would be disclosed later in court.

"Whatever may have happened here, none of his actions were intentional," Fontier said, calling Arroyo's death a tragedy for both the EMT's family's and the suspect's.

Gonzalez is being held without bail.

Police said Gonzalez, who lived for about a month at a group home for chronically homeless single adults, had a history of arrests and violent and erratic behavior with officers. Fontier said his record involves mostly marijuana possession charges, as well as ongoing misdemeanor assault and criminal mischief cases.

Arroyo, 44, was incredibly dedicated, responding to calls even during asthma attacks, her colleagues said Friday.

"Yadi was the matriarch of the station," Lt. George Lampon said, choking back tears during a somber ceremony at Arroyo's stationhouse. "She was not only a mother of five, but a mother to the 100-plus people who worked here."

Another medic, Anastasia Rabos, said Arroyo was a great mentor and friend and "a very humble person."

Arroyo and another EMT were responding to a routine medical call when Gonzalez began riding on the back of the ambulance, police said. Arroyo was driving.

After they were flagged down, Arroyo got out and briefly spoke to Gonzalez before he dashed into the driver's seat, according to a court complaint.

She tried to stop him from driving off, but he threw the vehicle in reverse and ran her over, then drove forward and hit her again, the complaint said. A bystander's video, posted on Twitter, captured a horrific scene of the ambulance speeding across an intersection with one of its doors open, its lights flashing

and Arroyo's body being dragged beneath.

Gonzalez was captured moments later by a passing transit police officer and a bystander after the ambulance hit several parked cars and got stuck on a snowbank, authorities said.

The second EMT, seen in the bystander's video kneeling and sobbing over the body of her fallen partner, was treated at a Bronx hospital for minor injuries, police said.

All but the youngest of Arroyo's children, who range in age from 7 to 24, were able to say goodbye to her, her sister-in-law Monica Salazar told the New York Post.

"It was devastating. It was their mother. They were very upset, but the eldest held it together for the others, and he gave them a beautiful speech, saying he was going to take care of his brothers and be a rock for them," she told the newspaper.

While EMTs know their vital work can be dangerous, they don't expect violence, Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said Friday. Arroyo, he said, was extremely brave.

"We will, with her family, celebrate her life," he said. "We will mourn her death and stand strong together."

Tillerson: Pre-emptive force an option with NKorea

By MATTHEW PENNINGTON, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The United States signaled a tougher strategy toward North Korea on Friday that leaves open the possibility of pre-emptive military action and rejects talks with the communist nation until it gives up its weapons of mass destruction.

"Let me be very clear: the policy of strategic patience has ended," said Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. "We are exploring a new range of diplomatic, security and economic measures. All options are on the table."

Tillerson was speaking after visiting the heavily militarized border between the rival Koreas. His comments are likely to displease Beijing, where he travels this weekend. China has been advocating diplomacy to avoid a conflict on the divided peninsula.

Also Friday, President Donald Trump tweeted: "North Korea is behaving very badly. They have been 'playing' the United States for years. China has done little to help!"

Past U.S. administrations have considered military options against North Korea and have publicly said that an attack on the U.S. or its allies would prompt a devastating response.

Tillerson's comments were unusual, however, as he appeared to be implying, in public, that the U.S. would consider military force as a way of preventing an attack by Pyongyang, and not just as a means of retaliation. It also comes amid a greater sense of urgency about the threat because of North Korea's rapid progress toward developing the means to strike the U.S. with a nuclear-tipped missile. Risks of military action are high as North Korea could unleash a massive artillery barrage on Seoul in retaliation.

The Trump administration says it is conducting a review of North Korea policy. At a news conference in Seoul, alongside his South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-se, Tillerson said U.S. was exploring the new range of diplomatic, security and economic measures and emphasized that Obama administration's policy of "strategic patience"—that saw tightening of sanctions to try and get North Korea back to negotiations aimed at denuclearization—had ended.

Asked about the possibility of using military force against North Korea, he said, "all of the options are on the table."

Tillerson said the U.S. does not want a military conflict, "but obviously if North Korea takes actions that threaten South Korean forces or our own forces that would be met with (an) appropriate response. If they elevate the threat of their weapons program to a level that we believe requires action that option is on the table."

Former members of the Clinton administration have said that the U.S. considered a strike on a North Korean nuclear facility in 1994 when it appeared on the brink of producing weapons-grade fissile material and refused U.N. inspections. A diplomatic deal was struck to avert conflict.

Since then, North Korea has violated multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions and has been unde-

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tered by tough international sanctions. The North conducted two nuclear test explosions and 24 ballistic missile tests last year. Last week, after the U.S. and South Korea began annual military drills that the North views as rehearsal for invasion, it test-fired four missiles into seas off Japan.

Central to the U.S. review is China and its role in any bid to persuade Pyongyang to change course. China remains North Korea's most powerful ally and dominant trading partner. China recently announced it was suspending coal imports that are an important source of revenue for North Korea for the rest of the year in adherence with U.N. sanctions.

Tillerson urged China and other countries to fully implement the sanctions. He criticized China's opposition to a U.S. missile defense system being deployed in South Korea and accused it of waging "inappropriate and troubling" economic retaliation against the South. China sees the system as a threat to its own security although the U.S. says it is only targeted against North Korea. Tillerson said China should focus on the North Korean threat that makes the deployment necessary.

Tillerson also rejected Beijing's proposal of halting the U.S.-South Korean military drills in exchange for a nuclear freeze by North Korea. He said the allies had no intention to stand down the exercises that are defensive in nature and conducted transparently, unlike North Korean missile launches. He further sounded skeptical about the idea of negotiating a freeze that would leave the North with "significant capabilities" that could threaten the region and U.S. forces.

The U.S. retains nearly 30,000 troops in South Korea, and nearly 50,000 in neighboring Japan.

More broadly, Tillerson poured cold water on the idea of resuming negotiations with Pyongyang, saying, "20 years of talks with North Korea have brought us to where we are today."

"It's important that the leadership of North Korea realize that their current pathway of nuclear weapons and escalating threats will not lead to their objective of security and economic development. That pathway can only be achieved by denuclearizing, giving up their weapons of mass destruction, and only then will we be prepared to engage with them in talks," he said.

Six-nation aid-for-disarmament talks with North Korea, which were hosted by China, have in fact been stalled since 2009. The Obama administration refused to resume them unless the North re-committed to the goal of denuclearization, something it has shown little interest in doing.

Earlier Friday, Tillerson touched down by helicopter at Camp Bonifas, U.S.-led U.N. base about 400 meters (438 yards) from the Demilitarized Zone, a Cold War vestige created after the Korean War ended in 1953. He then moved to the truce village of Panmunjom inside the DMZ, a cluster of blue huts where the Korean War armistice was signed. He is flying this week without the usual contingent of journalists who normally cover the secretary of state.

Tillerson is the latest in a parade of senior U.S. officials to have their photos taken at the border. But it was the first trip by the new Trump administration's senior diplomat.

The DMZ, which is both a tourist trap and a potential flashpoint, is guarded on both sides with land mines, razor wire fence, tank traps and hundreds of thousands of combat-ready troops. More than a million mines are believed to be buried inside the DMZ. The Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty, which means the Korean Peninsula remains in a technical state of war.

Associated Press photographer Lee Jin-man at Camp Bonifas, South Korea, contributed to this report.

Trump, Merkel try to sidestep differences in first meeting

By KEN THOMAS and JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel tried to sidestep their differences in a meeting at the White House Friday, but their first public appearance was punctuated by some awkward moments.

During a photo op in the Oval Office, the two did not shake hands before reporters. Trump pushed back against the notion in Europe that his "America First" agenda means he's an isolationist, calling such a suggestion "another example of, as you say, fake news." And he referred to the United States as "a very powerful company," before quickly correcting that to "country."

When a German reporter asked Trump if he regrets any of his commentary on Twitter, Trump said,

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“Very seldom.”

Merkel maintained her composure even when Trump repeated his contention that former President Barack Obama may have tapped his phones in Trump Tower. He sought to turn the explosive charge into a light joke when asked about concerns raised by the British government that the White House is now citing a debunked claim that U.K. spies snooped on Trump.

“At least we have something in common, perhaps,” Trump said casually, referring to 2013 reports that the U.S. was monitoring Merkel’s cellphone conversations. As for the most recent report, Trump said he shouldn’t be blamed for quoting a Fox News analyst who had accused British intelligence of helping Obama spy on him.

When the subject turned to economic issues, Merkel attempted to project a conciliatory approach. She said the “success of Germans has always been one where the German success is one side of the coin and the other side of the coin has been European unity and European integration. That’s something of which I’m deeply convinced.”

Those comments appeared aimed at making a case to Trump on the benefits of the European Union. Trump backed Britain’s departure from the EU and has expressed skepticism of multilateral trade agreements.

The two leaders tried to express their common bonds but showed minimal rapport in their first encounter, a departure from Merkel’s warm relations with Obama during his eight years as president. At the start of the news conference, Merkel sought to break the ice, saying that it was “much better to talk to one another than about one another.”

Merkel said delicately that while she represents German interests, Trump “stands up for, as is right, American interests. That is our task respectively.” She said they were “trying to address also those areas where we disagree but tried to bring people together.”

“We need to be fair with each other,” Merkel said, saying both countries were expecting “that something good comes out of it for their own people.”

The meetings at the White House included discussions on strengthening NATO, fighting the Islamic State group, the conflict in Afghanistan and resolving Ukraine’s conflict, all matters that require close cooperation between the U.S. and Germany.

The talks, postponed from Tuesday because of a snowstorm, aimed to represent a restart of a relationship complicated by Trump’s rhetoric on the campaign trail. As a candidate, Trump frequently accused the chancellor of “ruining” Germany for allowing an influx of refugees and other migrants from Syria and accused his campaign rival, Hillary Clinton, of wanting to be “America’s Angela Merkel.”

During the news conference, Trump predicted that a new health care law would be passed by a substantial margin and “pretty quickly,” expressing optimism for his top legislative priority.

The new president reaffirmed the United States’ “strong support” for NATO but reiterated his stance that NATO allies need to “pay their fair share” for the cost of defense. Trump said many countries owe “vast sums of money” but he declined to identify Germany as one of the nations.

Prior to his inauguration, Trump declared NATO “obsolete” but has since modified his stance, telling European leaders the alliance remains of strategic importance. Only the U.S. and four other members currently reach the benchmark of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense. Germany currently spends 1.23 percent of its GDP on defense, but it is being increased.

Both leaders pointed to their work on the conflict in Afghanistan and efforts to combat terrorism.

When the topic moved to trade, Trump said the U.S. would do “fantastically well” in its trade relations with Germany. The president has been deeply critical of foreign trade and national security agreements but suggested he was only trying to revise trade deals to better serve U.S. interests, rather than pull back from the world entirely.

Trump said trade agreements have led to greater trade deficits. The U.S. trade deficit with Germany was \$64.9 billion last year, the lowest since 2009, according to the Commerce Department.

“The negotiators for Germany have done a far better job than the negotiators for the United States, but hopefully we can even it out. We don’t want victory, we want fairness,” Trump said.

Merkel emphasized the need for trade deals that fairly benefit both countries. “That is the spirit I think in which we ought to be guided in negotiating any agreement between the United States of America

and the EU," she said.

On Twitter follow Ken Thomas at <https://twitter.com/KThomasDC> and <https://twitter.com/colvinj>

Harvard-educated lawyer gets 40 years for bizarre kidnapping

By DON THOMPSON, Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Matthew Muller was sentenced to 40 years in federal prison for a kidnapping so elaborate and outlandish that investigators first thought his victims were carrying out a bizarre hoax.

The Harvard University-trained lawyer and former Marine who meticulously planned his attack was tripped up months later by a stupid mistake: He dropped his cellphone at a burglary scene.

Here's how it all went down:

THE ATTACK AND THE VICTIMS

Denise Huskins and boyfriend Aaron Quinn told police they awoke about 3 a.m. March 23, 2015, in their Vallejo home northeast of San Francisco to find red targeting lasers shining in their eyes and shadowy figures at the foot of their bed whispering. Soon they were bound, blindfolded and drugged with a sleep-inducing liquid.

When Quinn awakened hours later, he found himself surrounded by motion-sensing cameras. He recalled the kidnapers warning him they would know instantly if he moved beyond certain boundaries. He called police about 2 p.m.

Huskins, meanwhile, had been dumped into the trunk of first one car, then another. She awoke 160 miles away, at a cabin in South Lake Tahoe. Blindfolded and woozy, she spent two days there and said she was sexually assaulted twice by an assailant who set up cameras around the bed and made her perform as if she was a willing participant.

She was certain she was about to die, she testified at Mullen's sentencing hearing. She later was driven nearly 500 miles and released in her hometown of Huntington Beach, near Los Angeles.

THE POLICE AND THE SUSPECTED HOAX

Vallejo police didn't believe their story.

Quinn reported that the kidnapers had demanded \$8,500 in ransom — a pittance, police thought, for such an elaborate abduction.

He'd waited nearly 12 hours to report the crime, and investigators found little physical evidence at the scene. Huskins, meanwhile, wasn't cooperating with investigators after her release, and soon she and Quinn hired defense attorneys.

The case felt, police said, like it had been ripped from the pages of the book and movie "Gone Girl," in which a woman goes missing and then when she reappears lies about being kidnapped.

"OCEAN'S ELEVEN" AND THE "GENTLEMAN CRIMINALS"

Huskins, Quinn and their families remain convinced that there was more than one abductor. But federal investigators say it was all an elaborate ruse by Muller, acting alone.

The gun pointed at the victims' heads? A water pistol with a flashlight and laser pointer taped to it.

The other shadowy figure at the house? A blow-up mannequin dressed in military fatigues and rigged with bendable wires.

The whispering voices that the victims heard? A recording that Muller played from a device in his pocket.

During and after the kidnapping he sent anonymous emails to a San Francisco reporter purporting to be from "a sort of 'Ocean's Eleven'" band of sophisticated criminals who were practicing their kidnapping-for-ransom tactics.

Muller told Huskins he was one of a group of "gentleman criminals" who would free her after they had their money.

"Gentleman criminals?" she said at Muller's sentencing. "Lucky me."

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THE MARINES, HARVARD AND A SPIRAL INTO MENTAL ILLNESS

Muller served as a Marine from 1995 to 1999 and returned to his home state of California to earn a college degree summa cum laude before attending and working at Harvard Law School. But by his third year in law school his defense attorney says Muller was so paranoid that he thought he was being tracked by the government.

Attorney Thomas Johnson largely blames mental illness for his client's downfall.

Muller's law license was suspended in 2013 for failing to pay annual dues, and he was later disbarred for failing to file a green card application for a client's son despite taking \$1,250 in advance money.

Three months after the Vallejo kidnapping, Muller broke into a San Francisco Bay Area home. He awoke the adults "with a red laser beam and flashlight," prosecutors say, and they were told to lay face down and "if they followed the burglar's instructions, their daughter would be safe."

The father fought back and Muller fled, but dropped his cellphone and zip ties when he ran out.

Investigators tracked the phone to Muller and found plenty of evidence linking him to Huskins' abduction — including videotapes of the sexual assaults.

"YOU WILL NEVER HAVE CLOSURE"

Huskins and Quinn now have new jobs and live in a different city.

El Dorado County Assistant District Attorney James Clinchard said his office will consider filing new state charges against Muller after learning after the sentencing Thursday that authorities recovered a video of the sexual assaults.

Vallejo police issued an apology after Muller's arrest but Huskins is suing the city and two police officers, accusing them of defamation and inflicting emotional distress. Her civil lawsuit is pending before U.S. District Judge Troy Nunley, the same judge who sentenced Muller on Thursday.

"You will never have closure," Nunley told Muller's two victims, who hugged during their tearful testimony.

"It will be there, but what I see from the two of you is you're going down a path of healing," the judge said. "But you're going to be OK, because the strongest thing you have is each other."

Death toll in Peru climbs to 67 from El Nino rains, floods

By FRANKLIN BRICENO, Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — The number of people killed in Peru following intense rains and mudslides wreaking havoc around the Andean nation climbed to 67 Friday, with thousands more displaced from destroyed homes and others waiting on rooftops for rescue.

Across the country overflowing rivers caused by El Nino rains damaged 115,000 homes, collapsed 117 bridges and paralyzed countless roadways.

"We are confronting a serious climatic problem," President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski said in a statement broadcast live Friday afternoon. "There hasn't been an incident of this strength along the coast of Peru since 1998."

The highly unusual rains follow a series of storms that have struck especially hard along Peru's northern coast, with voracious waters inundating hospitals and cemeteries, and leaving some small villages entirely isolated. On Thursday, the National Police rescued eight people who had been trapped for three days in Cachipampa and removed the body of an 88-year-old man killed in the floods. In the highlands along the department of La Libertad, dramatic video showed crashing water inundating several buses and trucks, killing at least five people. Rescuers were searching Friday for survivors.

Even Peru's capital city of Lima, where a desert climate seldom leads to rain, police had to help hundreds of residents in an outskirt neighborhood cross a flooded road by sending them one-by-one along a rope through choppy waters. The muddy current channeled down the street after a major river overflowed. Some residents left their homes with just a single plastic bag carrying their belongings.

In total, more than 65,000 people in nearby Huachipa were unable to either go to work or return to their properties.

"There's no way to cross," said Henry Obando, who was rescued after leaving the factory where he

works and making his way toward a rooftop where officers created a zip-line to cross. "Many people are trying to get to their homes."

The storms are being caused by a warms of the surface waters in the Pacific Ocean and are expected to continue for another two weeks. Kuczynski declared Peru's Central Highway in a state of emergency Friday and announced he would be boosting funds for reconstruction. He said he was optimistic the country was in a strong position to make a swift recovery but urged residents to use caution.

"This hasn't ended," he warned. "And it will continue for some time more."

In 1998, another El Nino event brought heavy rainfall to the nation's coast, causing landslides, ripping apart homes and leaving hundreds dead.

On Friday, drinking water was cut off throughout most of Lima, spiking the price for bottled water and creating long lines at city tanks. U.S. Embassy helicopters typically used to eradicate coca crops in the Amazon were redirected to help in rescue efforts.

"People are desperate," said Doris Meza, who lives in one of the Lima districts most heavily inundated by the floods. "Water is entering everyone's homes. There aren't cars and drivers are charging whatever they want."

Associated Press writer Christine Armario in Bogota, Colombia, contributed to this report.

Syria fires missiles at Israeli jets after airstrikes

By IAN DEITCH, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Syria fired missiles at Israeli warplanes on a mission to destroy a weapons convoy destined for the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah prompting it to deploy its missile defense system, Israeli officials said Friday, in a rare military exchange between the two hostile neighbors.

The Israeli military said its aircraft struck several targets in Syria and were back in Israeli-controlled airspace when several anti-aircraft missiles were launched from Syria toward the Israeli jets.

Israeli aerial defense systems intercepted one of the missiles, the army said, without elaborating. It would not say whether any other missiles struck Israeli-held territory, but said the safety of Israeli civilians and Israeli aircraft was "not compromised."

Israel is widely believed to have carried out several airstrikes in recent years on advanced weapons systems in Syria — including Russian-made anti-aircraft missiles and Iranian-made missiles — as well as Hezbollah positions. It rarely comments on such operations and the military statement detailing the raid and comments confirming the operation by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were highly unusual.

"Our policy is very consistent. When we identify attempts to transfer advanced weapons to the Hezbollah, and we have the intelligence and the operational capability, we act to prevent that. That is what was and that is what will be," Netanyahu said.

Hezbollah is fighting alongside President Bashar Assad in the brutal Syrian civil war. The Iran-backed group is sworn to Israel's destruction and fought a month-long war with the Jewish state in 2006.

The firing of missiles from Syria toward Israeli aircraft is rare, though Israeli military officials reported a shoulder-fired missile attack a few months ago.

Israeli Channel 10 TV reported that Israel deployed its Arrow defense system for the first time against a real threat and hit an incoming missile, intercepting it before it exploded in Israel.

However, Arrow is designed to intercept long-range ballistic missiles high in the stratosphere, so it remained unclear why the system would have been used in this particular incident.

The Israeli military would not comment on the type of system used.

Israel's powerful transportation and intelligence minister Yisrael Katz told the station "our message is clear, we will not be complacent with a Syrian policy that arms Hezbollah." Katz said "the fact that the incident developed into a situation where Israel claimed responsibility and the Syrians responded is significant."

A Syrian military statement said four Israeli warplanes violated Syrian airspace — flying into Syria through Lebanese territory — and targeted a military position in central Syria.

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Damascus said Syrian anti-aircraft systems confronted the planes and claimed one of the jets was shot down in Israeli-controlled territory and that another was hit. The Israeli military denied the claim, saying none of the jets had been hit.

There was no immediate comment from Hezbollah.

The pan-Arab Al-Mayadeen TV, which has good sources within the militant group, dismissed reports by other Arab media outlets that a Hezbollah commander, Badee Hamiyeh, was killed in one of the airstrikes. It said Hamiyeh was killed Thursday in the southern Syrian region of Quneitra, near the Israeli-held Golan Heights.

Jordan, which borders both Israel and Syria, said parts of the missiles fell in its rural northern areas, including the Irbid district. The Jordanian military said the debris came from the Israeli interception of missiles fired from Syria.

Radwan Otoum, the Irbid governor, told the state news agency Petra that the missile parts caused only minor damage.

A chunk of missile crashed into the courtyard of a home in the community of Inbeh in northern Jordan, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Syrian border.

Umm Bilal al-Khatib, a local resident, said she heard a blast at around 3 a.m. and initially thought a gas cylinder had exploded. When she went outside she found a small crater and a 3-meter-long (10-foot) cylinder.

Israeli media said the interception by the Arrow system took place north of Jerusalem.

Arrow is part of what Israel calls its "multilayer missile defense," comprised of different systems meant to protect against short and long range threats, including the thousands of missiles possessed by Hezbollah in Lebanon and rockets used by Hamas and other Islamic militant groups in Gaza.

Israel has been largely unaffected by the Syrian civil war raging next door, suffering mostly sporadic incidents of spillover fire that Israel has generally dismissed as tactical errors by Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces. Israel has responded to the errant fire with limited reprisals on Syrian positions.

The Syrian conflict, which began in March 2011 as a popular uprising against Assad, eventually descended into a full-blown civil war, with Syrian government forces fighting an array of rebel groups. The chaos has allowed al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria and the Islamic State group to expand their reach.

The skies over Syria are now crowded, with Russian and Syrian aircraft backing Assad's forces and a U.S.-led coalition striking Islamic State and al-Qaida targets.

Associated Press writers Zeina Karam and Bassem Mroue in Beirut, and Omar Akour in Amman, Jordan, contributed to this report.

US, global partners wrestle over trade stance

By DAVID McHUGH, AP Business Writer

BADEN-BADEN, Germany (AP) — Top finance officials including new U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin are debating what stance to take on free trade at a meeting that will help set the tone for the global economy.

The gathering of finance ministers and central bank heads from the Group of 20 countries has focused on shifting attitudes toward trade, particularly after U.S. President Donald Trump vowed to impose border taxes and rewrite free trade deals he says have shortchanged the U.S.

Mnuchin has said trade needs to be "fair," which would be a step back from the group's previous blanket condemnation of trade barriers.

Attention at the two-day meeting in the German spa town of Baden-Baden has centered on a joint statement that is being prepared for Saturday.

Early drafts have dropped an earlier ban on protectionism, but there was no agreement on what would replace it, said officials who briefed reporters Friday on condition of anonymity because the talks were ongoing.

The meeting's host, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble, told reporters that the discussion

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was about “the right formulation regarding the openness of the world economy.”

The last such gathering, in July 2016 in Chengdu, China, issued a strong statement in favor of free trade, saying “we will resist all forms of protectionism.” Possible replacements include support for “fairness.”

Angel Gurría, secretary-general of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, downplayed differences over the exact language. The OECD is one of several international organizations invited to participate in the meeting.

Gurría told The Associated Press it was “important to create a comfort zone” where leaders could have their first discussions with the new administration, “to make them feel that this is a place where we can talk, we can ventilate the areas where we have common ground and the areas where we may have differences.”

European countries and others that depend on exports, such as China, were said to be pushing for a stronger statement in favor of trade with fewer tariffs and other barriers in a rule-based system.

The gathering will help set the tone for international commerce and finance and will give Mnuchin a chance to clarify what the U.S. position is.

The G-20 is an informal forum on economic cooperation made up of 19 countries with more than 80 percent of the world economy, plus the European Union. The finance ministers’ meeting will pave the way for a summit of national leaders in Hamburg, Germany, on July 7-8.

Trump has repeatedly emphasized that the U.S. needs a tougher approach to trade that would put American workers and companies first. He has already pulled the U.S. out of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement with Japan and other Pacific Rim countries and he has started the process to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada, both of whom are G-20 members.

In a visit to Berlin ahead of the G-20 meeting, Mnuchin said the U.S. is interested in trade that is not only free but fair.

“Our objective is getting more balanced trade agreements,” he said, confirming that having border taxes is an option. He said, without providing specifics, that some U.S. trade agreements need to be re-examined, while adding that, “It is not our desire to get into trade wars.”

Mnuchin is scheduled to meet one-to-one with China’s Finance Minister Xiao Jie and central bank governor Zhou Xiaochuan.

The G-20 meeting is taking place with the global economy in relatively good shape: the International Monetary Fund predicts growth of 3.4 percent this year and 3.6 percent next year, compared with 3.1 percent last year.

Yet the British vote last year to leave the European Union and Trump’s victory on an “America First” platform have underlined discontent with globalization, a sense among many that the benefits of a globalized economy — that is, with fewer barriers to trade and business — do not reach enough people.

Advocates for free trade such as the IMF say that trade restrictions will only hurt growth and won’t benefit ordinary people, while urging measures to spread the benefits of trade more widely. That could include job training and education, since the IMF says trade and globalization have benefited higher-skilled workers.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 18, the 77th day of 2017. There are 288 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On March 18, 1937, in America’s worst school disaster, nearly 300 people, most of them children, were killed in a natural gas explosion at the New London Consolidated School in Rusk County, Texas.

On this date:

In 1766, Britain repealed the Stamp Act of 1765.

In 1837, the 22nd and 24th president of the United States, Grover Cleveland, was born in Caldwell, New Jersey.

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In 1917, the Mexican newspaper Excelsior published its first edition.

In 1925, the Tri-State Tornado struck southeastern Missouri, southern Illinois and southwestern Indiana, resulting in some 700 deaths.

In 1940, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini met at the Brenner Pass, where the Italian dictator agreed to join Germany's war against France and Britain.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing the War Relocation Authority, which was put in charge of evacuating "persons whose removal is necessary in the interests of national security," with Milton S. Eisenhower (the youngest brother of Dwight D. Eisenhower) as its director.

In 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Hawaii statehood bill. (Hawaii became a state on Aug. 21, 1959.)

In 1962, France and Algerian rebels signed the Evian Accords, a cease-fire agreement which took effect the next day, ending the Algerian War.

In 1965, the first spacewalk took place as Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov went outside his Voskhod 2 capsule, secured by a tether. Farouk I, the former king of Egypt, died in exile in Rome.

In 1974, most of the Arab oil-producing nations ended their 5-month-old embargo against the United States that had been sparked by American support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War.

In 1980, Frank Gotti, the 12-year-old youngest son of mobster John Gotti, was struck and killed by a car driven by John Favara, a neighbor in Queens, New York. (The following July, Favara vanished, the apparent victim of a gang hit.)

In 1990, thieves made off with 13 works of art from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston (the crime remains unsolved).

Ten years ago: Pakistan's national cricket team coach, Bob Woolmer, 58, was found dead in his hotel room in Kingston, Jamaica, during cricket's World Cup tournament. (An inquest into Woolmer's death ended with the Jamaican jury unable to reach a ruling on the cause.)

Five years ago: Mitt Romney scored an overwhelming win in Puerto Rico's Republican presidential primary, trouncing chief rival Rick Santorum.

One year ago: A jury in St. Petersburg, Florida, sided with ex-pro wrestler Hulk Hogan, awarding him \$115 million in compensatory damages in his sex tape lawsuit against Gawker Media. (Three days later, the jury awarded \$25 million in punitive damages; Gawker, which ended up going bankrupt, finally settled with Hogan for \$31 million.) Police in Brussels captured Europe's most wanted fugitive, Salah Abdeslam, who was the prime suspect in the deadly 2015 Paris attacks. North Korea ignored U.N. resolutions by firing a medium-range ballistic missile into the sea.

Today's Birthdays: Composer John Kander is 90. Country singer Charley Pride is 83. Nobel peace laureate and former South African president F.W. de Klerk is 81. Country singer Margie Bowes is 76. Actor Kevin Dobson is 74. Actor Brad Dourif is 67. Jazz musician Bill Frisell is 66. Singer Irene Cara is 58. Alt-country musician Karen Grotberg (The Jayhawks) is 58. Movie writer-director Luc Besson is 58. Actor Geoffrey Owens is 56. Actor Thomas Ian Griffith is 55. Singer-songwriter James McMurtry is 55. TV personality Mike Rowe is 55. Singer-actress Vanessa L. Williams is 54. Olympic gold medal speedskater Bonnie Blair is 53. Country musician Scott Saunders (Sons of the Desert) is 53. Actor David Cubitt is 52. Rock musician Jerry Cantrell (Alice in Chains) is 51. Rock singer-musician Miki Berenyi (ber-EN'-ee) is 50. Actor Michael Bergin is 48. Rapper-actress-talk show host Queen Latifah is 47. White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus (ryns PREE'-bus) is 45. Actor-comedian Dane Cook is 45. Country singer Philip Sweet (Little Big Town) is 43. Rock musician Stuart Zender is 43. Singers Jaron and Evan Lowenstein are 43. Actress-singer-dancer Sutton Foster is 42. Singer Devin Lima (LFO) is 40. Rock singer Adam Levine (Maroon 5) is 38. Rock musician Daren Taylor (Airborne Toxic Event) is 37. Olympic gold medal figure skater Alexei Yagudin is 37. Actor Adam Pally is 35. Actor Cornelius Smith Jr. is 35. Actress Lily Collins is 28. Actress-dancer Julia Goldani Telles is 22. Actress Ciara Bravo is 20. Actor Blake Garrett Rosenthal is 13.

Thought for Today: "To start is easy, to persist is an art." — German proverb.