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Monday, March 27

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

School Lunch: Taco salad, refried beans, fruit, muffin.

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, Swedish apple pie square, whole wheat bread.

National Honor Society induction ceremony at 7 p.m.

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

Cub Scouts: meets at 7 p.m. at United Methodist Church in Groton.

Tuesday, March 28

School Breakfast: Cinnamon roll, yogurt, fruit, juice, milk.

School Lunch: Chicken sandwich, sweet potato tots, fruit, broccoli and dip.

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, au gratin



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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2017 Groton Area Elementary

Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning

5 on or before September 1, 2017

Friday, March 31

Parents of children who will be turning 5 on or before September 1, 2017 in the Groton Area School District are asked to contact Heidi Krueger at the Groton Area Elementary School during school hours at 397-2317 to set up a screening time or to confirm their screening time. If your child is currently attending Junior Kindergarten they will not be screened.

Packets will be sent home this week with a scheduled time and additional paperwork that will need to be completed.

Kindergarten Roundup will take place at the Groton Area Elementary School. Please check in at the office.

Fresh flowers, silks, home decor



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Three Groton teams place at State DI Tourney

The state Destination Imagination tournament was held Saturday in Pierre. Groton Area had six teams competing at the state level. Only the first place winners will advance to Globals in Knoxville, Tenn., at the end of May. The top three teams received trophies. The awards ceremony was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. Groton Area had one team that placed second and two that placed third.

The Out of the Boxers placed second in Challenge B, Top Secret, Secondary Level

The Aquarium Solvers placed third in Challenge C, Vanished!, Elementary Level

The Disfunctional Broad Squad placed third in Challenge C, Vanished!, Middle Level

The Dumpling Jokers placed sixth in Challenge A, Show & Tech, Elementary Level

The Wonderful Nonsense placed fourth in Challenge C, Vanished!, Secondary Level

The Army Ants placed fifth in Challenge D, 3-Peat, Elementary Level

The Bazang Boys placed fourth in Challenge D, 3-Peat, Middle Level

Adult Birthday Club

The Adult Birthday Club met at Rosewood Court with LaVonne Helmer being the hostess. Prizes were awarded to Ruby Donovan, Arlowyn Specner and DeLoris Knoll. The honors were awarded to DeLoris Knoll. Arlowyn Spencer was a guest. The April 4th meeting location is unknown right now, but will meet at 1 p.m. with Grace Albrecht as hostess.

Living Stations to be presented at SEAS

The Living Stations event at St. Elizabeth Catholic Church, 107 E. 7th Ave., will be held on April 12, 2017 at 7:00pm. There will be bars and coffee afterwards. It is being sponsored by the High School CCD students.

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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

For Sale

City of Groton is taking sealed bids on 2 used John Deere 725 mowers, 250 lbs. of grass seed sold in bags of 50 lbs., and 3 propane cylinders-100 lb. until Mar 29. Send bid with your name to City Hall, PO Box 587, Groton, SD 57445 in envelope marked bid. Call 397-2690 for more info.

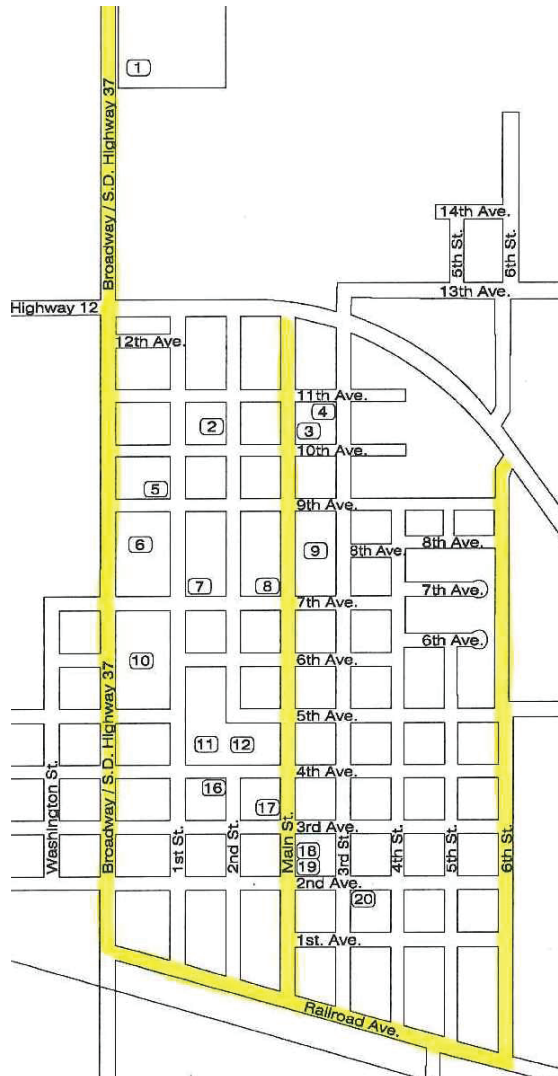


**Call or Text
Paul at
397-7460
or Tina at
397-7285
for
membership
Information**

GDI Living Fitness
25 Main St., Downtown Groton

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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!!



Fighting for Financial Independence

For many, preparing for Tax Day only highlights just how much of a person's paycheck is redirected straight into the federal government's bank account. The truth is our tax returns only tell part of the story. Federal regulations add thousands of dollars more in hidden costs every year for South Dakota families. I've heard from many that "enough is enough" – and I agree. So regardless of if it's tax or regulatory reform, I'm focused on giving you more financial independence.

One of the first places I'm looking to save you money is on your taxes. Last year, I helped outline a simpler and fairer tax code. In total, the plan is estimated to save the average family \$4,600 per year, according to analysis done by The Tax Foundation. On top of that, they expect the plan would help grow the economy by 9.1 percent over the next 10 years, which translates into more jobs and higher wages.

The way we're proposing to do this may save more than money. Under our plan, tax returns may be simple enough to fit on a postcard, hopefully saving taxpayers the 6 billion hours we collectively spend doing our taxes each year.

Like I mentioned before, there are also hidden costs the federal government imposes. Today, almost 25 percent of a new family home's final cost is dealing with regulations to build that home. Under Obama-era motor-vehicle regulations, the cost of a new car could spike almost \$3,000 by 2025. Meanwhile, regulations on everything from lightbulbs to dishwashers could increase consumer costs by as much as \$1,600. And it just keeps adding up from here!

Already, President Trump and Congress have worked together to delay, repeal, or dismantle more than 90 regulations put in place by President Obama. But more must still be done. In addition to dismantling the unnecessary regulations piece-by-piece, I've supported legislation to make it much more difficult to impose these massive regulations in the first place. Just days into 2017, the House passed a bill I co-sponsored that would require any major regulation to be approved by Congress. If enacted, it would be an unprecedented check on federal bureaucracy.

After eight years under President Obama, I think too many have accepted a status quo that leaves less money in your pocket and puts more decisions in the government's hands. Whether it's regulatory reform or tax reform, there is a path forward that gives you more freedom and financial independence. Ultimately, that's the path I will always pursue.

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Today in Weather History

March 26, 1977: During an early morning, severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 1 mile NE of Watertown in Codington County. In addition, hail up to 1.50 inches in diameter fell in Milbank, Grant County.

March 26, 1995: Heavy snow fell over most of central South Dakota, as well as in the northern Black Hills. Heavier accumulations included 14 inches at Murdo, 13 inches at Lead, and 12 inches at Eureka, and Leola. Only a few traffic accidents were reported, although many other vehicles slid into ditches. There was some damage to power lines and poles. Some livestock losses were feared, as the snow fell during the calving season, although this could not be assessed in the short term.

March 26, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across the Northern Plains brought strong lift and heavy snow from 6 to 15 inches in a band across much of central and northeast South Dakota from the evening to the early morning hours. Schools were delayed or cancelled and road travel was difficult, if not impossible. Some snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Stephan, Willow Lake, Harrold, Miller, and near Hoven; 7 inches at Hayti, east of Hayes, and Eagle Butte; 8 inches at Highmore and Doland; 9 inches at Orient, Bryant, and near Onida; 10 inches at Gettysburg and Faulkton; 11 inches at Seneca and Redfield. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included: 12 inches 23 miles north of Highmore; 13 inches near Agar; 15 inches 24 miles north of Highmore.

1913 - The Ohio River Basin flood reached a peak. Ten inch rains over a wide area of the Ohio River Basin inundated cities in Ohio, drowning 467 persons, and causing 147 million dollars damage. The Miami River at Dayton reached a level eight feet higher than ever before. The flood, caused by warm weather and heavy rains, was the second mostly deadly of record for the nation. (David Ludlum)

1948: Good Friday tornadoes moved from Terre Haute to Redkey, Indiana killing 20 people. About 80% of the town of Coatesville was destroyed, and 16 people were killed. The Coatesville Carnegie Library was a total loss. The path was a half mile wide.

1954 - The temperature at Allaket, AK, plunged to 69 degrees below zero. (The Weather Channel)

1971 - Parts of northern and central Georgia experienced their worst snow and ice storm since 1935. Two day power outages ruined two million eggs at poultry hatches. Two persons were killed when a tree landed on their car. (25th-26th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front crossing the Plateau Region produced high winds in Utah causing some property damage. Winds gusted to 51 mph at Salt Lake City. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Twenty cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 73 degrees at Flagstaff AZ, 90 degrees at Sacramento CA, 95 degrees at Santa Maria CA, 95 degrees at Los Angeles CA, 99 degrees at Tucson AZ, and 100 degrees at Phoenix AZ set records for March. (The National Weather Summary)








1989 - The Easter Bunny brought record warm temperatures to the central U.S. while such records were still welcome. A dozen cities reported record warm readings, including Dodge City KS with an afternoon high of 88 degrees. Strong southerly winds gusted to 51 mph at Dodge City, and reached 55 mph at Salina KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Fair weather prevailed across the nation for the second day in a row. Freezing temperatures were reported in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region in the wake of an early spring snowstorm. Afternoon highs were again in the 70s and 80s in the southeastern U.S., and for the ninth day in a row, temperatures in the southwestern U.S. reached the 90s. (The National Weather Summary)

2009: The proof is in the pudding - A NOAA Weather Radio can save your life. Near Belk, AL, a family was alerted to a tornado by their weather radio; they went to their storm cellar. They heard the "jet roar" of the EF1 tornado as it damaged their home; they were unhurt.


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Tonight	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night
						
Patchy Fog	Patchy Fog then Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Rain	Mostly Cloudy
Low: 34 °F	High: 56 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 56 °F	Low: 37 °F	High: 56 °F	Low: 36 °F


Typical Spring Weather




4 pm Sunday, March 26th



Tonight  *Light rain to diminish this evening, fog develops late. Lows ~34° F*

Monday  *Areas of am fog in northeastern SD give way to sun, highs 55-60° F*

Tuesday  *Clouds return with a chance of light rain for central SD. Highs ~55° F*

 National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD   Updated: 3/26/2017 3:56 PM Central

Published on: 03/26/2017 at 4:01PM

Areas of rain showers across central SD will diminish over the next several hours, and then areas of fog could once again form across northeastern SD during the overnight. This fog should break off by mid-morning Monday, leading to sunshine during the afternoon. Another system sideswipes the area Tuesday, leading to more cloud cover as well as rain showers for central SD. Temps remain above average meanwhile.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 47.8 F at 4:46 PM

Low Outside Temp: 26.8 F at 12:59 AM

High Gust: 19.0 Mph at 5:32 PM

Snow: Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 76° in 1905

Record Low: -13 in 1964

Average High: 45°F

Average Low: 24°F

Average Precip in March.: 0.92

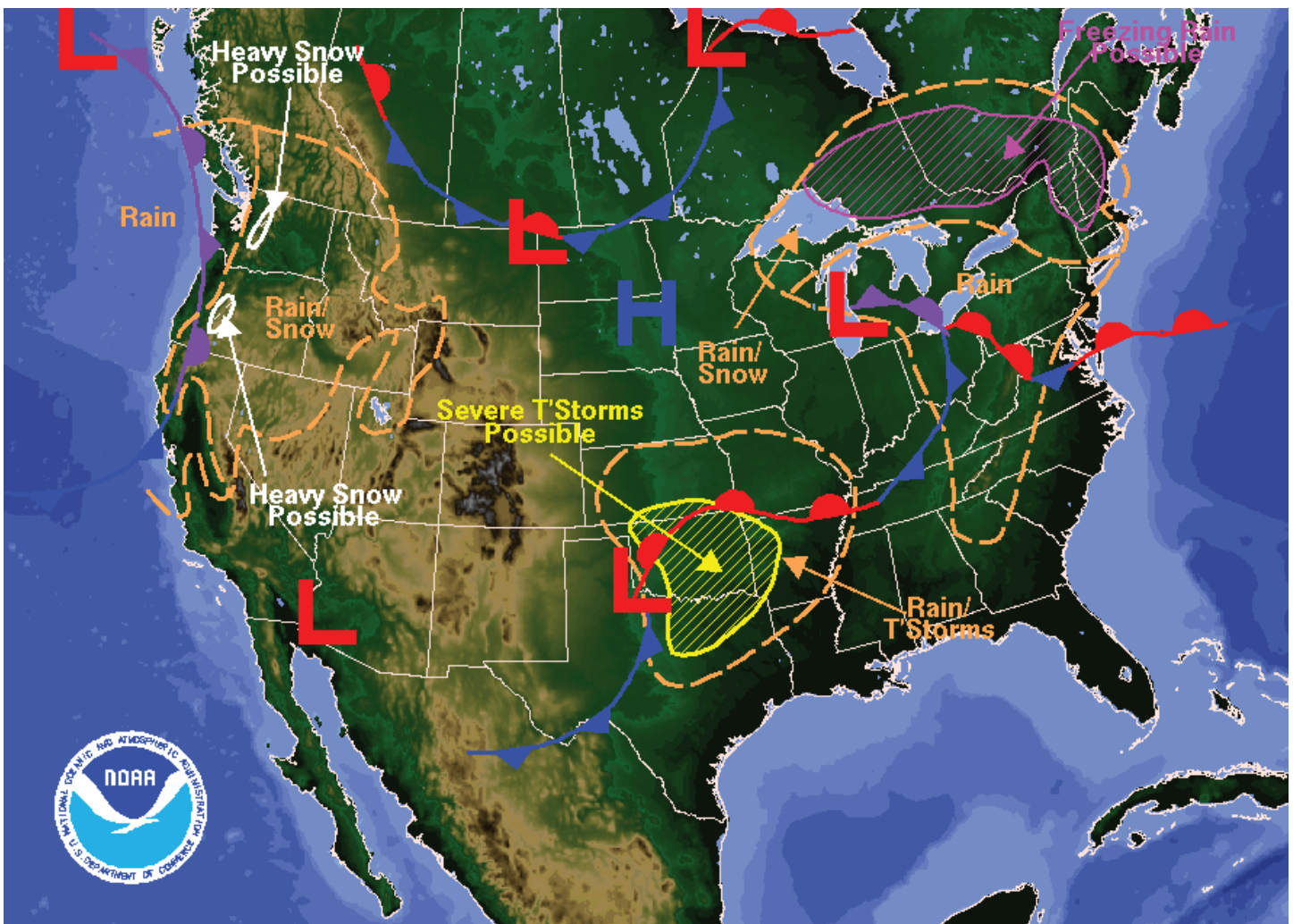
Precip to date in March.: 0.59

Average Precip to date: 1.94

Precip Year to Date: 0.59

Sunset Tonight: 7:54 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Sun, Mar 26, 2017, issued 4:27 PM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Reinhart based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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SEARCHING FOR VICTORY

During one of his fights Gene Tunney broke both of his hands. Some thought that he would never fight again because of the severe damage. However, he did not give up boxing and years later said that "breaking my hands was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Realizing that he would never be able to hit his opponents hard enough to win a world championship by knocking them out, he chose to become a scientific fighter. So, he decided that he would become a boxer and not a slugger. As a result of that decision he became a champion.

Often the obstacles we face in life are God's way of actually giving us an opportunity to grow and develop and learn faith and trust. Many times we come face to face with unforeseen and overwhelming problems we never thought we would have to face. They may be simple or significant, large or small, few or many. But each and every one of them come to us as a gift from God and are a sign of His grace and overflowing love to offer us an opportunity to grow into His likeness.

What may seem as something that would destroy us may be God's way of presenting a new opportunity to us to prove the promises in His Word. With His power and strength, with His wisdom and knowledge, with His guidance and protection we can overcome all things.

Prayer: Increase our faith, Father, and enable us to see beyond what is to what can be. Open our eyes and minds that we may willingly see You at work in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

News from the Associated Press

Police search for sculpture stolen from downtown Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police are asking for the public's help in finding a sculpture stolen from a downtown exhibit over the weekend.

The piece called "Weathering the Storm" was among the city's SculptureWalk exhibits. The director of SculptureWalk noticed Sunday that the piece was missing.

The missing piece is a Native American-themed sculpture of a horse's head. SculptureWalk says it is valued at nearly \$6,000.

KSFY-TV (<http://bit.ly/2nlgkNf>) reports this is the third time in the organization's history a sculpture was stolen off the street.

The Sioux Falls nonprofit is liable for the stolen piece and will have to cover the costs if it is not returned. SculptureWalk is offering a \$1,000 reward for the return of the sculpture or any information that leads authorities to the suspect.

Information from: KSFY-TV, <http://www.ksfy.com>

Ex-South Dakota trooper sentenced to 5 years in prison

CHAMBERLAIN, S.D. (AP) — A former South Dakota Highway Patrol trooper has been sentenced to five years in prison after admitting he took tens of thousands of dollars in evidence money.

Forty-eight-year-old Brian Biehl of Platte also was fined \$10,000. Brule County State's Attorney David Natvig and South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley announced Biehl's sentence Friday.

Biehl pleaded guilty to grand theft by law enforcement for keeping nearly \$70,000 confiscated from drug searches during his time with the patrol. He faced a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$20,000 fine.

The Capital Journal (<http://bit.ly/2nUGitB>) reports state police began investigating Biehl when other troopers began noticing money missing from evidence bags.

Biehl was a trooper for about 15 years, working out of Chamberlain. He left the patrol last year.

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

Authorities ID man killed in Charles Mix County rollover

DANTE, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have released the name of a Wagner man killed in a one-vehicle crash in Charles Mix County last week.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol says 34-year-old Jeremy Lhotak was driving a pickup truck that rolled in the ditch off a rural road just south of Dante. He was pronounced dead at the scene Thursday night.

Authorities say Lhotak was not wearing a seat belt and was thrown from the pickup. He was alone in the vehicle.

Musical park to come to South Dakota town of Lead

LEAD, S.D. (AP) — A soon-to-be-renovated park in the South Dakota town of Lead will include a feature available in only a few U.S. cities: outdoor musical instruments.

The devices at Manuel Brothers Park will be large outdoor equivalents of common and not-so-common musical instruments. The devices will allow children to experiment with making sounds on drums, pagoda bells, chimes, xylophones and lily pad cymbals. They're expected to be installed next to the park's

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playground equipment, the Black Hills Pioneer (<http://bit.ly/2nwHCSP>) reported City Administrator Mike Stahl said the feature will create a musical park.

"It's a social as well as a musical project," Rich Quail, who started the fundraising effort, said. "There are no wrong notes."

The Lead City Commission voted Monday to give a temporary loan of nearly \$3,000 to a group raising money for the musical devices at Manuel Brothers Park. The group has already raised nearly \$18,000 themselves. The purchase and installation of the components will cost a little more than \$20,000.

The equipment manufacturer, Freenotes Harmony Park of Durango, Colorado, says the sound levels created are not intrusive to nearby neighborhoods.

"The instruments are working sculptures as well as true percussion instruments," the manufacturer's promotional literature said.

The nation's first musical park was created in 1995 in Moab, Utah, and is still functioning after more than two decades of use. Quail said he was inspired by the Utah park to create the one in Lead.

Information from: Black Hills Pioneer, <http://www.bhpioneer.com>

Officials to break ground on new South Dakota school

REDFIELD, S.D. (AP) — Officials in Redfield plan to break ground in a few weeks on a more than \$20 million preschool-to-12th grade school.

The project passed in a \$16 million bond vote last year. The remainder of the money will be from the district's capital outlay funds, the Aberdeen American News (<http://bit.ly/2nN8r5X>) reported.

Superintendent Shad Storley said the building will add an auditorium and auxiliary gym, as well as a new kitchen and commons area.

"What's coming is going to be so much better," School board president Heather Jordan said.

Spink County Auditor Theresa Hodges said Redfield School District taxpayers will see a small increase in property tax bills this year.

"With the vote that we had a year ago — last February — the public spoke and they are in support overall," Jordan said.

According to Storley, the building was finished in 1917 with an addition in 1934.

"It served the community very well for 100 years," he said.

Jordan said that while some generations of Redfield residents who attended classes there will be sad to see the old school go, they know it's time for something new.

The superintendent said the new school will be accessible to everyone because it will be a single level.

"Our elementary building is three floors, our junior high/high school is two floors with no elevators," he said. "Our new building will not have any steps in it, except for the theater."

Storley says student life will hardly be interrupted during construction.

"It will mostly be keeping them away," he said. "Making sure everyone's safe during construction and making sure they know which doors are off limits."

Information from: Aberdeen American News, <http://www.aberdeennews.com>

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Saturday:

Dakota Cash

09-17-18-31-32

(nine, seventeen, eighteen, thirty-one, thirty-two)

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Estimated jackpot: \$51,000

Hot Lotto

09-16-22-38-39, Hot Ball: 4

(nine, sixteen, twenty-two, thirty-eight, thirty-nine; Hot Ball: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$5 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$162 million

Powerball

18-31-32-45-48, Powerball: 16, Power Play: 4

(eighteen, thirty-one, thirty-two, forty-five, forty-eight; Powerball: sixteen; Power Play: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$40 million

Number of speeding tickets up as speed limit rose to 80 mph

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The number of speeding tickets issued by South Dakota state troopers has gone up since the state's top speed limit increased from 75 mph to 80 mph nearly two years ago.

According to an analysis of ticket data by the Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2nR7jxX>), in the nearly two years before the speed limit increase, troopers wrote 12,585 speeding tickets on interstates and state highways. For the same period following the change, troopers wrote 18,227 citations.

The surge began on day one. During the month of April 2015, a total of 1,012 tickets were issued. That's more than double the 465 tickets issued in April 2014.

The newspaper reported that while the numbers show the Highway Patrol is more aggressive at enforcing the speed limit, they don't show whether troopers are writing more tickets to speeders who were only slightly speeding, or whether they were giving motorists more leeway before the speed limit changed. That's because the Highway Patrol wouldn't release the speeds of motorists cited. Argus Leader Media filed an appeal, which is pending.

In a statement, Department of Public Safety spokesman Tony Mangan said troopers are free to use discretion when they stop motorists, and he credited the increase in tickets to hard-working, self-motivated troopers. He said the Highway Patrol does not have a quota system.

"The Highway Patrol has always provided direction to its troopers on the application of the law as it pertains to speed enforcement in an effort to provide a consistent and equitable policy," he said. "This is to ensure all officers perform their duties in a similar manner. This direction does not take away officer discretion or common sense."

The Argus Leader Media's analysis of ticket data also found that men received 66 percent of the tickets written since 2013. While the majority of tickets were issued to motorists on Interstates 90 and 29, the number of tickets written on back roads and state highways more than doubled since the limit went up.

The data also shows the busiest days for tickets fall around Independence Day, Memorial Day and Labor Day. The busiest day was Friday, July 3, 2015, when troopers wrote 165 tickets.

The National Safety Council reports that highway traffic deaths increased nationwide in 2016. But in South Dakota, fatalities were down to 115 last year, the lowest since 2011.

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

Repairs begin on Delmont's Onion House

DELMONT, S.D. (AP) — Repairs are underway on the onion-shaped dome of a historic Delmont building that was damaged in a tornado almost two years ago.

The Onion House's dome has been wrapped in plastic since the May 2015 tornado while plans were

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made for its repair, the Yankton Press & Dakotan (<http://bit.ly/2nNtPb1>) reported. The tornado destroyed a third of Delmont's homes.

Delmont resident Leo Holzbauer bought the Onion House to save it from being demolished when the out-of-state owners didn't want responsibility for the landmark after the tornado. Holzbauer donated the house to the Historical Society of Delmont.

"I did not want to see the Onion House disappear, since I had fond boyhood memories of seeing it on the Main Street of Delmont," he said.

The house has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1987. It started as a private residence in 1902. It's since served as a hospital, clinic, beauty shop and clothing store, then back to a private residence.

"This was something we had wanted for years," Historical Society President Earla Strid said. "We are grateful for the gift and look forward to opening it up for viewing in the future."

Strid said renovations on the dome have already begun and are going to cost nearly \$50,000, so "we are reaching out to the public for assistance." The society has so far received a \$20,000 matching grant from the Deadwood Fund. The group has about \$10,000 to match so far.

Information from: Yankton Press and Dakotan, <http://www.yankton.net/>

Drug arrests in South Dakota reach 10-year high

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The number of drug arrests in South Dakota reached a 10-year high.

The number of drug arrests last year was more than 7,600, a 13 percent increase from the previous year, according to the state attorney general office's annual Crime in South Dakota report, released Monday. The report also said that homicides, sexual assaults and robbery arrests declined.

Drug arrests in the state have been increasing since methamphetamine grew in popularity in South Dakota. In recent years, the amount of meth seized in rural counties has doubled.

Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom said fighting drugs is a "three-legged stool" comprised of prevention, treatment and enforcement. He said while the enforcement aspect has been successful, police falter with prevention, which leads to more arrests.

"I would advocate for more resources on the front-end," Thom said. "I think what's important to note with methamphetamine is the level of violence. People who are using methamphetamine are prone to violence and that could be driving other numbers."

Gov. Dennis Daugaard has signed a Senate bill appropriating more than \$600,000 to expand the state's meth treatment services.

"We need treatment for people who are struggling with this and we need families and friends to get involved when they recognize a problem," Minnehaha County Deputy Sheriff Michelle Boyd said.

The bulk of the meth-related arrests are still in the state's most populated areas, which are Boyd and Thom's counties. Boyd said the increase isn't surprising because the department has been discussing the spike in drug-related crimes for years.

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

Debate renewed over economic benefits of Keystone pipeline

By DAVID KOENIG, AP Business Writer

DALLAS (AP) — President Donald Trump is calling his administration's approval of the Keystone XL pipeline a new era for American energy policy.

As expected, the State Department reversed a decision by the Obama administration and favored energy development over environmentalists' objections to the pipeline, which will carry thick Canadian crude oil to Nebraska, where it can flow on to refineries along the Gulf Coast.

Trump on Friday called it "a great day for American jobs." The costs and benefits of the pipeline have

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been hotly debated, however, and many experts believe it will have only a small impact on the U.S. economy.

JOBS

The company proposing the pipeline, Calgary-based TransCanada Corp., estimates the project could create up to 6,500 construction jobs for two years. In a 2014 report, the State Department projected the pipeline would support 3,900 in construction jobs.

Including work indirectly related to the construction, the number of jobs balloons to 42,100, the State Department estimated. But once the pipeline is finished, it will create just 35 permanent jobs, according to the report.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The State Department estimated that construction of Keystone XL would contribute \$3.4 billion to the nation's output. That's about 0.02 percent of the \$18 trillion U.S. economy.

TAXES

The State Department estimated that Keystone XL would generate \$70 million in new state and local taxes along the route during construction and \$55.6 million in property taxes once oil starts flowing.

COSTS

Environmental groups say TransCanada overstates the economic benefits of the pipeline and lowballs the impact of using tar-sands oil. They say it generates more carbon emissions to refine the heavy, thick crude than to process other oil types. A civil engineer at the University of Nebraska said that TransCanada also significantly underestimated the chance of a major oil spill from the 36-inch-diameter pipeline.

THE OIL

Keystone XL would carry up to 830,000 barrels a day from Alberta to Nebraska, where it would connect with the existing Keystone pipeline that flows to Gulf Coast refineries.

During an Oval Office ceremony Friday, TransCanada CEO Russell Girling thanked Trump for pushing the pipeline, and he called it "a very, very important day" for the company.

In a video on the company website, Girling said the pipeline is needed because North America needs oil so badly that it will continue to import crude "for years to come." But in January he had leavened his optimism with some doubts because of uncertainty about demand from oil producers.

Canada is the largest exporter of oil to the U.S., at about 3.3 million barrels a day in 2016. Running at capacity, Keystone XL would equal about one-fourth of the current flow. U.S. oil production is around 9 million barrels per day.

Two other planned pipelines would carry Alberta oil to export markets, creating competition with Keystone XL for commitments from oil producers. Some analysts think only two of the three pipelines will get built.

THE COMPANIES

By providing a route to the Gulf Coast, Keystone XL could raise the price of tar sands oil. Among the oil companies that could benefit: Canada's Suncor Energy Inc. and Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. and Texas-based Exxon Mobil Corp., whose former CEO, Rex Tillerson, is now the secretary of state. Tillerson recused himself from the pipeline decision.

A pipeline to Gulf refineries will make drilling in Alberta more attractive. The 2014 drop in oil prices hurt because production and processing are more expensive in the oil sands than in many other places. Last year Exxon wrote down the value of its Canadian reserves.

GASOLINE PRICES

The pipeline likely will not be completed for several years, so there will be no immediate effect on prices at the pump. It's not clear that Keystone XL will eventually lead to lower prices — it could have

the reverse effect.

Patrick DeHaan, an analyst for the price-tracking service GasBuddy.com, said the pipeline could lead to higher prices for Canadian crude oil, which has long sold at a discount.

AMERICAN STEEL

Trump said in January, while announcing his support for Keystone XL and Dakota Access, that he would require pipelines to be made with American steel, but there is no such requirement for Keystone XL. A White House spokeswoman said this month that Trump's directive applied only to new pipelines, and since TransCanada had already stockpiled pipe, "the steel is already literally sitting there. It would be hard to go back."

About half of the pipe is from the U.S. and the rest comes from Canada, Italy and India.

US-backed forces capture Syrian air base from IS

By PHILIP ISSA, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces captured a strategically important air base from Islamic State militants in north Syria on Sunday in the first major victory for the group since the U.S. airlifted the forces behind enemy lines four days ago.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces announced they had captured the Tabqa air base, 45 kilometers (28 miles) west of Raqqa, the Islamic State group's de facto capital in Syria.

The U.S., which has provided substantial air and ground support to the SDF, ferried hundreds of SDF forces, as well as U.S. military advisers and U.S. artillery, behind IS lines earlier this week.

The airlift was a major development to the SDF's multi-front campaign to bear down on Raqqa, as U.S.-backed Iraqi forces simultaneously press their assault to seize Mosul from the militants, in neighboring Iraq. SDF forces are within 10 kilometers (6 miles) of Raqqa from the north.

Tabqa air base was captured by IS militants from the Syrian government in August 2014. Shortly afterward, the group announced it had killed about 200 government soldiers at the base, in a mass killing recorded and distributed on video over social media.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group also reported the SDF advance.

Meanwhile there were conflicting reports over whether civilians had begun evacuating Raqqa due to concerns over the stability of the nearby Tabqa Dam.

The militants said U.S.-led coalition airstrikes had locked up the dam's gates, causing the water level behind it to rise. The activist group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently reported that IS had ordered Raqqa residents to evacuate, though without their furniture. Tabqa Dam is 40 kilometers (25 miles) upstream of Raqqa on the Euphrates River.

U.S.-led coalition forces said the dam was structurally sound.

U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces were in control of a spillway north of the dam "which can be used to alleviate pressure on the dam if need be," the coalition said in a letter to The Associated Press.

The coalition says the dam has not been structurally damaged, to its knowledge, and says it has not targeted the dam.

The Observatory said there were no evacuations happening from Raqqa, as did the activist-run Raqqa 24 media center.

Raqqa 24 said engineers employed by the militants had restored power to the dam's gates and the structure was functioning normally.

The reports from Raqqa came as a leading Syrian opposition group called on the U.S.-led coalition to stop targeting residential areas in and around the city.

The Syrian National Coalition said in a statement that it was "increasingly concerned" about civilian casualties in the campaign against the extremist group. The exiled opposition coalition is taking part in U.N.-mediated talks in Geneva.

The SNC said it believed coalition forces were behind an airstrike that killed at least 30 civilians sheltering in a school in the countryside outside Raqqa on March 21. The coalition has said it is investigating.

The U.S. has provided substantial air and ground support to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, who are closing in on Raqqa as well as the Tabqa Dam.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said coalition airstrikes have killed 89 civilians in Raqqa province in the past week, including 35 in a school in the village of Mansoura.

1 dead, 15 injured in Cincinnati nightclub gunfight

By JOHN MINCHILLO and DAN SEWELL, Associated Press

CINCINNATI (AP) — A gunfight broke out inside a crowded Cincinnati nightclub early Sunday, leaving one man dead and 15 others wounded after a dispute among several patrons escalated into a shootout, authorities said.

No suspects were in custody by late afternoon in the shooting at the Cameo club, which has a history of gun violence, and police said there was no indication of any terrorism link.

Cincinnati Police Chief Eliot Isaac said one of the wounded was in "extremely critical condition," while a hospital spokeswoman said two victims were listed in critical condition.

Police began receiving calls at 1:30 a.m. about gunshots at the club near the Ohio River east of downtown Cincinnati. Isaac said some 200 people were inside the club, one of the few hip-hop venues in the city, for music and dancing.

Isaac identified the dead man as 27-year-old O'Bryan Spikes, but provided no other details. He said 15 others were injured, with some already treated and released from hospitals.

"What we know at this point in the investigation is that several local men got into some type of dispute inside the bar, and it escalated into shots being fired from several individuals," Isaac said. It wasn't clear how many people fired shots.

Club patron Mauricio Thompson described a chaotic scene in which as many as 20 shots were fired as people scrambled to get away. He said there was a fight and people were yelling for security to intervene before the gunfire began.

"Once I got outside, people coming out bloody, gunshot wounds on them, some of their friends carrying them to the car, rushing them to the hospital," Thompson told WCPO-TV. "It was just crazy."

Police Sgt. Daniel Hils said the large crowd at the club was a factor in the number of people who suffered gunshot wounds.

"When you're talking about something tightly packed like that, I think intended targets aren't going to be the only thing that's hit," said Hils, who is president of the Fraternal Order of Police local. "When you starting throwing lead around, and there's a lot of other people standing around, then the other people are going to get hit."

Isaac said the club has its own security operation that uses detection wands and pat-downs, but that police believe several firearms got inside. Four officers were working security in the club's parking lot and some tried unsuccessfully to revive the man who died.

Cameo's Facebook profile says it caters to college students on Friday nights, when anyone over 18 is allowed in, while Saturdays are "grown and sexy night" for ages 21 and older.

The club has a history of gun violence, including a shooting inside the club on New Year's Day in 2015 and one in the parking lot in September of that year, City Manager Harry Black said.

Police Capt. Kim Williams said there was "just a lot of chaos, obviously, when shots were fired."

"Saturday night, it is a very young crowd. We have had incidents here in the past, but this is by far the worst," she said.

Referring to initial speculation about possible terrorism, Mayor John Cranley said: "What difference does that make to the victims? Innocent people were shot."

He called the shootings "unacceptable" and said authorities would work to find ways to prevent such violence.

A single body was removed by the coroner shortly after 6 a.m. A federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives team was also at the scene.

Among the injured, five were treated at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center and released, hos-

pital spokeswoman Kelly Martin said. She said two people were in critical condition and another three were listed in stable condition by late afternoon. She had no details on the types of injuries or the ages of the victims. Other injured people were taken to or drove themselves to other hospitals.

Authorities asked anyone with information to come forward. Investigators were checking to see if surveillance cameras were working, Williams said.

An Associated Press phone call to the club Sunday morning went unanswered.

The area is mostly industrial but also home to several nightclubs with a smattering of homes. A regional airport is nearby. The neighborhood is fairly desolate at night, with the exception of the nightlife scene and 24-hour gas stations. The road where the club is located was easily cordoned off by a single police cruiser and officer at either end.

First responders had problems reaching the shooting victims because the parking lots were full, Sgt. Eric Franz told the Cincinnati Enquirer.

Ohio Gov. John Kasich said on Twitter that he was "saddened to learn about last night's shooting" and that he was offering the state's assistance.

Associated Press reporter Mike Householder in Cincinnati contributed to this report.

Settler leader: Population growth is end of 2-state solution

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The number of Israeli settlers living in the West Bank has soared by nearly one-quarter over the past five years to over 420,000 people, a prominent settler leader said Sunday, presenting new population figures that he said put to rest the internationally backed idea of a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

Yaakov Katz issued his report as the Israeli government is locked in negotiations with the Trump administration over understandings that are expected to include some curbs on settlement construction.

"We are talking about a situation that is unchangeable," he said Sunday. "It's very important to know the numbers, and the numbers are growing."

According to Katz, the settler population hit 420,899 on Jan. 1, up 3.6 percent from 406,332 people a year earlier and a 23-percent increase from 342,414 at the beginning of 2012.

Katz said the numbers were based on data from the Interior Ministry that have not yet been made public. The ministry, which oversees the country's population registry, had no comment. But Peace Now, an anti-settlement watchdog group, said the numbers appeared reasonable.

The figures are being published on a new website sponsored by Bet El Institutions, a settler organization that counts members of President Donald Trump's inner circle among its supporters.

Katz's figures did not include settlement construction in east Jerusalem, where more than 200,000 Israelis now live. Altogether, he said the population growth — which is nearly double the 2-percent nationwide rate of annual population growth — means the settlements are "irreversible," he said.

"Whatever Angela Merkel or Trump or anybody else is thinking about, it belongs to the past, not to the future," he said.

Israel captured the West Bank, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek all three areas for a future independent state.

Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, leading to the takeover of the territory by the Islamic militant group Hamas two years later. Israel and Egypt have maintained a blockade over Gaza since then. Israel says the policy is needed to prevent Hamas from building up its arsenal of weapons. Critics condemn it as collective punishment.

For the past two decades, the international community has overwhelmingly backed the idea of a two-state solution as the best way of reaching peace in the region and rejected Israeli settlements as obstacles to peace.

Without an independent Palestinian state, the thinking goes, Israel will remain in control over millions of Palestinians who do not have equal rights, forcing it to choose between its Jewish and democratic

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character.

Just weeks before Trump took office, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution declaring settlements illegal.

Ahmad Majdalani, a senior aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said Palestinian independence is the only way to peace and remains a possibility, despite settler efforts to derail it.

"The two-state solution was possible yesterday and today and at any time. The two-state solution is not the problem," he said. "Settlements are."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government is dominated by pro-settler hard-liners who oppose Palestinian statehood on either security or religious grounds.

After years of clashes with President Barack Obama, Israeli hardliners have welcomed the election of Trump, who they perceive as being far more sympathetic to their cause.

Trump's platform made no mention of a Palestinian state. And during the campaign, he vowed to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a stance welcomed by Israel and opposed by the Palestinians, and signaled that he would be more tolerant of settlement construction.

But since taking office, he appears to have backpedaled. He seems to be in no rush to move the embassy, and during a White House meeting with Netanyahu last month, he urged restraint on Israeli settlement construction. He also has left the door open to a two-state solution.

A Trump envoy, Jason Greenblatt, visited the region earlier this month for introductory talks with Israelis and Palestinians. He has been working with the Israelis on a series of understandings that would limit at least some settlement construction in hopes of restarting peace talks.

Speaking to his Cabinet on Sunday, Netanyahu said there was still no agreement. "I will not go into details," he said. "Our talks with the White House are continuing. I hope they will conclude quickly."

Katz, widely known by his nickname "Ketzeleh," is one of the founders and most prominent figures in the West Bank settler movement. He is a former member of parliament and led a hard-line nationalist party.

Bet El is a religious settlement north of Jerusalem. Katz's organization sponsors a well-known Jewish seminary and "Arutz Sheva," a pro-settler news agency.

Official U.S. records show that its donors have included the family foundation of Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and confidant; David Friedman, his new ambassador to Israel; and Trump himself.

Friedman, a former fund-raiser for the Bet El Institutions, was narrowly confirmed last week as ambassador after a tough battle that included fierce opposition from dovish Jewish American groups.

Katz expressed faith that Trump would remain supportive and described the new ambassador as a "great American patriot."

"The American people will be very proud of him," he said.

'Beauty and the Beast' dances off with top box-office spot

By LINDSEY BAHR, AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Not all reboots are created equal.

This weekend at the box office, nostalgia-driven fare was everywhere, from "Beauty and the Beast" to "Power Rangers" and "CHIPS," producing both successful and underwhelming results.

On the high end, Disney's live-action "Beauty and the Beast" continued enchanting audiences in its second weekend in theaters, easily topping the charts with \$88.3 million, according to studio estimates Sunday. On the low end, Warner Bros.' raunchy, R-rated "CHIPS" debuted in seventh place with \$7.6 million.

In the middle was Lionsgate's "Power Rangers," which earned a solid \$40.5 million to grab the No. 2 spot. The PG-13 take on the campy 1990s television show tells the origin story of the Power Rangers with a diverse teenage cast of relative newcomers.

Its audiences were 60 percent male, while "Beauty and the Beast" crowds remained largely female. The divide allowed both to succeed in the crowded marketplace.

"Power Rangers" didn't get the best reviews, but audiences gave it a promising A CinemaScore, sug-

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gesting that it might have staying power in the coming weeks.

"CHIPS," on the other hand, underwhelmed audiences, critics and the studio. Dax Shepard wrote, directed and starred in the action comedy based on the 1970s and '80s TV show about the California Highway Patrol.

Costing \$25 million to produce, "CHIPS" wasn't the biggest risk, but its \$7.6 million debut disappointed. The film also got a deathly B- CinemaScore from audiences.

"Brand recognition will get you far — it gives you a leg up before you even start — but at the end of the day, it comes down to the movie itself," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for comScore. "No matter how much brand equity they have with a particular title, the real test is: How do critics and audiences respond to that film?"

"You still have to deliver a solid movie that will entice people to spend their hard-earned money to go see something that they already know, or already know about," he said.

That's where Disney has succeeded, with its latest remake earning \$317 million in just 10 days in North American theaters and \$690.3 million worldwide.

"With 'Beauty and the Beast' there have been decades of goodwill and the Disney brand and so many more elements going into it than just the intellectual property," Dergarabedian said. "Disney makes it look easy. Others have had more challenges."

Also this weekend, the sci-fi thriller "Life" failed to connect with audiences, debuting in fourth place with \$12.6 million behind holdover "Kong: Skull Island" with \$14.4 million.

The R-rated space film stars Jake Gyllenhaal and Ryan Reynolds as astronauts who discover that the alien life form they have brought on board might be dangerous. With a \$58 million price tag, Sony and Skydance's "Life" has a long journey to profitability.

Dergarabedian said that part of the reason for its muted launch might be that recent space films, such as "Passengers" and "Arrival," are available for home viewing. The much-anticipated "Alien: Covenant" and "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2" also are on the horizon.

Despite some flops, the March 2017 box office, which crossed \$1 billion this weekend, has become the biggest March of all time, with help from the strength of "Logan," "Kong: Skull Island," "Get Out" and "Beauty and the Beast."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to comScore. Where available, the latest international numbers for Friday through Sunday are also included. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Beauty and the Beast," \$88.3 million (\$119.2 million international).
2. "Power Rangers," \$40.5 million (\$18.7 million international).
3. "Kong: Skull Island," \$14.4 million (\$93 million international).
4. "Life," \$12.6 million (\$16.1 million international).
5. "Logan," \$10.1 million (\$12.1 million international).
6. "Get Out," \$8.7 million (\$2.2 million international).
7. "CHIPS," \$7.6 million (\$1.9 million international).
8. "The Shack," \$3.8 million.
9. "The Lego Batman Movie," \$2 million (\$1.2 million international).
10. "The Belko Experiment," \$1.8 million.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at international theaters (excluding the U.S. and Canada), according to comScore:

1. "Beauty and the Beast," \$119.2 million.
2. "Kong: Skull Island," \$93 million.
3. "Power Rangers," \$18.7 million.
4. "The Boss Baby," \$16.3 million.
5. "Life," \$16.1 million.
6. "Logan," \$12.1 million.
7. "The Prison," \$8.3 million.
8. "Split," \$5.2 million.
9. "Sing," \$4.6 million.

10. "A Dog's Purpose," \$4.1 million.

Universal and Focus are owned by NBC Universal, a unit of Comcast Corp.; Sony, Columbia, Sony Screen Gems and Sony Pictures Classics are units of Sony Corp.; Paramount is owned by Viacom Inc.; Disney, Pixar and Marvel are owned by The Walt Disney Co.; Miramax is owned by Filmyard Holdings LLC; 20th Century Fox and Fox Searchlight are owned by 21st Century Fox; Warner Bros. and New Line are units of Time Warner Inc.; MGM is owned by a group of former creditors including Highland Capital, Anchorage Advisors and Carl Icahn; Lionsgate is owned by Lions Gate Entertainment Corp.; IFC is owned by AMC Networks Inc.; Rogue is owned by Relativity Media LLC.

Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/lldbahr>

Blaming conservatives, Trump signals new openness to Dems

By HOPE YEN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Sunday attacked conservative lawmakers for the failure of the Republican bill to replace former President Barack Obama's health care law, as aides signaled a greater willingness to work with moderate Democrats on upcoming legislative battles from the budget and tax cuts to health care.

On Twitter, Trump complained: "Democrats are smiling in D.C. that the Freedom Caucus, with the help of Club For Growth and Heritage, have saved Planned Parenthood & Ocare!"

The Freedom Caucus is a hard-right group of more than 30 GOP House members who were largely responsible for blocking the bill to undo the Affordable Care Act, or "Obamacare." The bill was pulled from the House floor Friday in a humiliating political defeat for the president, having lacked support from either the conservative Republicans or Democrats.

Trump initially focused his blame on Democrats for the failure and predicted a dire future for the current law.

But on Sunday, his aides made clear that Trump would be seeking support from moderate Democrats, leaving open the possibility he could still revisit health care legislation. White House chief of staff Reince Priebus scolded conservative Republicans, explaining that Trump had felt "disappointed" that a "number of people he thought were loyal to him that weren't."

"It's time for the party to start governing," Priebus said. "I think it's time for our folks to come together, and I also think it's time to potentially get a few moderate Democrats on board as well."

As he ponders his next steps, Trump faces decisions on whether to back administrative changes to fix Obamacare or undermine it as prices for insurance plans rise in many markets. Over the weekend, the president tweeted a promise of achieving a "great healthcare plan" because Obamacare will "explode."

On Sunday, Priebus did not answer directly regarding Trump's choice, saying that fixes to the health law will have to come legislatively and he wants to ensure "people don't get left behind."

"I don't think the president is closing the door on anything," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., said Democrats stood ready to work with Trump to fix Obamacare if he is willing to drop attempts to repeal the law and not undermine it. He warned that Trump is destined to "lose again" on other parts of his agenda if he remains beholden to conservative Republicans.

"If he changes, he could have a different presidency," Schumer said. "But he's going to have to tell the Freedom Caucus and the hard-right special wealthy interests who are dominating his presidency ... he can't work with them, and we'll certainly look at his proposals."

Their comments came after another day of finger-pointing among Republicans, both subtle and not-so-subtle. On Saturday, Trump urged Americans in a tweet to watch Judge Jeanine Pirro's program on Fox that night. She led her show by calling for House Speaker Paul Ryan to resign, blaming him for defeat of the bill in the Republican-controlled chamber.

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Priebus described the two events as "coincidental," insisting that Trump was helping out a friend by plugging her show and no "preplanning" occurred. "He doesn't blame Paul Ryan," Priebus said. "In fact, he thought Paul Ryan worked really hard. He enjoys his relationship with Paul Ryan, thinks that Paul Ryan is a great speaker of the House."

A spokeswoman for Ryan, AshLee Strong, said Ryan and Trump spoke for nearly an hour Saturday and again on Sunday about moving forward on the agenda, saying "their relationship is stronger than ever right now." In their Sunday conversation, Trump "was clear his tweet had nothing to do with the speaker," Strong said.

The White House faces a tall task in gaining support for its congressional agenda. Trump, for instance, now lacks the savings anticipated from the health care bill to help pay for tax cuts, while expected legislation to invest \$1 trillion in roads and infrastructure and to cut down on illegal immigration will likely need support from Democrats.

Priebus said Trump was looking ahead for now at debate over the budget and a tax plan, which he said would include a border adjustment tax and middle-class tax cuts.

"It's more or less a warning shot that we are willing to talk to anyone, we always have been," he said. "I think more so now than ever, it's time for both parties to come together and get to real reforms in this country."

Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., chairman of the Freedom Caucus, acknowledged he was doing a lot of "self-critiquing" after the health care defeat. He insisted the GOP overhaul effort was not over and that he regretted not spending more time with moderate Republicans and Democrats "to find some consensus."

"It's incumbent upon those two groups, the conservatives and the moderates, to come together, hopefully in the coming days, to find consensus, to present something to the president that certainly not only gets him 216 votes, but hopefully 235 votes," he said.

Meadows also said he was open to a tax plan that is not fully "offset" so it is revenue neutral. That's a shift for a fiscal conservative concerned about deficits.

"Does it have to be what they would say revenue neutral, or do you have to have an offset like with the border adjustment tax? ... I think there has been a lot of flexibility in terms of some of my contacts and conservatives in terms of not making it totally offset," he said.

Trump left the White House on Sunday morning for the Trump National Golf Course in Potomac Falls, Virginia, returning in early afternoon. Trump also spent Saturday at his Virginia club.

Priebus spoke on "Fox News Sunday," and Schumer and Meadows appeared on ABC's "This Week."

Associated Press writer Catherine Lucey contributed to this report.

Nationwide protests bring thousands to Russia's streets

By HOWARD AMOS and JIM HEINTZ, Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's opposition, often written off by critics as a small and irrelevant coterie of privileged urbanites, put on an impressive nationwide show of strength Sunday with scores of protest rallies spanning the vast country. Hundreds were arrested, including Alexei Navalny, the anti-corruption campaigner who is President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic.

It was the biggest show of defiance since the 2011-2012 wave of demonstrations that rattled the Kremlin and led to harsh new laws aimed at suppressing dissent. Almost all of Sunday's rallies were unsanctioned, but thousands braved the prospect of arrests to gather in cities from the Far East port of Vladivostok to the "window on the West" of St. Petersburg.

An organization that monitors Russian political repression, OVD-Info, said it counted more than 800 people arrested in the Moscow demonstrations alone. That number could not be confirmed and state news agency Tass cited Moscow police as saying there were about 500 arrests.

Navalny, who was arrested while walking from a nearby subway station to the demonstration at Moscow's iconic Pushkin Square, was the driving force of the demonstrations. He called for them after his

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Foundation for Fighting Corruption released a report contending that Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has amassed a collection of mansions, yachts and vineyards.

Navalny is a persistent thorn in the Kremlin's side. He has served several short jail terms after arrests in previous protests and has twice been convicted in a fraud case, but given a suspended sentence. He intends to run for president in 2018 — an election in which Putin is widely expected to run for another term — even though the conviction technically disqualifies him. Putin has dominated Russian political life, as president or prime minister, since 2000.

No overall figures on arrests or protest attendance were available. Some Russian state news media gave relatively cursory reports on the demonstrations; the state news TV channel Rossiya-24 ignored them altogether in evening broadcasts.

Police estimated the Moscow crowd at about 7,000, but it could have been larger. The one-hectare (2.5-acre) Pushkin Square was densely crowded as were sidewalks on the adjacent Tverskaya Street.

In St. Petersburg, about 5,000 protesters assembled in the Mars Field park, shouting slogans including "Putin resign!" and "Down with the thieves in the Kremlin!"

Russia's beleaguered opposition is often seen as primarily a phenomenon of a Westernized urban elite, but Sunday's protests included gatherings in places far from cosmopolitan centers, such as Siberia's Chita and Barnaul.

"Navalny has united people who think the same; that people don't agree with the authorities is obvious from what is going on in the country today," Anna Ivanova, 19, said at the Moscow demonstration. "I am a bit scared."

Scuffles with police erupted sporadically and the arrested demonstrators included a gray-haired man whom police dragged along the pavement. Police cleared the square after about three hours and began herding demonstrators down side streets.

"It's scary, but if everyone is afraid, no one would come out onto the streets," 19-year-old protester Yana Aksyonova said.

The luxuries amassed by Medvedev include a house for raising ducks, so many placards in Sunday's protests featured mocking images of yellow duck toys. Some demonstrators carried running shoes — a reference to Navalny's assertion that tracking shipments of running shoes for Medvedev helped reveal his real-estate portfolio. Others showed up with their faces painted green, a reminder of a recent attack on Navalny in which an assailant threw a green antiseptic liquid onto his face.

"People are unhappy with the fact that there's been no investigation" of the corruption allegations, said Moscow protester Ivan Gronstein.

There were no comments reported from Putin, Medvedev or other top Russian politicians, leaving in doubt what the Kremlin's strategy may be for countering the protests. Previous waves of demonstrations have dissipated through inertia or the intimidation of increasingly punitive measures; under a 2014 law, holding an unauthorized protest is punishable by 15 days in jail, or five years imprisonment for a third offense.

In Vladivostok, police forcefully detained some demonstrators near the city's railway terminal, in one case falling down a small grassy slope as they wrestled with a detainee.

News reports and social media reported demonstrations in large cities throughout the country, including Novosibirsk, Tomsk and Krasnoyarsk. At least 25 people were reported arrested in Vladivostok and 12 in Khabarovsk.

About 40 people were detained in a small protest in the capital of Dagestan, a restive republic in the Russian Caucasus, according to Tass,

= Irina Titova in St. Petersburg contributed to this report.

UK: Attacker used WhatsApp, firm must help police get access

By GREGORY KATZ, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Westminster Bridge attacker Khalid Masood sent a WhatsApp message that cannot be accessed because it was encrypted by the popular messaging service, a top British security official

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said Sunday.

British press reports suggest Masood used the messaging service owned by Facebook just minutes before the Wednesday rampage that left three pedestrians and one police officer dead and dozens more wounded.

As controversy swirled over the encrypted messages, police made another arrest in Birmingham, England, where Masood had lived. The 30-year-old is one of two men now in custody over possible links to the attack. Neither has been charged or publicly named.

Masood was shot dead on the grounds of Parliament.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd used appearances on BBC and Sky News to urge WhatsApp and other encrypted services to make their platforms accessible to intelligence services and police trying to carrying out lawful eavesdropping.

"We need to make sure that organizations like WhatsApp — and there are plenty of others like that — don't provide a secret place for terrorists to communicate with each other," she said.

Rudd did not provide any details about Masood's use of WhatsApp, saying only "this terrorist sent a WhatsApp message and it can't be accessed."

But her call for a "back door" system to allow authorities to retrieve information is likely to meet resistance from the tech industry, which has faced previous law enforcement demands for access to data after major attacks.

In the United States, Apple fought the FBI's request for the passcodes needed to unlock an iPhone that had been used by one of the perpetrators in the 2015 extremist attack in San Bernardino, California.

The FBI initially claimed it could obtain the data only with Apple's help, but ultimately found another way to hack into the locked phone.

Masood drove a rented SUV into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge before smashing it into Parliament's gates and rushing onto the grounds, where he fatally stabbed a policeman and was shot by other officers. A detailed police reconstruction has found the entire attack lasted 82 seconds.

Police are trying to pinpoint his motive and identify any possible accomplices, making the WhatsApp message a potential clue to his state of mind and his social media contacts.

Rudd said attacks like Masood's would be easier to prevent if authorities could penetrate encrypted services after obtaining warrants similar to the ones used to listen in on telephone calls or — in snail mail days — to steam open letters and read their contents.

Without a change in the system, she said terrorists would be able to communicate with each other without fear of being overheard even in cases where a legal warrant has been obtained.

Rudd also urged technology companies to do a better job at preventing the publication of material that promotes extremism. She plans to meet with firms Thursday about setting up an industry board that would take steps to make the web less useful to extremists.

British police investigating the attack say they still believe Masood, a 52-year-old Briton, acted alone and say they have no indications that further attacks are planned.

Metropolitan Police Deputy Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu said it may never be possible to fully determine Masood's motives.

"That understanding may have died with him," Basu said Saturday night as police appealed for people who knew Masood or saw him to contact investigators. "Even if he acted alone in the preparation, we need to establish with absolute clarity why he did these unspeakable acts, to bring reassurance to Londoners."

The Islamic State group, which is losing territory in Iraq and Syria but still has radical followers in other parts of the world, has claimed Masood was a "soldier" carrying out its wishes to attack Western countries.

Masood had convictions for violent crimes in the U.K. and spent time in prison. He also worked in Saudi Arabia teaching English for two years and traveled there again in 2015 on a visa designed for religious pilgrimages.

Along with the man arrested Sunday, a 58-year-old man detained in Birmingham several days ago remains in custody in the case. Nine others arrested after the attack have been freed without charges,

while one person was released on bail.

The family of slain police officer Keith Palmer, meanwhile, released a statement thanking those who tried to save his life.

"There was nothing more you could have done. You did your best and we are just grateful he was not alone," the statement said.

Medical pot bill in S. Carolina bolstered by conservatives

By SEANNA ADCOX, Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina Rep. Eric Bedingfield once shunned all marijuana use, but when his eldest son's six-year struggle with opioid addiction ended with his overdose a year ago, the conservative Republican co-sponsored medical cannabis legislation.

"My mindset has changed from somebody who looked down on it as a negative substance to saying, 'This has benefits,'" Bedingfield said recently.

The 50-year-old teetotaler believes marijuana may effectively wean addicts from an opioid dependence. Ultimately, the Marine veteran hopes medical marijuana can be an alternative to people being prescribed OxyContin or other opioid painkillers to begin with, helping curb an epidemic he's seen destroy families of all economic levels.

Two decades after California became the first state to legalize medical marijuana, efforts to let patients legally access pot are slowly taking root in the South.

While 28 states allow comprehensive medical marijuana programs, only two of those are in the South. Arkansas and Florida voters approved theirs through the ballot last November. Neither is in place yet. A law signed in Louisiana last year, also not yet in effect, doesn't allow the smoking or vaping of marijuana.

This year's renewed push in South Carolina is bolstered by some of the state's most conservative legislators, such as Bedingfield, whose opinions have shifted due to personal losses or the pleadings of parents and pastors in their districts.

Three years ago, state lawmakers passed a very narrow law allowing patients with severe epilepsy, or their caregivers, to legally possess cannabidiol, or CBD, a non-psychoactive oil derived from marijuana. Bedingfield voted against that idea.

Bill Davis, a Christian author who leads a Bible study for people fighting drug addiction, said he was bedridden before trying marijuana. Diagnosed two years ago with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease with no cure, he was put on an experimental drug with "horrible side effects."

"I had to decide whether I wanted to die of lung disease or kidney or liver failure," Davis said.

Then he started vaping marijuana, which he says allows him to control the amount of CBD and THC he receives.

"I'm praying this state will allow me to be treated legally for me to live" using "a plant that God made," he said.

Republican Rep. Jonathon Hill said he signed onto the bill after hearing Davis' story over dinner at his home.

"He is living, walking proof that there can be some very real benefits," he said.

A bill allowing people with a debilitating medical condition, or their adult caregivers, to legally possess 2 ounces (57 grams) of marijuana advanced last month to the House's full medical committee. Its Republican backers tout the bill's "seed-to-sale tracking" as guarding against recreational use. A Senate subcommittee is considering an identical bill.

"We shouldn't be forcing a choice between breaking the law or not taking care of members of your family," said Republican Rep. Bill Herbkersman.

Marijuana was the only thing that gave his brother an appetite and kept the pain at bay before he died of skin cancer in 2011, Herbkersman said.

"They call it a gateway drug, but sometimes it's just a gateway to a little bit better life, or what you have left of a life," he said.

The idea still has strong opposition — chiefly from South Carolina's law enforcement agencies, includ-

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ing State Law Enforcement Division Chief Mark Keel.

Jarrod Bruder, director of the state Sheriffs' Association, told the House panel that sheriffs can't support legalizing a drug the federal government still puts in the same class as heroin and cocaine.

His predecessor, however, stunned observers when he stood to support the bill.

Jeff Moore, who retired in 2014 after 32 years leading the association, credits marijuana with saving his son's life. But he says it also prevents his son, an Army veteran, from coming home to South Carolina for fear of being arrested.

In 2008, six weeks into his son's first of two tours in Iraq, their convoy was surrounded in Mosul. He watched as five of his friends were killed by an IED and he fought for his life for 2 ½ hours. He suffers from PTSD and traumatic brain injury as that battle scene and others replay in his mind. He was honorably discharged after two suicide attempts, Moore said.

Eventually, his son's father-in-law, a Vietnam veteran, convinced him to move near him in Michigan, where he can legally smoke a high-CBD, low-THC strain of marijuana Moore says does not get him high. He's stopped drinking, returned to college and organized an all-veteran support group. He is also an elder in his church, Moore said.

"His life has made a complete, 180-degree turnaround. Had he stayed in South Carolina, he'd have ended up killing himself," Moore said.

Family of missing ex-FBI agent files lawsuit against Iran

By JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The family of a former FBI agent who went missing in Iran a decade ago on an unauthorized CIA assignment has filed a lawsuit against the Islamic Republic, accusing it of using "cold, cynical and false denials" to torture his loved ones.

The lawsuit by Robert Levinson's family in U.S. federal court comes years after the last hostage photos and video of the 69-year-old investigator surfaced in emails they say were sent by Iran so the country "would not be held responsible for his ultimate fate." The lawsuit also describes in detail offers by Iran to "arrange" for his release in exchange for a series of concessions, including the return of a Revolutionary Guard general who defected to the West.

"Iran has, for many years, established a pattern of seizing and holding hostages in order to extract concessions from the hostage's home country," the lawsuit filed Tuesday in Washington reads. "That Robert Levinson's seizure is a part of that pattern is reflected in Iran's multiple attempts to use Robert Levinson's imprisonment to extort concessions from the United States."

The family's lawsuit seeks unspecified monetary damages from Iran.

Iran's mission at the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment Sunday, amid Iran's long celebration of the annual Nowruz holiday that marks the Persian New Year and the arrival of spring. Iranian media previously carried international reports on the lawsuit, without elaborating.

Levinson disappeared from Iran's Kish Island on March 9, 2007. For years, U.S. officials would only say that Levinson, a meticulous FBI investigator credited with busting Russian and Italian mobsters, was working for a private firm on his trip.

In December 2013, The Associated Press revealed Levinson in fact had been on a mission for CIA analysts who had no authority to run spy operations. Levinson's family had received a \$2.5 million annuity from the CIA in order to stop a lawsuit revealing details of his work, while the agency forced out three veteran analysts and disciplined seven others.

The lawsuit said emails to Levinson's family and friends began in August 2007, though the only photos and video of Levinson emerged in 2010 and 2011. The video message included a demand for \$3 million and the release of "certain named individuals," the lawsuit said.

Iranian authorities also used a meeting with an American religious organization to ask for the release of a report on its nuclear program to be delayed in exchange for Levinson, the lawsuit said. At another time, Iran asked for the exchange of the defecting general, while Levinson remained held all the while, it said.

"For the past 10 years the Iranian government has held Robert Levinson captive while at the same time denying any knowledge or involvement in the circumstances of his capture," the lawsuit said. "In order to maintain its false story, Iran has held Robert Levinson incommunicado."

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

Trump's border-wall proposal faces many obstacles

By ALICIA A. CALDWELL, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has now laid out exactly what he wants in the "big, beautiful wall" that he's promised to build on the U.S.-Mexico border. But his effort to build a huge hurdle to those entering the U.S. illegally faces impediments of its own.

It's still not clear how Trump will pay for the wall that, as described in contracting notices, would be 30 feet (9 meters) high and easy on the eye for those looking at it from the north. The Trump administration will also have to contend with unfavorable geography and many legal battles.

A look at some of those obstacles:

MONEY

Trump promised that Mexico would pay for his wall, a demand Mexico has repeatedly rejected. Trump's first budget proposal to Congress, a preliminary draft that was light on details, asked lawmakers for a \$2.6 billion down payment for the wall. An internal report prepared for Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly estimated that a wall along the entire border would cost about \$21 billion. Congressional Republicans have estimated a more moderate price tag of \$12 billion to \$15 billion. Trump himself has suggested a cost of about \$12 billion.

It's unclear how much money Congress will approve. Lawmakers have been balking at his plans to sharply cut other federal spending to pay for the wall and other boosts to border security, while increasing military spending. White House spokesman Sean Spicer told reporters this past week that the administration was still looking at how the wall would be funded, adding that it hasn't given up on Mexico footing the bill.

GEOGRAPHY

Roughly half of the 2,000-mile (3,200-kilometer) U.S.-Mexico border is in Texas and marked by the winding and twisting Rio Grande. A 1970 treaty with Mexico requires that anything built near that river not obstruct its flow. The same treaty applies to a stretch of border in Arizona, where the Colorado River marks the international boundary.

Some fencing that is already in place along the frontier is built well off the river, in some places nearly a mile (about a kilometer) away from the border.

Trump will have to navigate not only the treaty maintained by the International Boundary and Water Commission but also various environmental regulations that protect some stretches of border and restrict what kind of structures can be built and where. The contracting notices of March 17 say the Trump administration wants the wall dug at least 6 feet (almost 2 meters) into the ground. Along parts of the border in California, environmentally sensitive sand dunes required that a "floating fence" was built to allow the natural movement of the sand.

LEGAL CHALLENGES

Nearly all of the land along the Texas border is privately held — much of it by people whose families have been in the region for generations — and buying their land won't be easy, as Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama discovered. Lawyers for both administrations fought in court with private landowners. Obama's efforts to buy privately held land in the Rio Grande Valley have carried over into Trump's term.

The Trump administration appears to be preparing for the legal fight and included a request for more lawyers to handle such cases in its budget proposal. Spicer said this past week the administration would

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“take the steps necessary” to fulfill Trump’s promise to secure the southern border.

Follow Alicia A. Caldwell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/acaldwellap

GOP struggles to govern despite a monopoly in Washington

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and BILL BARROW, Associated Press

The Republican Party of “no” for Democrat Barack Obama’s eight years is having a hard time getting to “yes” in the early Donald Trump era.

The unmitigated failure of the GOP bill to replace Obamacare underscored that Republicans are a party of upstart firebrands, old-guard conservatives and moderates in Democratic-leaning districts. Despite the GOP monopoly on Washington, they are pitted against one another and struggling for a way to govern.

The divisions cost the party its best chance to fulfill a seven-year promise to undo Obama’s Affordable Care Act and cast doubt on whether the Republican-led Congress can do the monumental — the first overhaul of the nation’s tax system in more than 30 years — as well as the basics — keeping the government open at the end of next month, raising the nation’s borrowing authority later this year and passing the 12 spending bills for federal agencies and departments.

While the anti-establishment bloc that grew out of the tea party’s rise helped the Republicans win majorities in Congress in 2010 and 2014, the internal divide, complicated further by Trump’s independence, threatens the GOP’s ability to deliver on other promises.

“I think we have to do some soul-searching internally to determine whether or not we are even capable as a governing body,” said Rep. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota in the bitter aftermath of the health care debacle.

Despite a commanding majority in the House, an advantage in the Senate and Trump in the White House, Republicans hardly seem to be on the same team.

“There are some folks in the Republican House caucus who have yet to make the pivot from complaining to governing,” said Republican pollster Whit Ayres. “And this is a White House controlled by a politician who is not really trying to lead a party.”

The GOP health care bill exposed philosophical fissures masked by years of rejecting and resisting all things Obama. The legislation’s provision to repeal essential health benefits such as maternity care and emergency services was designed to appeal to hard-line conservatives who don’t think the government should be in the health care business.

That unnerved GOP moderates, especially those in districts won by Democrat Hillary Clinton last year, who were worried about tens of thousands of constituents losing Medicaid or older voters being forced to pay more. The irony of the outsider president is both the health care debate and Trump’s proposed budget cuts to domestic programs from Appalachia to the inner cities reminded many Americans that government can do some good.

Pulling the bill on Friday cleared out Washington, giving House Republicans a chance to cool off back home this weekend. Still, some seethed while others couldn’t hide their frustration, hardly a combination for unity and success.

Michigan Rep. Justin Amash said he and his conservative colleagues wanted a full-blown departure from the Obama law, rather than what Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., was offering, but were given little voice.

“From the beginning of the process, I think the way it was set up did not bring the disparate parts of the conference together,” Amash said.

New York Rep. Chris Collins, an early Trump backer in the campaign, echoed the bill’s supporters in chiding opponents for not seizing the opportunity to deliver on the perennial campaign promise.

“I can tell you right now there’s bitterness within our conference, it’s going to take time to heal that,” Collins said.

Ryan pledged the House would return to its campaign agenda, including legislation aimed at beefing up U.S.-Mexican border security, increasing spending on the military and public works, while also reining in the budget deficit. The GOP has to move beyond the defeat, with midterm elections next year and

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the historic disadvantage the president's party typically faces in holding seats.

"We were a 10-year opposition party where being against things was easy to do. You just had to be against it," Ryan told reporters after canceling the vote. "And now, in three months' time, we try to go to governing where we actually have to get ... people to agree with each other."

Ryan's toughest opponents were the 30 or so members of the House Freedom Caucus, the hardliners widely expected to be marginalized after Trump won, but instead a bloc that showed its strength. The GOP owes its majority numbers to the brand of conservatism born in opposition to the 2010 health care law, the tea partiers and non-conformists like Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ted Cruz of Texas.

After all that winning, former Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour cast the GOP as an expansive party with multiple factions. But the former Mississippi governor said Republicans must produce something for the electorate because they "have told the American people from Day One" they would.

For his part, Ryan insisted there is a viable governing path.

"We will get there," he said Friday. "But we weren't there today."

Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa, and Barrow from Atlanta. Associated Press writers Kevin Freking and Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington contributed to this report.

No surprise: Beijing's pick Lam chosen as Hong Kong's leader

By **KELVIN CHAN, Associated Press**

HONG KONG (AP) — The candidate favored by China's Communist leadership was chosen as Hong Kong's new leader on Sunday, in the first such vote since huge pro-democracy protests erupted over the semiautonomous Chinese city's election system in 2014.

A committee dominated by pro-Beijing elites selected Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's former No. 2 official, as the financial hub's chief executive even though she was far less popular than her main rival. Lam received 67 percent of the votes cast by the 1,194-member committee.

Her victory was hardly a surprise. China's leaders had lobbied heavily behind the scenes for the 59-year-old Lam, who will become Hong Kong's first female leader and its fourth since British colonial control ended in 1997. After the votes were counted, she bowed to the crowd and shook hands with the second-place finisher, former Finance Secretary John Tsang.

Some pro-democracy supporters in the official seating area yelled slogans and held up a yellow umbrella, the symbol of the 2014 protests, as the results were announced. The elite election committee was at the root of the protests, with activists decrying the lack of a direct choice by Hong Kong's 3.8 million registered voters.

Democracy supporters called Sunday's vote a "fake election" and blasted Beijing for meddling in Hong Kong's affairs.

Political party Demosisto, founded by the young pro-democracy protest leader Joshua Wong, said in a Facebook post that "this result is a nightmare to Hong Kongers." It said it would organize "a large civil disobedience protest" when Lam is sworn in on July 1.

Lam, a lifelong civil servant, has a reputation as an efficient and pragmatic administrator, but is unpopular with Hong Kongers because she's seen as a proxy for Beijing and out of touch with ordinary people. Tsang, in contrast, is highly popular because of his easygoing persona and deft use of social media. He was nicknamed "Pringles" or "Uncle Chips" in Cantonese for his signature mustache that drew comparisons to the snack food mascot.

Lam received 777 of the 1,163 validly cast votes. Tsang got 365 votes, or 31 percent, while the third candidate, retired judge Woo Kwok-hing, had 21 votes.

As the next leader of the Asian financial center, Lam will inherit a city roiled by political divisions, including a burgeoning independence movement, and saddled with sluggish economic growth. Many fear that Beijing is tightening control and undermining the "one country, two systems" framework that

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guarantees Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy. Those fears have been amplified by several cases in recent years, including the secret detention on the mainland of five Hong Kong booksellers and a Chinese tycoon's suspected abduction in Hong Kong by mainland security agents.

Lam's ability to soothe tensions relies on how much public support she can gain. She lagged far behind Tsang in opinion polls.

"My priority will be to heal the divide and to ease the frustrations and to unite our society to move forward," she said at a news conference after the results were announced.

Lam said she would not immediately revive attempts to revamp the electoral system, a potential political flashpoint that could rekindle protests by pro-democracy supporters. She said she wanted to focus on other more pressing issues such as housing, education and health care.

"There is a serious divide in Hong Kong, so why don't we start with the easier subjects and try to reach consensus" on how to tackle them, she said.

Lam succeeds current leader Leung Chun-ying, who cited family reasons when he ruled out a second term. Political analysts suspect Beijing asked Leung, a highly polarizing figure, to step aside.

The Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, China's Cabinet, said in a statement that Lam met the standards to be the city's leader, including "being trusted by the central government," a key factor that Tsang's opponents repeatedly said he did not enjoy.

When reporters asked Tsang on Sunday whether he thought Beijing had interfered in the selection process, he said he respected the decision of the election committee members.

"I mean, all they have is themselves and their conscience when they voted. So it's their responsibility, nobody else's," Tsang said.

Members of the Hong Kong election committee include tycoons like Li Ka-shing, Hong Kong's richest person. They represent industry and trade groups such as finance, accounting, real estate and textiles. The way the members are chosen also irks democracy activists. Some are elected by peers, but others are uncontested, especially in sectors most supportive of China's Communist leaders.

Hong Kong lawmakers, local councilors and delegates to China's rubber-stamp parliament also have votes, and some 326 seats, mostly in the education, legal, health and social welfare sectors, are held by pro-democracy supporters.

Associated Press news assistant Henry Hou in Beijing contributed to this report.

Follow Kelvin Chan on Twitter at twitter.com/chanman

Find his stories at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/kelvin-chan>

New anxieties as Trump says Obamacare will 'explode'

By MICHAEL WARREN and SUDHIN THANAWALA, Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Americans who have benefited from the Affordable Care Act are feeling some relief at the failure of Republican efforts to repeal it, but they face new anxieties with President Donald Trump tweeting that "ObamaCare will explode."

Premiums have risen and major insurers have backed out of the state markets where people can buy insurance online under Obama's signature health care law. But people who say it saved their lives or helped them start a business want lawmakers to fix these problems, not encourage them.

"It does need its fixes, I totally see that," said Inge Hafkemeyer, 57, who credits the law's subsidies for containing her costs as her home-based event-planning business took off in Mission, Kansas, a Kansas City suburb. "But if your roof leaks, you don't burn down the house to fix it."

Clare Schexnyder, 49, is convinced she's alive today because of it. As a small business owner in Decatur, Georgia, she couldn't afford health insurance until the rollout in 2013. She began getting mammograms, and her breast cancer was spotted in time. Her double mastectomy and reconstruction surgery was priced at \$250,000, but she paid no more than her \$6,200 annual deductible.

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Then, her daughter spent a week in the hospital after her appendix burst, costing them another \$6,200. They took out a second mortgage to pay the bills.

"An appendectomy shouldn't have to make me refinance my house," she said. "It's still not a perfect system by any means, but I'm glad we have it."

Schexnyder's insurer pulled out of the Affordable Care Act last year, leaving fewer alternatives in Georgia, one of the states that refused to set up insurance exchanges or participate in Medicaid expansion.

But she objects to tweets like this one Trump sent on Saturday: "ObamaCare will explode and we will all get together and piece together a great healthcare plan for THE PEOPLE. Do not worry."

"They're setting it up to fail, which is irresponsible and unforgiveable," Schexnyder said.

Shannon Henson, a 49-year-old unemployed conference planner in the Kansas City suburb of Independence, Missouri, said the Affordable Care Act has been a good starting point.

"It wasn't going to be perfect from the get-go," she said.

Republican promises to repeal and replace the law foundered on Friday when House Speaker Paul Ryan abruptly pulled the party's health care bill to avoid almost certain defeat.

"We're going to be living with Obamacare for the foreseeable future," Ryan, R-Wis., told reporters.

The law has covered more than 20 million people who were previously uninsured through private insurance sold on the law's marketplaces and by expanding Medicaid, the health program designed to help poor Americans. It required insurers to cover "essential" services, including mammograms, and barred them from refusing policies to the very sick or others with pre-existing health conditions.

But premiums jumped by double digits this year as the cost of medical care and prescription drugs continues to soar, and the marketplaces created by the law are short on the healthy consumers who make insurance companies profitable. In about one-third of U.S. counties, consumers in the individual markets don't have a choice of plans.

Mina Viladas, 53, of Fairfield, Connecticut, said she was covered under the Affordable Care Act when she needed emergency surgery. But the self-employed fitness trainer said the insurance plans are getting more expensive.

"The Democrats need to work on improving it, with the Republicans, if possible," she said. "But I'm happy it's still where it is because it's saved me."

Thanawala reported from San Mateo, Calif. Associated Press writers Pat Eaton-Robb in Bridgeport, Conn. and Jim Suhr in Kansas City contributed to this report.

Play it back: Rematches to decide last 2 spots in Final Four

By EDDIE PELLIS, AP National Writer

The most entertaining college basketball game of the regular season came in December.

Malik Monk set a record for a Kentucky freshman with 47 points, including a go-ahead 3-pointer taken against his coach's wishes, to lift the Wildcats to a 103-100 win over North Carolina.

Are these two ready for an encore?

Of course they are — though it's a valid argument to say this rematch might be better suited for next weekend in the Final Four than Sunday in the Elite Eight.

"I remember watching them play and I'm thinking, 'Please don't put them in our bracket,'" Kentucky coach John Calipari said. "And there they are in our bracket."

Indeed, the South bracket in which Kentucky and Carolina reside was pegged as the toughest on Selection Sunday. The top four seeds made it to the Sweet 16, and the Wildcats and Tar Heels moved within a game of the Final Four with double-digit wins.

North Carolina is a 2 1/2-point favorite in Sunday's game, which will fill out a Final Four that already includes Gonzaga and Oregon, both of which won Saturday. The first meeting between the Heels and Cats — the late half of a made-for-TV doubleheader in Las Vegas three months ago — now feels like a distant memory.

"I don't think we're freshmen anymore," Monk said. "You can't use that term anymore because it's in

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the tournament now. Nobody looks at that.”

Kentucky trailed 100-98 and Calipari was imploring his young freshman to drive the ball to the hoop in transition. Instead, he pulled up and made the 3 to put the Wildcats ahead for good with 16 seconds left.

“Heck of a college basketball game if you don’t care who won,” Carolina coach Roy Williams said afterward. “But I do care who wins.”

If North Carolina turns the tables, it will give the Tar Heels a return trip to the Final Four after their heartbreaking loss to Villanova in the final last year — on a buzzer-beating 3 by Kris Jenkins. It will also mark a festive send-off for Justin Jackson, who leads Carolina with 18.2 points a game and is expected to call this, his junior year, his last in college.

Kentucky’s list of probable one-and-doners includes Monk, Bam Adebayo and De’Aaron Fox.

“I’m not worried about that,” Fox said. “We’re still playing basketball, so I’m not thinking about leaving. If things go as planned, we still have three games left, so that’s not in my mind right now.”

SPEAKING OF REMATCHES: Sunday’s first game pits familiar foes in an unexpected setting. Florida and South Carolina of the Southeastern Conference will meet at Madison Square Garden for a trip to the Final Four.

“We’re playing a team we know,” said coach Frank Martin, who has led the Gamecocks further through the NCAA bracket than they have ever been. “We’re not playing the moment. We’re not playing a building. We’re not playing the NCAA Tournament. We’re playing the Florida Gators. And our focus should be playing a team that we have played twice.”

In many ways, it was the first meeting — a 57-53 South Carolina win on Jan. 18 — that set the stage for where both teams are today.

The Gators failed to sink a 3-pointer for the first time in 850 games — a streak that began in 1992 and lasted the entire Billy Donovan era. Another loss, three days later, prompted a two-hour team meeting that triggered a nine-game winning streak, including the rematch with the Gamecocks.

But South Carolina’s win over Florida also announced the Gamecocks as a force. It was their third win over a Top 25 team this season, and when it was over, senior Sindarius Thornwell said this: “Before the game, I was saying these are the games you prepare for in your backyard growing up.”

They certainly are. And this next one, too.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <http://collegebasketball.ap.org> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Reynolds and Fisher honored with humor, music and dance

By ANTHONY McCARTNEY, AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Laughter, music and the tapping of dancing shoes reverberated throughout a public memorial to Debbie Reynolds and Carrie Fisher, which loved ones say is just how the actresses would have wanted it.

There were few tears throughout the two-hour ceremony Saturday, which honored the mother-daughter duo’s impact on film, culture and those who knew them with a mix of photos, videos, and anecdotes that kept the audience laughing and applauding.

Todd Fisher led the ceremony, which he said was intended to bring fans an intimate view of his mother and sister. He called it a show, saying his mother hated to attend memorials.

Hundreds of fans — some wearing “Star Wars” attire — attended the public ceremony that featured numerous family photos and Reynolds’ final interview reflecting on her life and philanthropy, and one of Fisher’s high school friends sharing some her off-color emails to him.

A troupe from Reynolds’ dance studio performed an homage to “Singin’ in the Rain,” the film that catapulted Reynolds to stardom at age 19. After an opening film that was an ode to Fisher’s “Star Wars” role, a working R2D2 unit came on stage, mournfully beeped and parked next to a director’s chair with Fisher’s name on it. Across the stage, near a piano, sat an empty chair with Reynolds’ name on it.

Fisher, 60, an actress and writer who starred as Princess Leia in the original “Star Wars” trilogy, died

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Dec. 27 after suffering a medical emergency days earlier aboard a flight from London. Reynolds, an Oscar-nominated actress for her role in "The Unsinkable Molly Brown," died the following day at age 84.

Todd Fisher recounted his mother's final moments and her remark that she wanted to be with her daughter.

"It was a very peaceful exit that only my mother could have orchestrated," he said to booming laughter. "She was trained in Hollywood where they teach you to make a great entrance, and exit."

Fisher and Reynolds had a complex relationship, with some years of estrangement before they reunited and became close confidantes.

Actor Dan Aykroyd described Fisher, his one-time fiancée, as a chatterbox who never let him speak. He described using the Heimlich maneuver on her once, and joked that if he had been on the plane where Fisher fell ill in December, he "might have been able to save her again."

He echoed a sentiment expressed by many early in his remarks. "We really shouldn't be here this soon," he said.

The ceremony was attended by several stars, including Rene Russo, Beverly D'Angelo, "Dallas" actress Morgan Brittany, actor-director Fisher Stevens, "Brady Bunch" actress Susan Olsen and actor Griffin Dunne.

Dunne recounted living with Fisher in New York when they were both young actors, and her initial reactions to working on "Star Wars." He recounted Fisher's assessment of the film: "It's stupid and it's terrible."

After the first screening, they both knew she had been wrong. "We knew movies would never be the same, and you just knew Carrie's life would never be the same."

When speakers weren't delivering one-liners — some that had been uttered or penned by Fisher and Reynolds — music and dance took over the stage. The ceremony featured a new song James Blunt wrote after Fisher's death, and the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles performed a somber rendition of Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors" that celebrated Fisher's status as a feminist icon.

Actress Ruta Lee celebrated Reynolds' philanthropy in her eulogy, which included her singing to troops during the Korean War and her later efforts raising millions to help those suffering from mental illness. Carrie Fisher battled mental illness and addiction, exploring her struggles in the book "Postcards from the Edge."

Fisher discussed her mother's charitable work in a video clip, joking: "She sort of started what this town was going to need quite a bit of, which was treatment for the mentally ill."

Lee said it was OK to feel sadness at the deaths of Reynolds and Fisher, but not to dwell on it. "Debbie the unsinkable and her beautiful daughter would never want us to mourn," she said.

Author Gavin de Becker, who attended high school with Fisher and recounted how his infatuation with her turned into a lifelong friendship, said his friend "zoomed through time" and made so many people's lives better. He recounted how Fisher took him on international trips and "gave me so many firsts."

"The first time I had sex was at Carrie's house," de Becker said. "It wasn't with Carrie, but she arranged it."

It was one of many tales about the actresses that drew boisterous laughter.

After the service, fans were invited to see the actresses' final resting place at Forest Lawn - Hollywood Hills, a storied cemetery where numerous celebrities, including Bette Davis and Liberace, are buried or interred.

Many also paused to snap photos with some of the actresses' memorabilia that was displayed outside the theater, including two dresses Fisher wore while filming "Star Wars" and "When Harry Met Sally," and two of Reynolds' costumes from "Singin' in the Rain" and "Unsinkable Molly Brown."

Associated Press producer Nicole Evatt contributed to this report

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Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Sunday, March 26, the 85th day of 2017. There are 280 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 26, 1917, the Seattle Metropolitans became the first U.S. team to win the Stanley Cup as they defeated the Montreal Canadiens in Game 4 of the finals by a score of 9-1.

On this date:

In 1812, an earthquake devastated Caracas, Venezuela, causing an estimated 26,000 deaths, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1827, composer Ludwig van Beethoven died in Vienna.

In 1874, poet Robert Frost was born in San Francisco.

In 1892, poet Walt Whitman died in Camden, New Jersey.

In 1937, a 6-foot-tall statue of the cartoon character Popeye was unveiled during the Second Annual Spinach Festival in Crystal City, Texas.

In 1945, during World War II, Iwo Jima was fully secured by U.S. forces following a final, desperate attack by Japanese soldiers. Former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, 82, died in Ty Newydd, Llanystumdwy, Wales.

In 1958, the U.S. Army launched America's third successful satellite, Explorer 3.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI issued an encyclical, "Populorum Progressio," on "the progressive development of peoples," in which he expressed concern for those trying to escape hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance.

In 1979, a peace treaty was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (men-AH'-kem BAY'-gihn) and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter at the White House.

In 1982, groundbreaking ceremonies took place in Washington, D.C., for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

In 1992, a judge in Indianapolis sentenced former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson to six years in prison for raping a Miss Black America contestant. (Tyson ended up serving three years.)

In 1997, the bodies of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate techno-religious cult who'd committed suicide were found inside a rented mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California.

Ten years ago: The military concluded that high-ranking Army officers had made critical errors in reporting the friendly fire death of Army Ranger Pat Tillman in Afghanistan, but that there was no criminal wrongdoing in the shooting of the former NFL star by fellow soldiers. (Tillman's family rejected the findings.) Australian detainee David Hicks pleaded guilty before a military tribunal at Guantanamo to helping terrorists fight the United States in Afghanistan. (Hicks, who had already spent more than five years at Guantanamo Bay, was sentenced to seven years in prison; all but nine months of his term were suspended. Hicks was returned to Australia to serve out his term, and was freed in Dec. 2007; the U.S. Court of Military Commission Review struck down his conviction in 2015.)

Five years ago: As demonstrations swirled outside, Supreme Court justices began hearing arguments on challenges to President Barack Obama's historic health care overhaul. Pope Benedict XVI arrived in Cuba in the footsteps of his immediate predecessor, Pope John Paul II, expressing great affection for Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits and heartfelt hopes for reconciliation.

One year ago: Bernie Sanders scored wins over Hillary Clinton in the Washington state, Alaska and Hawaii Democratic caucuses. Belgian prosecutors announced they had three men in custody in connection with the March 22 suicide attacks on the Brussels airport and subway that claimed 32 victims. The six astronauts at the International Space Station got an early Easter treat with the arrival of a supply ship full of fresh food and experiments. Author Jim Harrison ("Legends of the Fall") died in Patagonia, Arizona, at age 78.

Today's Birthdays: Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is 87. Actor Alan Arkin is 83. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is 82. House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (puh-LOH'-see) is 77. Actor James Caan is 77. Author Erica Jong is 75. Journalist Bob Woodward is 74. Singer Diana Ross is 73. Actor Johnny Crawford is 71. Rock singer Steven Tyler (Aerosmith) is 69. Singer and TV personality Vicki Lawrence is 68. Actor Ernest Thomas is 68. Comedian Martin Short is 67. Country singer Ronnie McDowell is 67. Movie composer Alan Silvestri is 67. Rock musician Monte Yoho is 65. Transportation

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Secretary Elaine Chao is 64. Radio talk show host Curtis Sliwa is 63. Country singer Dean Dillon is 62. Country singer Charly McClain is 61. TV personality Leeza Gibbons is 60. Actress Ellia English is 58. Actress Jennifer Grey is 57. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Marcus Allen is 57. Actor Billy Warlock is 56. Actor Eric Allan Kramer is 55. Basketball Hall of Famer John Stockton is 55. Actor Michael Imperioli is 51. Rock musician James Iha (EE'-hah) is 49. Country singer Kenny Chesney is 49. Actress Leslie Mann is 45. Actor T.R. Knight is 44. Rapper Juvenile is 42. Actress Amy Smart is 41. Actress Bianca Kajlich (KY'-lihk) is 40. Actress Keira Knightley is 32. Rapper J-Kwon is 31. Actress Carly Chaikin is 27.

Thought for Today: "Life is denied by lack of attention, whether it be to cleaning windows or trying to write a masterpiece." — Nadia Boulanger (boo-lahn-ZHAY'), French music teacher (1887-1979).

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