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Thursday, March 30

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

School Lunch: Hot dog, French fries, fruit, carrots and dip.

Senior Menu: Hot turkey sandwich, macaroni salad, fruit, carrot bar.

United Methodist, Groton: Trustees meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Friday, March 31

School Lunch: Cheese stick, mixed vegetable, fruit, romaine salad.

Senior Menu: Fish sticks, macaroni & cheese, lettuce salad with dressing, fruited Jell-O dessert, whole wheat bread.

Student Congress at Brookings High School



DAIRY QUEEN HELP WANTED

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

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

The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **OPEN**

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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.





Schuring signs on with Presentation

Sean Schuring has signed on to play basketball at Presentation College in Aberdeen. According to his dad, Brian Schuring, eight schools were trying to recruit Sean. In the photo below are Andrea and Brian Schuring, Presentation Head Coach Jeremy Reigle and Assistant Coach Brendan Goetzinger, with Sean Schuring in the front..

Argumentative Essays On the MS/HS Proposed Building Project Written by GHS Students

By Stella Meier

Many of the voters have not been in school recently. They have no idea what the students deal with every day. How would you like to spend the day in cramped classrooms, with a sewer gas smell? How would you like to spend the day in a freezing cold, or really hot classroom? Do you want your children to be students in a very old building, with many problems? I will be writing about all of the problems that will be fixed in the school. Today, I am going to give you my opinion about why we should tear down and rebuild the 1934 edition.

In the morning you can walk into a classroom that is freezing cold, and later walk into another classroom that is very hot. The new school will have new heating and cooling systems, so the temperature will be regulated. This would cost around 4 million dollars. If you don't build the new school we would still have to replace the heating and AC, so we would be putting \$4 million into an old building.

Some of the school's classrooms and other details are not up to code. Some of those details include the following: Classroom Size and Suitability, Security and Supervision, Art Classrooms/Lab, Music Classrooms/Practice Areas, Staff Lounge/Collaborative Planning Areas, Student Commons/Break-Out Areas, Auditoriums/Performing Arts Spaces, Career and Technical Education and Hallways/Lockers/Washrooms/Maintenance space. The new building would fix all of these and make them up to code.

The classrooms are small and cramped. Sometimes if the classrooms don't have enough desks the students have to sit against the wall in chairs, because there isn't enough room. Mrs. Kurtz changed one small detail in her room and we were pushed against the walls, because there wasn't enough room. The new classrooms will be much larger, almost twice the size they are now!

My last main point is that the new construction will improve safety. Safety is very important in schools. The fire alarm system will be updated, it will tell you what fire alarm went off so that the teachers can get there faster and find out what is wrong. There will be updated security cameras, and the doors will have sensors to let teachers know if one has been propped open, or didn't lock.

Some people want to vote no on the new school; they are worried about the tax costs. Yes, there are many school projects that need to be paid, but if we wait we don't know any of the hidden costs. If we wait we may need to replace heating and electric in an old building. People don't want to have to pay too much for the taxes, and we could make them smaller, but you would have to pay for it longer. I think that even though the new school may cost a lot, that it is worth it. These people haven't been in school for a while, so they don't know what it is like. As a student that is in school almost every day, I think the cost is worth it.

Every day students deal with changing temperatures, cramped classrooms, a not up to code building, and outdated safety features. This new building will improve the learning environment for students. Some people may still want to vote no, but if you really think about it you will realize that the pros of the new school definitely out way the cons.

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By Tessa Erdmann

"We're not building a future for a few years, we are building a future for a lifetime" - Abe Reichtal. And that is what we are going to do with this new building that we, the whole town, is talking about. We are not wanting to build this building for just for a few years, we are wanting to build this building for a whole new future and a whole lifetime. With all these things they want to add this could help us in so many ways in the near future. So today, I am going to share with you my thoughts on why we should tear down the 1934 building.

Our school right now is 82 years, and has a lot of problems that need to be solved very soon so we are able to meet the school codes for safety. As the school gets older and older it's getting harder and harder to fix. As we try to fix the problems we may only be making it worse which is making it harder to fix and is costing us a lot of money that isn't necessary. To meet all the codes with the heating, plumbing, air conditioning, and electrical issues it would cost us 4.4 million dollars and the new school would cost 13.8 million dollars. In the end, it would make much more sense if we would spend a little extra money now and not have to keep fixing and fixing everything which will just make us keeping spending money.

Another set of issues that our school has is the fact that our classrooms are way too small for the class numbers that we now have this day and age. I know for my classes we are crammed in the classrooms so tight it almost makes you feel claustrophobic, and it sort of makes you very uncomfortable.

Now on the other hand, people are asking, "Well why can't we wait till all the other debt is paid off and then we will have the money we need to make all the new improvements?" In my opinion, if we wait until 2022, it will cost people too much more money than what is being determined at the present date. Wouldn't it just make more sense to fix it all now rather than later?

The part of the Groton Area MS/HS is in very tough shape and it has many issues that need to be resolved so we are fully able to meet codes, issues with the air quality, air conditioning, plumbing, the sewerage, classroom size, and for goodness sakes, the building is 82 years old!. I want my school to continue to be a "Blue Ribbon" school so we need to make the improvements now to keep our reputation up and keep on making our education better and better than it already is.

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South Dakota State Treasurer Announces Changes in Unclaimed Property Laws

PIERRE, SD – State Treasurer, Rich Sattgast, announced that the recently passed SB34 affects Unclaimed Property laws in regards to how long the Unclaimed Property Division is required to retain escheated securities.

Sattgast explains that the new legislation, which takes effect immediately, affects how the office will handle the sale of securities received in the future. Securities will be held for no more than 90-days prior to sale. Further, the bill directs the State Treasurer to sell all securities held prior to the passage of SB34.

The State Treasurer will be sending letters to the owners of securities currently held by the unclaimed property division that are directed to be sold under SB 34. The owner will have the opportunity to claim the securities or have the Unclaimed Property Division sell the security and return the proceeds of the sale. Once the deadline for contacting the Unclaimed Property Division has passed, all securities held prior to the passage of SB34 will be sold. The owner will still be able to claim the proceeds of the sale.

The State Treasurer's website lists properties available for search and claim. The public can search for their names at www.sdtreasurer.gov or contact the Unclaimed Property Division at 605-773-3379.

For More Information Contact: SD State Treasurer's Unclaimed Property Division at (605) 773-3379



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

GDI Living Fitness
25 Main St., Downtown Groton

Today in Weather History

March 31, 1967: Heavy snow of 6 to 15 inches combined with 30 to 50 mph winds, caused blizzard conditions across most of northeast South Dakota. Many roads became snow packed and impossible to travel on. This left many people stranded, especially along Interstate-29 and Highway 12. In Hamlin County, a man was injured when his snowmobile struck a snowplow in Bryant in the early evening. Also, in the early afternoon, 4 miles west of Lake Norden on Highway 28, a car crossed the lane and hit a semi. The car was destroyed with thousands of dollars of damage to the semi. The driver of the car was injured. Many schools were let out early on the 31st and were canceled for April 1st. Many activities and sports events were either postponed or canceled. In addition, many businesses were closed. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Doland, Conde, and Castlewood, 7 inches at Turton and Clear Lake, 8 inches at Clark and Britton, 9 inches at Bryant and Webster, 10 inches near Peever, and 11 inches at Summit. Snowfall amounts of a foot or more included, 12 inches at Watertown and Big Stone City, 13 inches at Victor, the Waubay NWR, and Sisseton, 14 inches at Wilmot, and 15 inches at Milbank.

March 31, 2014: A strong surface low pressure area moving across the region brought mixed precipitation to all of the area including rain, freezing rain, sleet, snow along with some thunder. As the precipitation changed to over to all snow, northwest winds increased substantially to 30 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 to 60 mph causing widespread blizzard conditions. Much of the area received a coating of ice with trace amounts up to a tenth of an inch with several locations receiving up to 2 inches of sleet. Snowfall amounts from 2 to as much as 10 inches occurred with this storm. The precipitation changed over to snow in the morning out west and into the late afternoon hours across the east. The light snow did not end in the eastern portion of South Dakota until the early morning hours of April 1st. Many schools, government offices, and businesses were closed or cancelled early. Travel was not advised across much of region with Interstate-29 being closed for a time from Brookings to the North Dakota border.

1823 - A great Northeast storm with hurricane force winds raged from Pennsylvania to Maine. The storm was most severe over New Jersey with high tides, uprooted trees, and heavy snow inland. (David Ludlum)

1899 - A storm which buried Ruby, CO, under 141 inches of snow came to an end. Ruby was an old abandoned mining town on the Elk Mountain Range in the Crested Butte area. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - Hartford, CT, hit 87 degrees to establish a record for the month of March. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm spread heavy snow across the Ohio Valley and Lower Great Lakes Region. Cleveland OH received sixteen inches of snow in 24 hours, their second highest total of record. Winds gusting to 50 mph created 8 to 12 foot waves on Lake Huron. The storm also ushered unseasonably cold air into the south central and southeastern U.S., with nearly one hundred record lows reported in three days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)








1988 - A winter-like storm developed in the Central Rockies. Snowfall totals in Utah ranged up to 15 inches at the Brian Head Ski Resort, and winds in Arizona gusted to 59 mph at Show Low. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along and ahead of a slow moving cold front produced large hail and damaging winds at more than fifty locations across the southeast quarter of the nation, and spawned a tornado which injured eleven persons at Northhampton NC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Low pressure produced heavy snow in central Maine and northern New Hampshire, with up to eight inches reported in Maine. A slow moving Pacific storm system produced 18 to 36 inches of snow in the southwestern mountains of Colorado in three days. Heavier snowfall totals included 31 inches at Wolf Creek Pass and 27 inches at the Monarch Ski Area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Patched Fog then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny
High: 55 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 58 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 60 °F	Low: 38 °F	High: 62 °F



A Bit Cooler Today

Follow us on *Social Media*

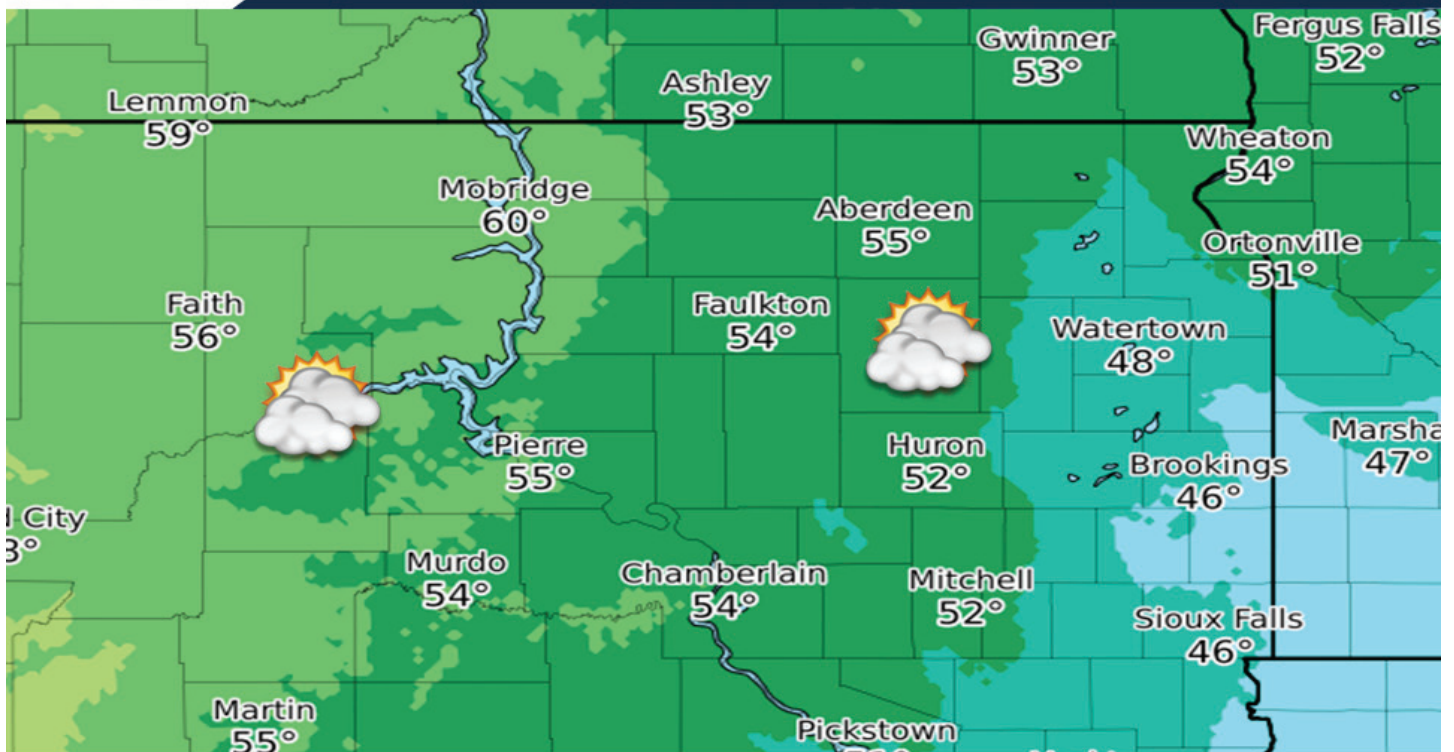
weather.gov/Aberdeen



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen



Published on: 03/30/2017 at 5:39AM

Mostly cloudy skies will be across the region this morning, along with patches of fog and drizzle. Skies throughout the day will be mostly cloudy as temperatures rise into the upper 40s east, to around 60 degrees in north central South Dakota. Overall, temperatures today will be a bit cooler than what they were on Wednesday.

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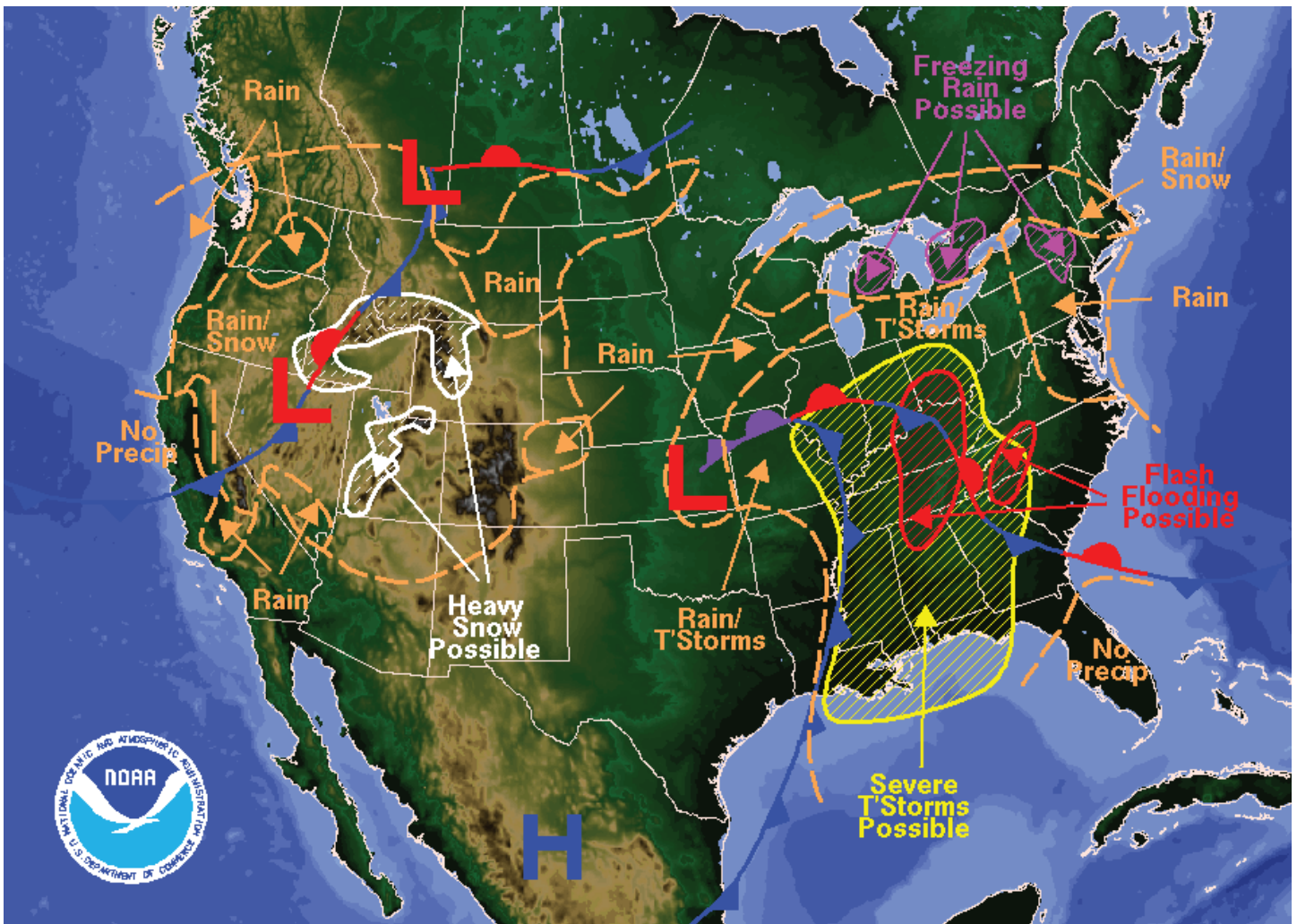
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 60.2 F at 3:40 PM
Low Outside Temp: 38.0 F at 11:57 PM
High Gust: 23.0 Mph at 8:48 PM
Snow: Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 81° in 1943
Record Low: -14 in 1969
Average High: 48°F
Average Low: 25°F
Average Precip in March.: 1.11
Precip to date in March.: 0.59
Average Precip to date: 2.13
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 7:59 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:15 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Thu, Mar 30, 2017, issued 4:55 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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SETTING THE STANDARD

He is a central figure in the success of the New York Yankees. He has led the American League in the most single hits, runs scored and "at bats." He has over 3,000 hits, stolen more bases than any other player, has five golden glove awards, selected 13 times as an all-star and played more games than any other New York Yankee. Many of his records will stand for many years to come.

A reporter once asked, "What's the best advice your father ever gave you?"

"Don't let anyone outwork you," came the quick reply of Derek Jeter.

We are all compiling a list of accomplishments that will reflect what we have done with talents God has given us. However, beyond that fact we must realize that the time we are allocated and the talents we are given are gifts from God and must be used to His glory.

Paul wrote, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as though you are working for the Lord rather than for people!" We are all accountable to someone for the work we do here on earth. Ultimately, though, the Christian is accountable to God and will be judged by Him for what we have done with the many opportunities He has given us. We must always remember that we are obligated to God to honor Him with every gift He has given us.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, that You are interested in the work that You have given us to do. May we accept this with thanksgiving and bring You honor in what we do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Colossians 3:23,24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
08-09-15-20-26
(eight, nine, fifteen, twenty, twenty-six)
Estimated jackpot: \$56,000

Hot Lotto
13-15-23-26-45, Hot Ball: 7
(thirteen, fifteen, twenty-three, twenty-six, forty-five; Hot Ball: seven)
Estimated jackpot: \$5.09 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$174 million

Powerball
08-15-31-36-62, Powerball: 11, Power Play: 3
(eight, fifteen, thirty-one, thirty-six, sixty-two; Powerball: eleven; Power Play: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

South Dakota Board of Regents elects new board president

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — The state Board of Regents has chosen a new president for the panel that oversees South Dakota's public universities.

The regents said Wednesday that the new president, Bob Sutton, is succeeding Randy Schaefer, who will remain on the board.

Sutton has been a member of the board since 2013. He is executive vice president of human resources at Avera Health in Sioux Falls.

Sutton says he's especially honored to serve as president because he's a graduate of South Dakota's public university system.

The board has also elected Kevin Schieffer, of Sioux Falls, as vice president and John Bastian, of Belle Fourche, as secretary.

Let's talk 2018: Marijuana among issues on South Dakota list

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Activists have proposed several ballot measures that may go before South Dakota voters in 2018, including initiatives restricting the bathrooms transgender students could use and allowing doctors to prescribe life-ending drugs to terminally ill people.

Attorney General Marty Jackley this week released explanations for two measures that would legalize medical and recreational marijuana, another step in the process for supporters to get them on the November 2018 ballot.

Backers of each plan would have to collect nearly 14,000 signatures by November 2017, and have them

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certified to put the measures to a public vote. Here's a look at some of the initiatives proposed so far:

MEDICAL CANNABIS

The plan would allow patients with serious medical conditions and a health practitioner's recommendation to use medical marijuana. Qualifying patients — such as people with cancer, AIDS and Hepatitis C — would be able to get a registration card to possess up to 3 ounces of the plant. It would be available from dispensaries, and some cardholders would be able to cultivate marijuana plants under the measure.

Supporters have failed to legalize medical marijuana in South Dakota at the ballot box at least twice since 2006. A proposal that year received 47.7 percent of the vote, and a 2010 effort got 36.7 percent.

RECREATIONAL CANNABIS

People 21 and older would be able to possess and use marijuana under the proposal. Possession for South Dakota residents would be limited to 1 ounce of marijuana, five plants and any excess cannabis produced by the plants if they are stored in the same facility where they were cultivated. Marijuana retailers could be established under the plan, which would also impose an excise tax on cannabis.

People who are serving time or have been convicted of a non-violent marijuana offense would have their cases reviewed or sentences commuted under the proposal.

DEATH WITH DIGNITY

A state-licensed physician would be able to prescribe life-ending drugs to a terminally ill South Dakota patient under the measure. The patient who wants to die would have to make an oral request and a written request, and reiterate the oral request at least 15 days after the initial one was made. The written request for medication to self-administer to die would have to be witnessed by two people.

If passed, the measure would go into effect in April 2019.

TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

The measure would require people to use the public school bathrooms, locker rooms, shower rooms and changing facilities matching their gender at birth. Schools would be allowed to provide alternative accommodations, such as single-occupancy restrooms.

It comes after lawmakers for the past two legislative sessions have considered restricting the school facilities that transgender students can use.

Donations boom for family of South Dakota woman who died

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City mother said she's grateful for the thousands of dollars in donations that helped bring home the remains of her daughter after she died hiking in Peru.

Whitney Stevens, 24, was hiking with a friend March 1 when she fell 100 feet into a river after the ground beneath her caved. Stevens' body was recovered the same day by a rescue team and cremated in Peru, the Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2njzv98>) reported.

Stevens' friend hiking with her, Molly Goin, was not injured.

Her remains were sent to Rapid City on March 15 after over \$12,000 was raised through a GoFundMe campaign to cover transporting costs. A separate fundraising event at Five Guys Burgers raised about \$7,000 and additional money was raised through a memorial fund at the Black Hills Federal Credit Union, where Stevens worked.

Stevens' mother, Roberta Ellis-Stevens, said any leftover money after transportation costs will be used to pay for day care and education expenses for Stevens' 4-year-old daughter Marley.

Ellis-Stevens said the family is "devastated over our loss of Whitney, but we're also thankful that Molly was saved and we're thankful for the community and the outreach and the outpouring ... we're just blessed."

Local villagers in a Peru town held a service and three blessings for Stevens' body before her ashes were

sent home. A funeral service was held March 17 in Sturgis.

Stevens was a veteran who served in Iraq and Kuwait in 2011 and 2012. Her family was presented with an American flag at the funeral.

"I think that we all anticipate that our parents will be gone someday, but I don't think we anticipate that your child will be gone before you," Ellis-Stevens said. "I tell people all the time, 'Hug your kids.' It's such a finalization, but we're so thankful to have her home."

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

Woman who persuaded juveniles in motel fire avoids prison

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A woman accused of convincing three juveniles to start a fire that caused \$500,000 to a Pierre motel has avoided prison.

A judge has given Tracy St. John a suspended prison sentence, although she will have to spend another three months in jail. The August fire nearly destroyed the low-rent, long-term stay State Motel.

Her attorney Jeremy Lund argued the 38-year-old woman has fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and is less culpable than the teens she persuaded to set a bed on fire.

The Capital Journal (<http://bit.ly/2nzUqHI>) reports Judge John Brown said in court Tuesday that sending St. John to prison would be "simply warehousing her." He ordered her to get in-patient treatment and pay the hotel owner \$2,500.

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

A look at latest ruling on Trump administration travel ban

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER, Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A federal judge in Hawaii who temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's revised travel ban hours before it was set to take effect issued a longer-lasting order Wednesday.

U.S. District Judge Derrick Watson held a hearing Wednesday on Hawaii's request to extend his temporary hold. Several hours later, he issued a 24-page order blocking the government from suspending new visas for travelers from six Muslim-majority countries and halting the U.S. refugee program.

Hawaii Attorney General Douglas Chin argued that even though the revised ban has more neutral language, the implied intent is still there. He likened it to a neon sign flashing "Muslim Ban," which the government hasn't bothered to turn off.

Chad Readler, a Department of Justice attorney defending Trump's executive order, told the judge via telephone that Hawaii hasn't shown how it is harmed by various provisions, including one that would suspend the nation's refugee program.

Watson disagreed.

Here's a look at Watson's ruling and what comes next:

THE PREVIOUS RULING

This month, Watson prevented the federal government from suspending new visas for people from six countries and freezing the nation's refugee program. The ruling came just hours before the ban was to take effect.

Watson, nominated to the bench by former President Barack Obama in 2012, agreed with Hawaii that the ban would hurt the state's tourism-dependent economy and that it discriminates based on nationality and religion.

Trump called the ruling an example of "unprecedented judicial overreach."

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The next day, a judge in Maryland also blocked the six-nation travel ban but said it wasn't clear that the suspension of the refugee program was similarly motivated by religious bias.

The federal government appealed the Maryland ruling to the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and sought to narrow the Hawaii ruling.

THE LATEST RULING

Like his temporary order, Watson notes that Hawaii has shown the state's universities and tourism industry will suffer from the ban. A plaintiff in Hawaii's lawsuit, the imam of a Honolulu mosque, will be harmed if the ban is enforced, Watson said: "These injuries have already occurred and will continue to occur if the Executive Order is implemented and enforced; the injuries are neither contingent nor speculative."

Government attorneys have tried to convince the judge not to consider comments Trump has made about the travel ban. "The court will not crawl into a corner, pull the shutters closed, and pretend it has not seen what it has," Watson wrote.

Watson also refused to narrow his ruling to only apply to the six-nation ban, as the government requested.

The ruling won't be suspended if the government appeals, Watson said.

"Enforcement of these provisions in all places, including the United States, at all United States borders and ports of entry, and in the issuance of visas is prohibited, pending further orders from this court," he wrote.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR HAWAII'S LAWSUIT?

Watson's ruling allows Hawaii's lawsuit challenging the ban to work its way through the courts.

"While we understand that the President may appeal, we believe the court's well-reasoned decision will be affirmed," the Hawaii attorney general's office said in a statement.

Ismail Elshikh, the imam of a Honolulu mosque who joined the lawsuit as a plaintiff, argues that he's harmed by Trump's order because it prevents his Syrian mother-in-law from visiting family in the U.S. It's not clear how Watson's ruling will affect the mother-in-law's ability to obtain a visa.

The Department of Justice didn't immediately comment after Watson issued his decision.

DEFENDING TRUMP'S EXECUTIVE ORDER

The Department of Justice opposed Hawaii's request to extend Watson's temporary order. But the department said that if the judge agrees, he should narrow the ruling to cover only the part of Trump's executive order that suspends new visas for people from Somalia, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Yemen.

Other provisions of the order have little or no effect on Hawaii, including a suspension of the nation's refugee program, Department of Justice attorney Chad Readler said Wednesday.

In an attempt to downplay the effect suspending the nation's refugee program would have on Hawaii, Readler said only a small amount of refugees have been resettled in Hawaii. But Watson questioned that reasoning by noting that the government said there have been 20 refugees resettled in Hawaii since 2010.

Other parts of Trump's order allow the government to assess security risks, which don't concern the plaintiffs in Hawaii's lawsuit, Readler said.

The revised order removes references to religion, he said.

CAN AN APPEALS COURT AFFECT THE HAWAII RULING?

The president is asking the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to put the ruling by the judge in Maryland on hold while it considers the case.

The Richmond, Virginia-based appeals court will hear arguments May 8. If the court sides with the federal government, it would not have a direct effect on the Hawaii ruling, legal experts said.

The Trump administration's best bet for saving the travel ban is to have the case go before the U.S. Supreme Court, said Richard Primus, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Michigan law school.

"What a ruling in 4th Circuit in favor of the administration would do is create a split in authority between federal courts in different parts of the country," he said. "Cases with splits in authority are cases the U.S. Supreme Court exists to resolve."

Casino mogul Phil Ruffin among Trump's closest friends

By JULIE BYKOWICZ, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Billionaire Las Vegas casino owner Phil Ruffin has never been to the White House. On Thursday, he'll have dinner there with his friend, Donald Trump.

"It's a lonely job, and I have been friends with him for a long time. It'll be nice to catch up," Ruffin said.

Trump has had a rough few weeks, with fellow Republicans dooming a White House-backed health care plan, questions persisting about possible ties between his campaign and Russian interference in the election, and distracting feuds among some of his senior officials.

In short: This president could probably use a friend.

Trump is living alone in the White House while his wife stays in New York where their son is in school. And he's a newcomer to Washington with few close allies, even within his party, and an especially small social circle.

Few know Trump as well, or in as many capacities, as Ruffin, who described their friendship in two recent interviews with The Associated Press. They're business partners and social friends who enjoy talking about corporate jets and golf games and business deals their acquaintances have made — the usual billionaire stuff, Ruffin said.

"He's somebody who wants everybody's opinion. He'll summon people over and say, 'What do you think about this? What do you think about that?'" Ruffin told AP at Treasure Island, his casino. "Then he compiles it all in his mind and makes his own decision."

Both are prone to superlatives. Ruffin calls Trump "brilliant" with "unparalleled business acumen." Scrawled in gold on a photo of the pair aboard a corporate jet is a note from Trump to Ruffin: "You are the greatest."

The two met when Ruffin traveled to Trump Tower in the early 2000s when he was thinking of adding a Trump-branded hotel to his Treasure Island casino on the Las Vegas Strip. That deal never worked out, but they stayed in touch.

One night in Las Vegas, after dinner, Ruffin took Trump to a Nordstrom parking lot to show him a parcel of undeveloped land. "I said, 'This is where you ought to be,'" Ruffin recalled. "And he instantly made a decision."

Trump International Hotel Las Vegas opened in 2008 — timing that put Ruffin and Trump in the business of selling condos as the recession took hold.

One course of action would have been to declare bankruptcy, but Ruffin said Trump decided to "tough it out."

"Donald's words were, 'This is not New Jersey, this is not Atlantic City, this is Vegas, and it will recover,'" Ruffin said. "And it did." They haven't sold more than 300 units, though.

Ruffin also owns a 4-acre parcel next to the Trump building and says he'd like to develop it "at some point" with the Trump Organization.

Forbes Magazine has reported that Ruffin wants to open a casino on the site, but Ruffin says he's yet to discuss any plans with the Trump Organization's leaders, now Eric and Donald Trump Jr. and Allen Weisselberg.

Another idea for the land is to dust off the pre-recession plan of building a second residential tower, although Ruffin says that's probably not the best way to make money there.

During their business dealings, Ruffin and Trump developed a friendship. Ruffin, now 82, and Trump, 70, were single together. "He would approve my girlfriends at the time," Ruffin said.

Their wives — Eastern European immigrants decades younger than themselves — are close, trading parenting tips by text message, Ruffin said. They've been on double dates, including one in Florida to see the movie "Lincoln," Ruffin said.

Trump, in fact, was Ruffin's best man when he married Oleksandra Nikolayenko in 2008 — at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort. Trump paid for the guests' accommodations as his wedding present, Ruffin said, though he drew the line at footing the bill for their hired entertainer, Lionel Ritchie.

Nikolayenko will travel with Ruffin to the White House, though Melania Trump isn't expected to join them for dinner.

Beginning in the summer of 2015, the two men's friendship took an interesting twist when Trump said he was running for president. Ruffin wondered if it was the right move, but he said whatever doubts he had were erased by his time on the campaign trail with Trump.

Ruffin said he saw a "fanatic" interest among Trump supporters. At one campaign stop in Las Vegas days before the election, Trump pointed to Ruffin and called him "one of the great, great people."

Ruffin said his upcoming overnight trip to Washington is purely a social call. The two have not seen each other since inaugural weekend, when Ruffin and a handful of other top Trump supporters had prime access to the swearing-in ceremony on the Capitol steps.

While Ruffin says he shelled out \$18,000 a night to stay at Trump's Washington hotel during the inauguration, his accommodations this time will be free: He'll be at the White House.

Follow Bykowicz on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/Bykowicz>.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

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

1. TRUMP'S REVISED TRAVEL BAN BLOCK EXTENDED

A federal judge in Hawaii disagreed with a government lawyer's contention that the state hasn't shown how it is harmed by a suspension in the nation's refugee program.

2. WHAT RUSSIA PROBE WILL FOCUS ON

A Senate hearing will address how the Kremlin allegedly uses paid internet trolls to spread disinformation in the U.S. and Europe.

3. 'BATHROOM BILL' MAKING PROGRESS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Lawmakers and the governor hope an end to the legislation would remove any obstacles to expanding businesses and attracting sporting events, but gay rights groups are not happy with the proposal.

4. NTSB TO BEGIN PROBE OF TEXAS BUS-TRUCK CRASH

Federal investigators will examine the scene of a head-on collision involving a small church bus and a pickup truck west of San Antonio that killed 13 senior adult church members.

5. WHO IS PAYING A VISIT TO AN OLD FRIEND

AP talks to casino billionaire Phil Ruffin, who is visiting Trump at a time when the U.S. president likely needs support after a rough couple of weeks in Washington.

6. WHY IT HAS TAKEN SO LONG TO LIBERATE MOSUL

Islamic State militants are mingled among tens of thousands of civilians in the northern Iraqi city and are willing to take the population down with them, laying bare the challenge of asymmetric warfare.

7. POST-BREXIT EUROPE SINKING IN FOR SOME

Poles, who have settled in large numbers in Britain in recent years, express confusion and apprehension as the U.K. triggers the process to leave the EU.

8. PEDESTRIAN DEATHS CLIMBING FASTER THAN MOTORIST FATALITIES

They've reached nearly 6,000 deaths last year — the highest total in more than two decades, an analysis of preliminary state data finds.

9. IN LAB SIMULATING MARS CLIMATE, A POTATO GROWS

Experts believe the initial results are a promising indicator that the spuds might one day be grown in terrains as dry and salty as the Martian soil.

10. WHERE TERPS WERE NEVER NO. 1

An AP analysis of more than 1,100 polls shows Maryland, despite winning a national championship, was ranked more times than any other program without ever being No. 1.

China's Xi to meet Trump in Mar-a-Lago on April 6-7

BEIJING (AP) — President Donald Trump will meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for the first time on April 6-7 at Trump's Florida resort, China's foreign ministry announced Thursday, amid a range of pressing issues from trade, to North Korea and territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The future relationship between the world's No. 1 and No. 2 economies has been uncertain following the election of Trump, who accused China during his campaign of unfair trade practices and threatened to raise import taxes on Chinese goods and declare Beijing a currency manipulator.

It is unclear whether Trump will follow through with either threat. He is now seeking Beijing's help in pressuring North Korea over its nuclear weapons and missiles programs. China is the North's most important source of diplomatic support and economic assistance.

In February, Trump reaffirmed Washington's long-standing "One China" policy in a call with Xi, in an apparent move to ease concerns in China that he might use Taiwan as leverage in negotiations over trade, security and other sensitive issues. The policy in place since 1979 requires Washington to maintain only unofficial ties with Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang told reporters that Xi would meet with Trump at Mar-a-Lago, without providing any more details.

It is the same Florida resort where Trump hosted and played golf with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in February. Xi, a fan of soccer and other sports, is not known to play golf.

Before arriving in the U.S., Xi will pay a state visit to Finland from April 4-6, Lu said.

Relations between China and the U.S. under President Barack Obama were strained by issues including China's island-building in waters surrounding international shipping lanes in the South China Sea, allegations of cyber hacking and a U.S. policy rebalance to Asia.

Despite that, cooperation between their militaries expanded tentatively, and China's defense ministry on Thursday hailed further growth, while warning of potential frictions ahead.

"We are willing to make joint efforts with the U.S. side ... so as to maintain a stable military-to-military relationship while striving to make new gains," spokesman Col. Wu Qian said.

However, Wu also reiterated China's total opposition to the deployment of a sophisticated missile defense system in South Korea, known as THAAD, which Beijing says threatens its own security with its ability to monitor flights and missile launches deep inside northeastern China.

"The deployment of the THAAD system will definitely not make (South Korea) any safer. And secondly, the Chinese military's opposition to the THAAD system will definitely not be confined to just words," Wu said.

Asked what specific measures the People's Liberation Army was willing to take, Wu replied: "You will know when the time comes."

One bright spot touted by both sides under Obama was their cooperation, as the world's top emitters of greenhouse gases, on tackling climate change. Lu said Wednesday that China would stick to its climate commitments after Trump, who has called climate change a hoax, this week rescinded measures enacted by Obama to reduce coal and oil use.

Senate hearing to focus on Russian disinformation tactics

By **DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some tactics Russia used to meddle in last year's presidential election would give shivers to anyone who believes in American democracy, the Senate intelligence committee's top Democrat says.

Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia spoke ahead of a committee session Thursday that will address how the Kremlin allegedly uses technology to spread disinformation in the U.S. and Europe. Warner and the panel's chairman, Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., provided an update the committee's investigation into activities Russia might have taken to alter or influence the 2016 elections and whether there were any campaign contacts with Russian government officials that might have interfered with the election process.

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"There were upwards of 1,000 paid internet trolls working out of a facility in Russia, in effect, taking over series of computers, which is then called a botnet," Warner told reporters on Capitol Hill Wednesday.

Warner said the committee was investigating to find out whether voters in key states, such as Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, might have been served up Russian-generated fake news and propaganda along with information from their traditional news outlets.

"We are in a whole new realm around cyber that provides opportunity for huge, huge threats to our basic democracy," Warner said. "You are seeing it right now."

Burr added that Russians are trying to influence elections in Europe as well.

"I think it's safe by everybody's judgment that the Russians are actively involved in the French elections," Burr said.

Scheduled to appear at the committee's open hearing are: Eugene Rumer, director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Roy Godson, professor of government emeritus at Georgetown University; Clint Watts, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute Program on National Security; Kevin Mandia, chief executive officer of the cybersecurity firm FireEye Inc.; and retired Gen. Keith Alexander, former director of the National Security Agency and president of Iron-Net Cybersecurity.

Pledging cooperation, Burr and Warner said they would steer clear of politics in their panel's probe of Russian meddling. They made a point of putting themselves at arm's length from the House investigation that has been marked by partisanship and disputes.

Democrats have called for House intelligence committee Chairman Rep. Devin Nunes to recuse himself because of his ties to the Trump team, especially because the investigation includes looking at contacts that Russians had with President Donald Trump's associates. Nunes, R-Calif., met with a secret source on the White House grounds last week to review classified material, which he says indicates that Trump associates' communications were captured in "incidental" surveillance of foreigners. Nunes says he sees no reason to step aside.

Burr said that so far, the Senate committee has requested 20 individuals to be interviewed. Five have been scheduled, and the remaining 15 are likely to be scheduled within the next 10 days. Additional witnesses could also be interviewed.

Burr identified just one of the witnesses: Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. The White House has said that Kushner, a senior adviser to Trump, has volunteered to answer questions about arranging meetings with the Russian ambassador and other officials.

Asked whether the committee had spoken to former national security adviser Michael Flynn or his representatives, Burr told reporters, "It's safe to say that we have had conversations with a lot of people, and you would think less of us if Gen. Flynn wasn't in that list."

An attorney for Flynn said his client had not yet been interviewed by the Senate committee. One of Flynn's lawyers, Robert Kelner, said they have had discussions with committee staff members, but Flynn has not been contacted directly.

Trump asked Flynn, a former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, to step down last month from his post as national security adviser. The president said he made the decision because Flynn had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other White House officials about his conversations with Russia's ambassador to the U.S.

NTSB to begin probe of Texas bus-truck crash that killed 13

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Federal investigators are getting their first look Thursday at the scene of a head-on collision involving a small church bus and a pickup truck that killed 13 senior adult church members onboard the bus.

The Texas Department of Public Safety reported the lone bus survivor remains hospitalized in critical condition, and the pickup truck driver is in stable condition.

The National Transportation Safety Board sent investigators to the scene to begin seeking the cause of the crash, NTSB spokesman Terry Williams said Wednesday.

Twelve bus occupants, including the driver, were dead at the scene of Wednesday's crash, DPS Lt. Johnny Hernandez said. One bus passenger died later at a San Antonio hospital.

The wreck happened about 12:30 p.m. on U.S. 83, a two-lane highway, outside Garner State Park in northern Uvalde County. The area is about 75 miles (120.7 km) west of San Antonio.

It was not immediately clear what caused the collision about 120 miles (193.1 km) from the church, where the members were headed.

Photos and video of the crash's aftermath showed heavy damage to the front drivers' sides of both vehicles where it appeared the two had collided. The back of the bus was up on a guardrail, with glass and debris scattered onto the grass below.

Hein said the small bus was a 2004 Turtle Top, though he did not know the specific model. Turtle Top's website features shuttle buses with capacities ranging from 17 to 51 passengers, which they bill as "a great alternative to the standard 15-passenger van." Safety concerns have long surrounded the 15-passenger vans, also frequently used by churches and other groups, with advocates saying they can be difficult to control in an emergency.

Church officials said in a statement on the First Baptist website that the members were returning from a three-day retreat at the Alto Frio Baptist Encampment in Leakey, about 9 miles (14.5 km) north of where the crash happened.

The church officials were "ministering to family members to help them deal with this tragedy," according to the statement. Counselors also were scheduled to be available Thursday at the church.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and his wife, Cecilia, offered their condolences in the hours after the crash.

"We are saddened by the loss of life and our hearts go out to all those affected," their statement said. "We thank the first responders working on the scene in the wake of this unimaginable tragedy, and ask that all Texans join us in offering their thoughts and prayers."

Agreement to end 'bathroom bill' but are there enough votes?

By GARY D. ROBERTSON, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Republican legislative leaders in North Carolina and Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper say they have an agreement to end the state's so-called "bathroom bill" that they hope will drive away negative national attention and remove obstacles to expanding businesses and attracting sporting events.

But they'll have to get enough votes in the House and Senate for a proposal set for debate Thursday so the replacement measure for the March 2016 law known as House Bill 2 can reach Cooper's desk.

Social conservatives in the General Assembly would prefer to have HB2 stay on the books. Gay rights groups oppose the replacement measure because it would still restrict LGBT protections from discrimination. Political repercussions exist for legislators and Cooper.

Cooper, who was elected governor last November with support from LGBT forces and on a platform that included a complete repeal of HB2, said in a release that he supported the compromise unveiled Wednesday shortly before midnight by GOP lawmakers.

"It's not a perfect deal, but it repeals House Bill 2 and begins to repair our reputation," Cooper said.

The late-night announcement came as the NCAA had said North Carolina sites won't be considered for championship events from 2018 to 2022 "absent any change" in House Bill 2, which it views as discrimination. The NCAA said decisions would be made starting this week on events. North Carolina cities, schools and other groups have offered more than 130 bids for such events.

The NCAA already removed championship events from the state this year because of the law, which limits LGBT nondiscrimination protections and requires transgender people to use restrooms in schools and government buildings corresponding to the sex on their birth certificate.

HB2 has prompted some businesses to halt expansions and entertainers and sports organizations to

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cancel or move events, including the NBA All-Star game in Charlotte. An Associated Press analysis this week found that HB2 already will cost the state more than \$3.76 billion in lost business over a dozen years.

The new proposal would repeal HB2 but would leave state legislators in charge of policy on public multi-stall restrooms. Local governments also couldn't pass ordinances extending nondiscrimination protections in private employment and in places such as hotels and restaurants covering categories like sexual orientation and gender identity until December 2020. That temporary moratorium, according to GOP House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger, would allow time for pending federal litigation over transgender issues to play out.

"Compromise requires give and take from all sides, and we are pleased this proposal fully protects bathroom safety and privacy," Berger and Moore said in a statement. It's not clear whether the NCAA would be satisfied by the changes.

Responding before Wednesday night's announcement to anticipated provisions in the legislation, top national and state gay rights activists blasted the proposal and said those who back Thursday's measure aren't allies of the LGBT community. Only a complete repeal, with nothing else, will do, they say.

"At its core, it's a statewide prohibition on equality," Human Rights Campaign President Chad Griffin told reporters, adding that consequences could fall on Cooper, whom gay rights activists backed in the election, for backing a "dirty deal."

"It would be a failure of leadership for Cooper" and for Democratic legislative leaders to back this agreement "instead of standing up for civil rights," Equality North Carolina Executive Director Chris Sgro said.

The Republican-controlled legislature passed HB2 in response to a Charlotte ordinance that allowed transgender people to use restroom aligned with their gender identity. Cooper narrowly defeated GOP Gov. Pat McCrory, who signed the law. HB2 supporters say ordinances like the one in Charlotte make it easy for sexual predators to enter public restrooms designated for the opposite sex.

Several potential compromises have failed over the past year, including one during a special session in December that collapsed amid partisan finger-pointing. GOP and Democratic legislators have been in a seemingly endless chase during the past several weeks to cobble together enough votes on various drafts of legislation.

Poll: Americans dislike GOP's, Trump's plan on health care

By ALAN FRAM and EMILY SWANSON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Note to President Donald Trump and House Republicans: People really don't like your approach to overhauling America's health care. If you're hoping to revive the effort, you may want to try something different.

Sixty-two percent of Americans turned thumbs down on Trump's handling of health care during the initial weeks of his presidency, according to a poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research released Wednesday. It was his worst rating among seven issues the poll tested, including the economy, foreign policy and immigration.

Of six changes the failed House GOP bill would have made to President Barack Obama's law, five drew more negative than positive reviews.

An overwhelming 8 in 10 opposed the Republican proposal to let insurers boost premiums on older people. Seven in 10 disapproved of premium surcharges for people whose coverage lapses.

By wide margins, people also disliked proposed cuts in Medicaid, which helps lower-earning people cover medical costs, a halt in federal payments to Planned Parenthood and a transformation of the Obama law's subsidies — based on income and premium costs — into aid linked to age.

"His campaign promise was great health care for everyone, for all Americans at great prices," said Raymond Brown, 64, a Republican and retired truck driver from Rio Grande, New Jersey. "He isn't fulfilling his campaign promise."

Overall, just over half in the poll said they worry many Americans would have lost coverage had the GOP bill become law. Would their own families and average Americans have been better or worse off?

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More said worse.

The results underscore that annulling Obama's statute is not an issue to be trifled with. More people support than oppose that law by 45 percent to 38 percent, a slightly narrower margin than in January. And a slender majority say covering all Americans is a federal responsibility — a view embraced by Democrats but not Republicans, who instead focus on access and lower premiums.

The survey was conducted over five days preceding and following last Friday's withdrawal of the GOP health care bill. Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., short-circuited a House vote that would have spelled defeat for the Republican legislation because of opposition from conservative and moderate Republicans. It was a mortifying setback for Trump and his party.

The poll suggests that health care is damaging Trump's image.

Fifty-eight percent disapproved of his overall performance as president, not much different from his negative grade on health care. Even among those approving the job he's doing in office, about 1 in 5 was unhappy with his approach to health care.

The GOP bill scared off many Republican lawmakers after the Congressional Budget Office projected there would be 24 million more uninsured people over a decade and a boost in out-of-pocket costs for many, especially poorer people and Americans nearing retirement age.

The negative views in the poll make any new GOP effort embracing pieces of the crumbled legislation potentially perilous for the party.

Nearly all Democrats and most independents disapproved of Trump's performance on health care, but so did around 1 in 3 Republicans.

In addition, Republicans had mixed views on the collapsed House GOP bill. Clear majorities of them opposed boosting premiums for older people and those who've had gaps in coverage. They were more likely to oppose than support cutting Medicaid and were divided over linking subsidies to age more than income.

Republicans did mostly back the Republican bill's blocking of federal payments to Planned Parenthood. And they were likelier to say their own families and average Americans would have been better off, not worse, under the legislation.

Rosiland Russell, 71, a retired apartment complex manager from Clifton, Texas, said she was glad to see the attempt to unravel Obama's law.

"It's not cheap, it's not what it's cracked up to be," Russell, a Republican, said of Obama's statute. "We've got to have change, it's ridiculous."

Of the proposed Republican changes examined by the poll, only one received a positive reception. That was its elimination of the tax penalty on people who don't buy coverage, though by a modest 48 percent to 35 percent margin.

Strong majorities backed two Obama requirements the GOP would have left in place: Insurers can't deny policies to sick people and must cover children up to age 26 under their parents' plans.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,110 adults was conducted March 23-27 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

Interviews were conducted online and using landlines and cellphones.

Online:

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

AP All-Time Top 100: Maryland tops the list of never No. 1s

By JOHN MARSHALL, AP Basketball Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — Gary Williams had great players and great teams during his tenure at Maryland, even won a national championship.

The one thing missing from the Terps' resume: A No. 1 ranking in the AP Top 25.

Through 68 years and more than 1,100 polls, Maryland was never once the top-ranked team in the country — and that's just fine by its former coach.

"We were No. 1 after the national championship, but nobody votes after that," Williams said. "If you win the national championship, you're the best team in the country."

The Associated Press has been ranking the best teams in college basketball since 1949, with 59 teams earning a No. 1 ranking, starting with Saint Louis in the inaugural poll.

Based upon a formula that awarded one point for poll appearances and two for No. 1 rankings, Maryland has the most points (400) for a team that was never ranked No. 1.

Purdue was next among the highest never No. 1s with 339 points, followed by Utah, Minnesota, Vanderbilt and LSU.

Williams' teams racked up points during his tenure from 1989 until 2011, yet never found the top spot. The Terps reached No. 2 twice under Williams, in 1998-99 and 2001-02, following four No. 2 rankings under Lefty Drissell.

Current coach Mark Turgeon also had Maryland up to No. 2 for three weeks during the 2015-16 season after starting at No. 3 in the preseason poll.

The No. 1 ranking was about the only accomplishment Williams didn't have in his 22 seasons in College Park.

A former coach at Ohio State, Williams took over a program that was still reeling from the death of star Len Bias in 1986 and was hit with NCAA sanctions in 1990 for violations that mostly dated to the Bob Wade era.

Williams, who played at Maryland, gradually built the Terps in a contender in the tough ACC, leading them to the Sweet 16 in 1994 and 1995 with a frenetic style that left opponents spinning. That kicked off a run of 11 straight NCAA Tournaments, including a trip to the Final Four in 2001 and the program's only national title in 2002.

Williams won 461 games at Maryland, had its court dedicated to him in 2012 and was inducted into the College Basketball Hall of Fame two years later.

"Everyone comments on where you are ranked, so you wanted to be ranked as high as possible," Williams said. "We weren't ranked No. 1 that year we won the national championship, but we were the best team in the country when the tournament was over."

Purdue had its heyday during 25 seasons under Gene Keady.

The Boilermakers reached their highest ranking as a program — the previous was No. 3 in 1969-70 under George King — spending three weeks at No. 2 during the 1986-87 season. Purdue also was No. 2 in the 1987-88 preseason poll and later spent six weeks at that spot later in the season, never able to get over the No. 1 hump.

Purdue was close again in 1994 after winning the Big Ten championship and earning a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

"I'm going to vote us No. 1," Keady said after beating Illinois for the Big Ten title. "It wouldn't be unjustifiable."

It never happened. Purdue reached no higher than No. 3 in the AP Top 25.

Keady won 512 games and finished in the top 10 six times before retiring in 2005. He was inducted into the College Basketball Hall of Fame in 2013.

Utah accrued 239 points the AP rankings after reaching No. 2 in two seasons. The 1996-97 team led by Keith Van Horn, finished the regular season at No. 2 on their way to the regional final and the 1954-55 team hit the same mark without reaching No. 1.

Minnesota was right behind with 226 points, its high ranking coming in 1996-97, when the Gophers got up to No. 2 on the way to the Final Four.

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

Mosul lays bare the challenge of asymmetric warfare

By DAN PERRY and SUSANNAH GEORGE, Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — As the fight for the Iraqi city of Mosul drags on, many might ask: Why has it taken the combined militaries of the United States and Iraq backed by an international coalition more than two years to dislodge a relatively small force of militants lacking heavy weaponry?

Donald Trump raised the question during his campaign, promising to turn up the heat against the Islamic State group if he became president. Now the growing controversy over the high number of civilian casualties believed caused by recent U.S. airstrikes has touched on a major part of the answer: The militants are mingled among tens of thousands of civilians in Mosul and are willing to take the population down with them.

Inevitably, the more force brought to bear to crush the fighters, the greater the danger civilians will be killed.

To avoid that, strikes must be more surgical and more cautiously used, and the battle turns to street-by-street fighting where the technological edge is often neutralized. Minimizing civilian deaths is more than just a humanitarian concern: Heavy bloodshed can fuel public resentments that push some to join militant groups.

Another factor is whether the extremists have support from at least part of the population. It's even further complicated if they can claim to be fighting for national liberation — as, for example, with the Hamas group in its battles with Israel in Gaza. In Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State group clearly holds the population hostage in many cases, but it also seeks to sway some support by claiming to defend Sunnis against a mostly Shiite force from Baghdad.

After a March 17 explosion that residents say killed at least 100 people in Mosul, the U.S. military acknowledged an airstrike was involved. But the top commander of U.S. forces in Iraq said investigations may reveal a more complicated explanation, including the possibility that militants rigged the building with explosives after forcing civilians inside.

Army Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend said recent civilian casualties in Mosul were “fairly predictable” given the densely populated urban neighborhoods the IS fighters are defending against Iraqi troops.

Over the past 2½ years, Iraqi forces backed by U.S. special forces and coalition airstrikes have managed to push IS out of most of the territory they overran in the summer of 2014 — retaking three major cities and numerous smaller communities. The fight for Mosul, launched in mid-October, has been the longest battle yet.

With each fight, the Islamic State group has adapted its use of civilians as human shields, creating increasingly deadly battlefields.

In Tikrit and Sinjar, IS let the population flee early on, allowing Iraqi and coalition forces to liberally use airstrikes and artillery to retake the areas by the autumn of 2015.

IS then tightened its grip on other cities and towns. It locked down Ramadi in western Anbar province with checkpoints to prevent civilians from fleeing. Only those with serious health conditions were allowed out — and only if they left behind a relative, property or thousands of dollars to guarantee their return.

After Iraqi forces punched into Ramadi, fleeing IS fighters forced civilians to go with them to thwart airstrikes. Moving west along the Euphrates River, Iraq's military responded to the use of human shields by largely emptying towns of their populations as they retook territory. The massive displacement resulted in humanitarian crises. Thousands were left without shelter and little food or water in desert camps.

So the government changed tactics. It asked civilians to stay in their homes, a decision that was con-

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troversial with commanders faced with clearing militants from dense residential areas.

In Mosul, an estimated 1 million people were in the city when Iraqi forces breached its eastern edge. IS fighters fired from the rooftops of homes where civilians sheltered, targeting those who fled with mortars and gunfire. In denser neighborhoods, even precision munitions inflicted heavy casualties. In western Mosul, IS fighters forced civilians into explosives-rigged homes, then took up positions on the roofs, Iraqi and coalition officials said.

A similar battle looms in the Islamic State group's Syrian stronghold of Raqqa.

There, the militants have taken even greater pains to trap the population. Land mines and checkpoints circle the city. And all the men have been ordered to wear the jihadis' garb of baggy pants and long shirts, making it difficult to distinguish militants from civilians.

Here are other cases where advanced militaries have wrestled with the issue.

THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. has faced backlash over civilian deaths in nearly all its recent conflicts — Korea, Vietnam, and more recently Iraq and Afghanistan. Public fury in Iraq and Afghanistan over deaths in airstrikes and at checkpoints and abuses by U.S. troops has been a major factor shaping the evolution of U.S. tactics since 9/11. The response has been to turn increasingly to special operations forces and armed drones and to work with local fighters.

In Iraq from 2005 to 2007, the more secretive elements of U.S. special operations, led by Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, combined intelligence with night raids to capture or kill insurgents, including the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. This — and the enlisting of Sunni tribesmen to fight the insurgents — proved far more effective than conventional forces kicking in doors.

Still, drone strikes that kill civilians continue to raise an outcry in Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere.

And militants also evolve. Al-Qaida in Iraq was all but extinguished by 2009, but a kernel of militant leaders who met in U.S.-run prisons transformed it into the Islamic State group by exploiting Iraq's Sunni-Shiite divide, which worsened after U.S. forces left in 2011.

RUSSIA IN GROZNY

The Russian assault on the Chechen capital, Grozny, in 1999 and 2000 was the centerpiece of President Vladimir Putin's drive to end Chechen separatist ambitions.

It was also a case of a military — and government — that seemingly cared little about how much destruction it wrought to crush the rebels. Russian forces unleashed heavy bombardment with artillery and airstrikes that leveled apartment buildings and even city blocks. Most of the population had fled but a significant number remained. There was an international outcry over the brutality, but public opinion in Russia strongly backed the assault, giving Putin freedom of action.

It took just four months before Putin declared Grozny liberated in February 2000. Thousands of civilians are believed to have been killed, and the United Nations called Grozny the "most destroyed" city in the world.

ISRAEL IN GAZA

The Israeli military knows the challenges of fighting an enemy embedded in a civilian population. Wars against Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006 and against Hamas in Gaza in 2009, 2012 and 2014 killed hundreds of civilians. Israel blames its adversaries for the tolls, noting they used civilian areas to hide or to attack from.

The Israeli military says it takes numerous steps to minimize civilian casualties. It drops leaflets telling residents to leave. It makes phone calls and sends text messages to inhabitants of targeted buildings and sometimes strikes homes with nonexplosive shells as warnings to evacuate.

According to the United Nations, 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians, were killed during the 2014 Gaza fighting, including 551 children and 299 women. Israel disputes these figures. A U.N. report accused both Israel and Hamas of committing possible war crimes.

FRANCE IN ALGERIA

As France's empire was coming undone in the 1950s, it fought its most brutal battle for one precious piece of turf: Algeria, colonized beginning in 1830. The war to hold onto Paris' crown jewel lasted seven

years, 1954-1962, and left scars that have yet to heal.

The conflict, which began as an insurgency and continued with urban terror-style attacks on the French, was ferocious. Some Algerian lawmakers still call for reparations. The toll remains debated, but a leading French historian says 350,000-400,000 Algerian civilians died.

Perry reported from Jerusalem. Associated Press writers Robert Burns in Washington and Howard Amos in Moscow contributed to this report.

First Afghan women's orchestra tries to change attitudes

By **KARIM SHARIFI** and **RAHIM FAIEZ**, Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's first — and only — all-female symphony is trying to change attitudes in a deeply conservative country where many see music as immoral, especially for women.

The symphony's two conductors show how difficult that can be, but also how satisfying success is.

One of them, Negin Kholwak, was supported by her father when she joined the Afghanistan National Institute of Music and then became part of its girls' orchestra, called Zohra. But the rest of her family was deeply against it. Her uncles cut off ties with her father.

"They told him he is not their brother anymore," said Kholwak, now 20. "Even my grand-mother disowned my father."

Kholwak had learned about the music institute at the orphanage in Kabul where she spent most of her life. Her father sent her to the orphanage because he was afraid for her safety in their home province of Kunar in eastern Afghanistan, an area where Taliban militants are active.

The institute is one of the only schools in Afghanistan where girls and boys share classrooms, and it draws its students from the ranks of orphanages and street children, giving them a chance at a new life. Kholwak studied piano and drums before becoming the orchestra's conductor.

More than 30 girls aged 12 to 20 play in Zohra, which is named after a goddess of music in Persian literature. In January, the orchestra, which performs traditional Afghan and Western Classical music, had its first international tour, appearing at the World Economic Forum in Davos and four other cities in Switzerland and Germany.

"The formation of the orchestra is aimed at sending a positive message to the community, to send a positive message to the girls, to encourage families and girls to join the music scene of the country," said Ahmad Naser Sarmast, the institute's founder and director.

Sarmast has experienced firsthand the militants' hatred of music. In 2014, a Taliban suicide bomber blew himself up at a concert Sarmast was attending. He was wounded and a German man in the audience died.

The Zohra orchestra was created in 2014 when one of the institute's students, a girl named Meena, asked Sarmast if there could be a group where girls could play together. Sarmast leaped at the idea.

Since then, Meena has disappeared. Last year, the 7th grader told the school she had to attend her sister's wedding in her family's village in eastern Nangarhar province. She never returned, a sign of how tenuous people's situation is in a country where war rages, communications are poor and poverty is rife. Sarmast said the school has not been in contact with her, but he's hopeful she'll return to the school and Zohra.

The orchestra's other conductor, 18-year-old Zarifa Adiba, faced resistance from her family just as Kholwak did.

When she joined the school in 2014, she only told her mother and step-father, not her four brothers and her uncles, because she knew they would disapprove. Her mother and step-father tried to tell them about the importance of music — without mentioning Adiba — but they weren't convinced.

"If my brothers and uncles had known about me learning or playing music, they 100 percent would have stopped me because they had a very negative view toward music," Adiba said.

Her family's opposition to music was so intense she hesitated to join the orchestra's trip to Davos. But she ended up going, and as one of the conductors she was widely interviewed in the media there and

appeared on TV.

When she returned, her uncles were the first to congratulate her. Two of her brothers are still not happy about her involvement with music but now she has the support of the rest of the family, she has more courage, and she said she is sure her brothers will eventually come around.

"I changed my family, now it is time for other girls to change their families because I am sure that slowly all Afghanistan will change," she said.

S Korea's Park questioned at court hearing on arrest request

By HYUNG-JIN KIM, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's disgraced ex-President Park Geun-hye was being questioned Thursday by a court that will decide if she should be arrested over corruption allegations that have already toppled her from power.

Live TV footage earlier showed a stern-looking Park entering the Seoul Central District Court building amid a barrage of camera flashes. She did not comment to reporters. The court is expected to decide by Friday morning whether to approve her arrest.

If the court approves the arrest warrant requested by prosecutors, Park will be immediately sent to a detention facility as prosecutors can detain her for up to 20 days before laying formal charges.

If the court rejects the arrest request, prosecutors can still indict and charge her.

Prosecutors accuse Park of colluding with a confidante to extort from big businesses, take a bribe from one of the companies and commit other wrongdoings. The allegations prompted millions of South Koreans to stage street protests every weekend for months before the Constitutional Court ruled to dismiss her on March 10. Park's presidential powers had already been suspended after parliament impeached her in December.

It was a dramatic setback to Park, South Korea's first female president who rose to power four years ago amid conservatives' nostalgia for her late dictator father who is credited by supporters for pulling a war-torn country out of poverty in the 1960-70s. Liberal critics revile her father as a ruthless leader who tortured and imprisoned his opponents.

Earlier Thursday, hundreds of her supporters, mostly elderly conservative citizens, gathered near her Seoul home, waving national flags and chanting slogans when she left for the court.

Prosecutors say they want to arrest Park because her alleged crimes are "grave" and other suspects involved the scandal, including her confidante Choi Soo-sil, have already been arrested.

In the coming weeks, prosecutors are expected to formally charge Park with extortion, bribery and abuse of power. A bribery conviction alone is punishable by up to life in prison in South Korea.

Park and Choi deny most of the allegations. Park has said she only let Choi edit some of her presidential speeches and got her help on "public relations" issues. Choi made similar statements.

The women, both in their 60s, have been friends for 40 years. Park once described Choi as someone who helped her when she had "difficulties," an apparent reference to her parents' assassinations in the 1970s. Park's father Chung-hee was gunned down by his own intelligence chief in 1979, five years after his wife was killed in an assassination attempt that targeted him. Park Geun-hye served as first lady after her mother's death.

While in office, Park Geun-hye had refused to meet with prosecutors, citing a law that gives a leader immunity from prosecution except for grave crimes such as treason.

South Korea is to hold an election in May to choose Park's successor.

Judge in Hawaii extends order blocking Trump's travel ban

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER, Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A federal judge in Hawaii decided Wednesday to extend his order blocking President Donald Trump's travel ban, preventing the government from suspending new visas for people from six Muslim-majority countries and halting the U.S. refugee program.

U.S. District Judge Derrick Watson issued the longer-lasting hold on the ban several hours after hearing arguments.

Hawaii says the policy discriminates against Muslims and hurts the state's tourist-dependent economy. The implied message in the revised ban is like a "neon sign flashing 'Muslim ban, Muslim ban'" that the government didn't bother to turn off, state Attorney General Douglas Chin told the judge.

Extending the temporary order until the state's lawsuit was resolved would ensure the constitutional rights of Muslim citizens across the U.S. are vindicated after "repeated stops and starts of the last two months," the state has said.

Watson's ruling is an affirmation of America's value of religious freedom and allows Muslims and refugees to face less uncertainty, the state attorney general's office said in a statement. Chin was traveling to Mexico for a western states attorneys general meeting and heard about the ruling while boarding a plane, said Deputy Attorney General Joshua Wisch, special assistant to Chin.

The government argued the ban falls within the president's power to protect national security. Hawaii has only made generalized concerns about its effect on students and tourism, Department of Justice attorney Chad Readler told the judge via telephone.

The Trump administration had asked Watson to narrow his ruling to cover only the part of Trump's executive order involving the six-nation ban. Readler said a freeze on the U.S. refugee program had no effect on Hawaii.

Watson rejected that argument, preventing the administration from halting the flow of refugees.

"It makes little sense to do so," he wrote. "That is because the entirety of the Executive Order runs afoul of the Establishment Clause, where 'openly available data support a commonsense conclusion that a religious objective permeated the government's action.'"

Watson said in court that the government only argued for that narrower interpretation after a federal judge in Maryland blocked the six-nation travel ban but said it wasn't clear that the refugee suspension was similarly motivated by religious bias.

Watson noted that the government said 20 refugees were resettled in Hawaii since 2010.

"Is this a mathematical exercise that 20 isn't enough? ... What do I make of that?" the judge asked Readler.

The government attorney replied that 20 is simply a small number of refugees.

"In whose judgment?" Watson asked.

Hawaii was the first state to sue over Trump's revised ban. The imam of a Honolulu mosque joined the challenge, arguing that the ban would prevent his Syrian mother-in-law from visiting family in Hawaii.

In his arguments, Chin quoted Trump's comments that the revised travel ban is a "watered down" version of the original.

"We cannot fault the president for being politically incorrect, but we do fault him for being constitutionally incorrect," Chin said.

Earlier this month, Watson prevented the federal government from suspending new visas for people from Somalia, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Yemen and freezing the nation's refugee program. His ruling came just hours before the federal government planned to start enforcing Trump's executive order.

Trump called Watson's previous ruling an example of "unprecedented judicial overreach." The Department of Justice didn't immediately comment on the latest ruling.

Watson wrote that he won't suspend his ruling if the government appeals. Enforcement of both provisions of the ban is prohibited nationwide until he orders otherwise.

Hawaii's ruling would not be directly affected by a decision siding with the federal government in the Maryland case, legal experts said. The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals set a hearing for May 8 to consider the administration's appeal.

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"What a ruling in 4th Circuit in favor of the administration would do is create a split in authority between federal courts in different parts of the country," said Richard Primus, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Michigan law school.

"Cases with splits in authority are cases the U.S. Supreme Court exists to resolve," he said.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, March 30, the 89th day of 2017. There are 276 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 30, 1867, U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward reached agreement with Russia to purchase the territory of Alaska for \$7.2 million (the rough equivalent of \$125 million today), a deal ridiculed by critics as "Seward's Folly."

On this date:

In 1822, Florida became a United States territory.

In 1870, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited denying citizens the right to vote and hold office on the basis of race, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Hamilton Fish. Texas was readmitted to the Union.

In 1923, the Cunard liner RMS Laconia became the first passenger ship to circle the globe as it arrived in New York.

In 1945, during World War II, the Soviet Union invaded Austria with the goal of taking Vienna, which it accomplished two weeks later.

In 1959, a narrowly divided U.S. Supreme Court, in *Bartkus v. Illinois*, ruled that a conviction in state court following an acquittal in federal court for the same crime did not constitute double jeopardy.

In 1964, John Glenn withdrew from the Ohio race for the U.S. Senate because of injuries suffered in a fall. The original version of the TV game show "Jeopardy!" hosted by Art Fleming, premiered on NBC.

In 1975, as the Vietnam War neared its end, Communist forces occupied the city of Da Nang. James Ruppert, 41, killed 11 members of his family at his mother's home in Hamilton, Ohio, on Easter Sunday.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan was shot and seriously injured outside a Washington, D.C., hotel by John W. Hinckley, Jr.; also wounded were White House press secretary James Brady, Secret Service agent Timothy McCarthy and a District of Columbia police officer, Thomas Delahanty.

In 1987, at the 59th Academy Awards, "Platoon" was named best picture; Marlee Matlin received best actress for "Children of a Lesser God" and Paul Newman was honored as best actor for "The Color of Money."

In 1991, Patricia Bowman of Jupiter, Florida, told authorities she'd been raped hours earlier by William Kennedy Smith, the nephew of Sen. Edward Kennedy, at the family's Palm Beach estate. (Smith was acquitted at trial.)

In 2002, Britain's Queen Mother Elizabeth died at Royal Lodge, Windsor, outside London; she was 101 years old.

In 2006, American reporter Jill Carroll, a freelancer for The Christian Science Monitor, was released after 82 days as a hostage in Iraq.

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where he personally apologized to troops for shoddy conditions there. The Food and Drug Administration said it had found melamine, a chemical used to make plastics, in samples of Menu Foods pet food, as well as in wheat gluten used as an ingredient in the company's wet-style products.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama said he was plowing ahead with potential sanctions against countries that kept buying oil from Iran, including allies of the United States, in a deepening campaign to starve Tehran of money for its disputed nuclear program. Anthony Davis became the first Kentucky basketball player and second freshman to be selected The Associated Press' Player of the Year.

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One year ago: President Barack Obama commuted the prison sentences of 61 drug offenders, including more than a third serving life sentences. A Hennepin County, Minnesota, prosecutor announced that two Minneapolis police officers involved in the Nov. 2015 fatal shooting of Jamar Clark, a black man, would not face criminal charges, a decision that drew outrage from community members.

Today's Birthdays: Game show host Peter Marshall is 91. Actor John Astin is 87. Actor-director Warren Beatty is 80. Rock musician Graeme Edge (The Moody Blues) is 76. Rock musician Eric Clapton is 72. Actor Justin Deas is 69. Actor Paul Reiser is 60. Rap artist MC Hammer is 54. Singer Tracy Chapman is 53. Actor Ian Ziering (EYE'-an ZEER'-ing) is 53. TV personality Piers Morgan is 52. Actress Donna D'Errico is 49. Singer Celine Dion is 49. Actor Mark Consuelos is 46. Actress Bahar Soomekh is 42. Actress Jessica Cauffiel is 41. Singer Norah Jones is 38. Actress Fiona Gubelmann is 37. Actress Katy Mixon is 36. Actor Jason Dohring is 35. Country singer Justin Moore is 33. Actress Tessa Ferrer is 31. Country singer Thomas Rhett is 27.

Thought for Today: "Prophecy, however honest, is generally a poor substitute for experience." — Benjamin N. Cardozo, U.S. Supreme Court Justice (1870-1938).

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