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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

Saturday, April 1

Prom Grand March at 7 p.m. in GHS Gym (to be carried live on GDILIVE.COM)

Sunday, April 2

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at 9 a.m., Sunday School at 10 a.m., 1st Communion Class at 11 a.m.

Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Easter Cantata at 7 p.m. with fellowship and



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

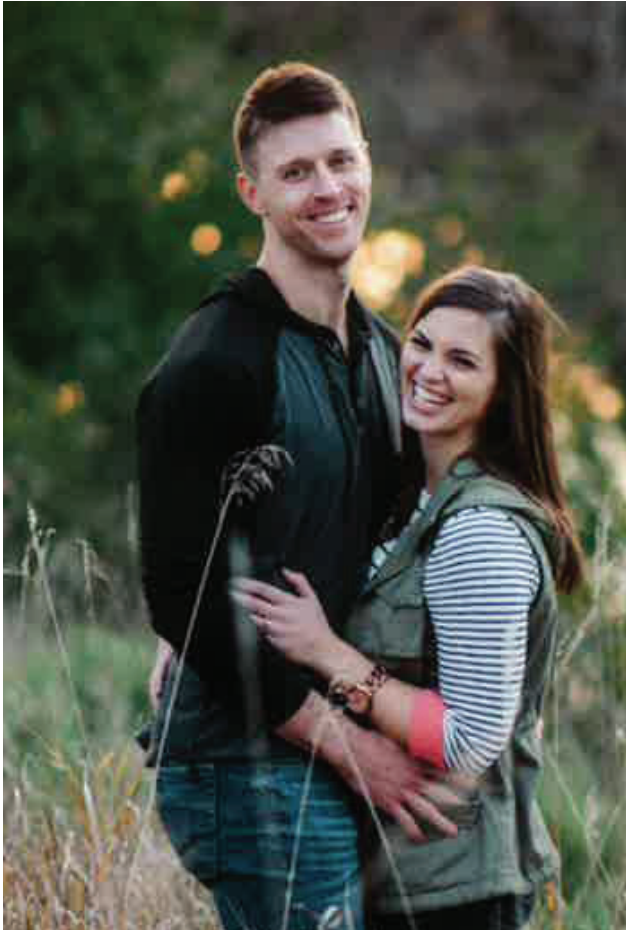
Friday, March 31

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.

			
			
Oven Fresh Sandwiches	Hot Desserts	Snack Melts	
11 E Hwy 12, Groton ~ 397-8627			



Johnston, Kroll Engaged

Steve Johnston and Casey Kroll of Sioux Falls are engaged and plan a May 20th wedding at Memorial Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls. Parents of the couple are Dave and Sandy Johnston of Sioux City, Iowa and Ron and Luanne Kroll of Groton. (pd)



Get ready for detours!

Traffic control signs will be going up next week as the state gets prepared to do work on US 12 and SD 37 going through Groton. Construction will be starting around April 10th, starting with the work on US 12 and then moving south on SD 37.

US 12 will be widened to the north to add a turning lane. There will be a new four-way three-light control at the intersection of US 12 and SD 37.

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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.

1890 - Saint Louis, MO, received 20 inches of snow in 24 hours. It was the worst snowstorm of record for the St Louis. (David Ludlum)

1942: 107 inches of rain fell during the month at Puu Kukui at Maui, Hawaii to set the U.S. record for rainfall in one month. The same place also holds the annual rainfall record for the United States with 578 inches in 1950.

1954 - The temperature at Rio Grande City, TX, hit 108 degrees, which for thirty years was a U.S. record for the month of March. (The Weather Channel)

1962: A tornado struck the town of Milton, Florida killing 17 persons and injuring 100 others. It was the worst tornado disaster in Florida history.

1973: A devastating tornado took a nearly continuous 75 mile path through north central Georgia causing more than 104 million dollars damage.








1987 - March went out like a lion in the northeastern U.S. A slow moving storm produced heavy snow in the Lower Great Lakes Region, and heavy rain in New England. Heavy rain and melting snow caused catastrophic flooding along rivers and streams in Maine and New Hampshire. Strong southerly winds ahead of the storm gusted to 62 mph at New York City, and reached 87 mph at Milton MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)


1988 - March went out like a lion in eastern Colorado. A winter-like storm produced 42 inches of snow at Lake Isabel, including 20 inches in six hours. Fort Collins reported 15 inches of snow in 24 hours. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Albuquerque NM received 14 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 76 mph at Cape Henry VA. While squalls blanketed northwest Pennsylvania with up to 9 inches of snow, thunderstorms in eastern Pennsylvania produced golf ball size hail at Avondale. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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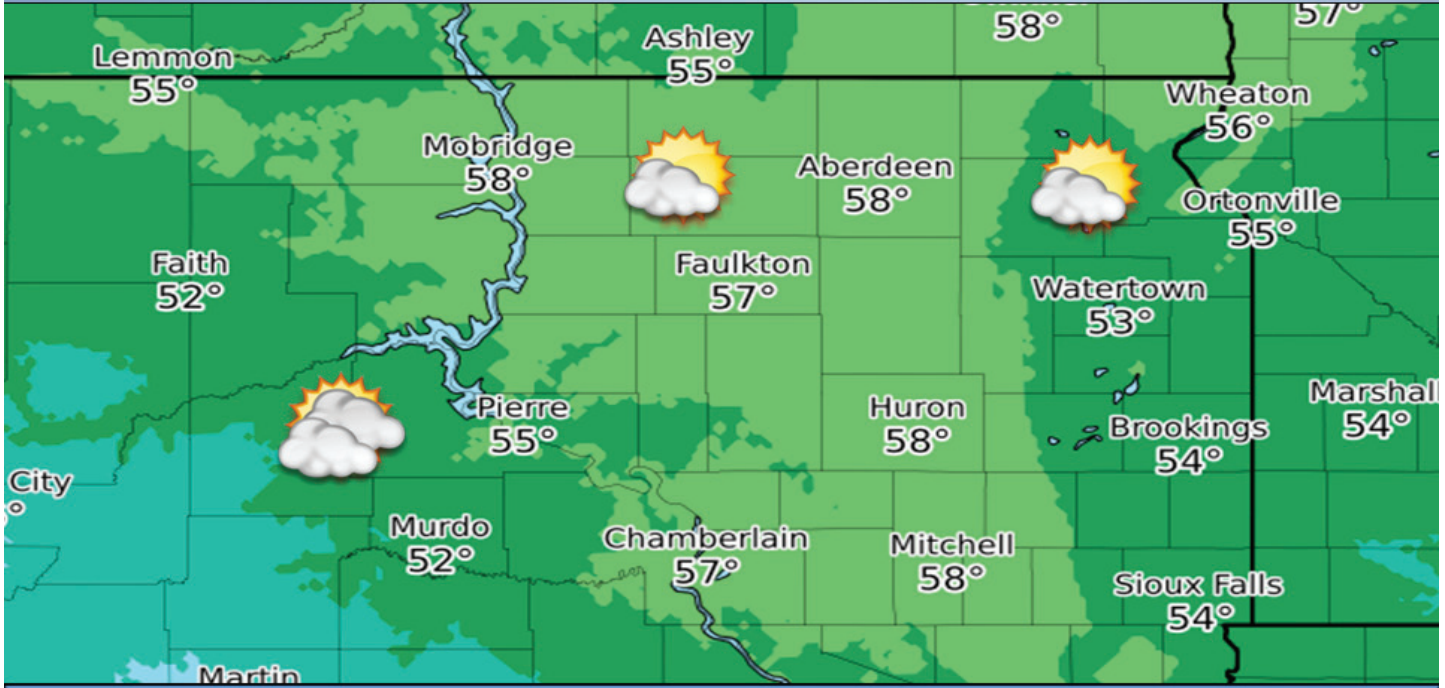
Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny then Slight Chance Rain
High: 58 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 61 °F	Low: 36 °F	High: 65 °F	Low: 38 °F	High: 60 °F






Warmer Temps Today

Less cloud cover for most areas





National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD


weather.gov/Aberdeen

National Weather Service Aberdeen

@NWSAberdeen
Updated: 3/31/2017 5:45 AM Central

Published on: 03/31/2017 at 5:49AM

Drier air advecting into the region from the northeast has eroded much of the cloud cover across north central and northeast South Dakota, as well as west central Minnesota. Although, much of central and south central South Dakota will remain in clouds to start off the day, with gradual clearing expected later. Therefore, with more sunshine expected for many areas, highs are forecast to be a bit warmer today compared to Thursday. Winds will generally remain around 10 mph.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 47.1 F at 5:44 PM

Low Outside Temp: 33.6 F at 6:07 AM

High Gust: 12.0 Mph at 9:21 AM

Snow: Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 86° in 1946

Record Low: 0 in 1899

Average High: 48°F

Average Low: 26°F

Average Precip in March.: 1.16

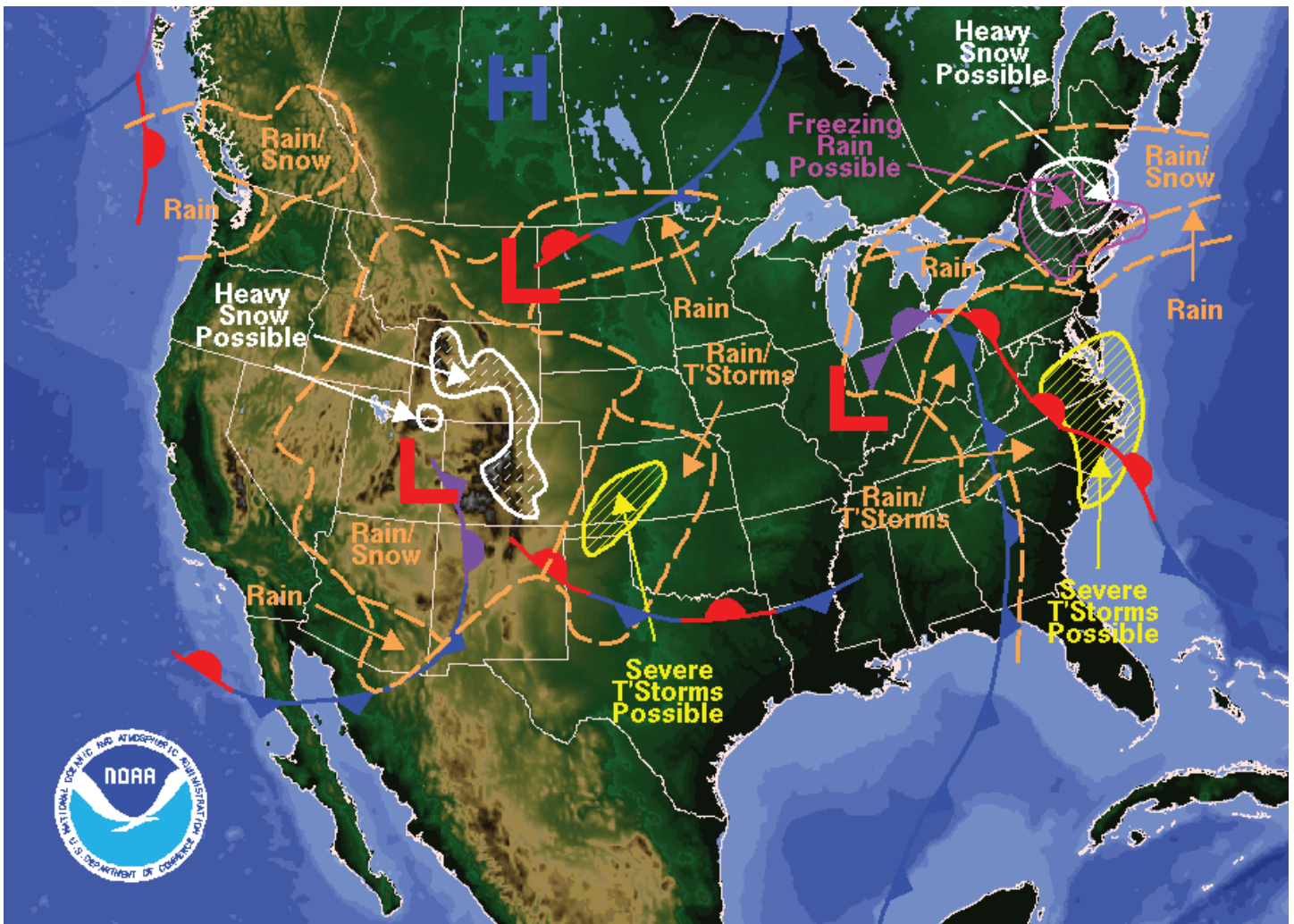
Precip to date in March.: 0.59

Average Precip to date: 2.18

Precip Year to Date: 0.59

Sunset Tonight: 8:00 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:13 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Fri, Mar 31, 2017, issued 4:48 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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SINCERITY MAY NOT BE ENOUGH

Charlie Brown was standing in front of his baseball team talking about the game they had just lost.

With a look of sadness in his eyes he sighed and said, "Sixty-five to nothing. I don't understand it. We were so sincere."

Sincerity is good but it does not insure success. We may be as sincere as the day is long but it will not replace knowledge, skill or the right attitude. If we are going in the wrong direction sincerity will not lead us to the right destination.

One may be sincere about what they believe but it does not guarantee salvation. One may sincerely believe in eternal life and want to go to heaven, but unless they receive Christ as their Savior, they will not be with Him in eternity.

John wrote, "So whoever has God's Son has life; whoever does not have His Son does not have life." This simple statement says it all when it comes to the new birth and the way to eternal life.

Eternal life begins the moment we surrender our lives to the Lordship of Christ as our Savior. It is not something we can work for or hope for or purchase. It is not something that is passed on from one generation to another. And it certainly does not depend on a "feeling" or being sincere.

It is something that God guarantees through His Son. Whoever believes in Him will certainly receive eternal life.

Prayer: Only through You and in You, Heavenly Father, can we have eternal life. We are grateful for Your salvation and the assurance of eternal life with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: 1 John 5:12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

News from the Associated Press

Second bald eagle killed in northeastern South Dakota

ATHOL, S.D. (AP) — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is investigating the shooting death of a bald eagle in Spink County.

Authorities say the bird was killed near Athol, sometime before Tuesday.

An eagle also was killed in neighboring Faulk County earlier this month.

Killing a single eagle is a federal offense with a maximum penalty of a year in prison and a \$100,000 fine. If more than one eagle is killed or it's a second offense, the maximum penalty is two years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Pig that fell from truck en route to slaughter is spared

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A pig that survived falling out of a truck on Interstate 90 in South Dakota just a few miles from a hog processing facility is now being spared from slaughter.

The Argus Leader reports (<http://argusne.ws/2nz8ZcV>) that SoulSpace Farm Sanctuary in New Richmond, Wisconsin, is adopting Wally the pig after no owner claimed him.

The 250-pound pig fell out of the truck on Monday and a motorist reported it to authorities. The animal was taken to a shelter and a veterinarian treated it for road rash.

Word of Wally's plight spread quickly, and SoulSpace founder Kara Breci decided to adopt the pig.

Andy Oestreich at the Sioux Falls Area Humane Society says with what the pig has been through, it deserves to be spared from the dinner plate.

Rapid City National Guard unit to deploy to Kuwait

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City-based unit of the South Dakota Army National Guard will deploy to Kuwait in October.

More than 90 soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment have received a mobilization order for a yearlong deployment.

The mission of the 1-189th is to provide aerial medical evacuation support with its Black Hawk helicopters. The company is made up of pilots, crew chiefs, medics, aviation operations specialists and other support personnel.

The unit will report to Fort Hood, Texas, for several weeks of training before going overseas.

This is the third mobilization for the unit. The unit was deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn from 2011 to 2012 and supported peacekeeping operations in Kosovo from 2008 to 2009.

South Dakota officials work to stop spread of bovine TB

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota officials are trying to stop the spread of a strain of bovine tuberculosis discovered in a Harding County cattle herd.

It's the first case of bovine tuberculosis in the state in six years. So far 41 infected animals have been identified, the Capital Journal (<http://bit.ly/2mSkbnI>) reported.

Thirteen neighboring ranches were quarantined, six of which have since been released. State agriculture officials said the remaining seven still have testing to complete.

Wildlife officials also are testing deer, pronghorn, possums, raccoons, coyotes and badgers in the area.

The National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Iowa identified the strain of bovine tuberculosis as nearly identical to one previously only seen in dairy cattle in central Mexico.

Officials aren't sure how it entered South Dakota, but state veterinarian Dustin Oedekoven thinks there are at least two possibilities.

"One, it came with cattle. A million to a million-and-a-half cattle are imported from Mexico to here. They're all tested and inspected for animal health issues," he said. "We also have additional test requirements if they enter from Mexico into South Dakota. We don't know if these cattle are of Mexican origin. It's a possibility, but it's a long shot."

Oedekoven said the second possibility is that the tuberculosis was brought in by people, which can be possible due to the fact that it can infect humans.

All animals that tested positive on the initial herd test were removed from the herd. Oedekoven recommended that herds with infected animals be depopulated or moved to slaughter. He said the cattle ranchers would be paid by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the loss of their animals.

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

Environmental groups challenge Keystone XL pipeline approval

By JOSH FUNK, Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A coalition of environmental groups challenged the federal permit for the Keystone XL oil pipeline in court on Thursday because they say additional environmental scrutiny is needed.

The Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council and other groups say the initial environmental review completed in 2014 is inadequate and outdated, and that it underestimated how much the pipeline would encourage tar sands oil production in Canada.

The proposed pipeline that TransCanada wants to build would carry crude oil from Canada through Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska, where it would connect with an existing Keystone pipeline network that would take the oil to Texas Gulf Coast refineries.

The U.S. State Department issued a permit for the project earlier this month, though Nebraska regulators still must review and decide whether to approve the proposed route through their state.

President Donald Trump has said he believes the pipeline will create American jobs and bolster the country's energy independence. He overturned former President Barack Obama's rejection of the project in 2015.

Officials with the State Department and TransCanada declined to comment on the lawsuit, saying they don't comment on pending litigation.

The environmental groups contend in their lawsuit filed in Montana that the 2014 report on the project's impact "downplays or ignores other significant environmental impacts of Keystone XL, including harms to land, air, water, and wildlife."

The \$8 billion pipeline that was first proposed in 2008 has drawn strong opposition from environmental groups and some landowners who worry about potential contamination of ground and surface water.

Some of the other groups involved in the lawsuit are the Northern Plains Resource Council, Bold Alliance, Friends of the Earth and the Center for Biological Diversity.

Supporters of the project maintain that those fears are exaggerated, and the pipeline will have a number of upgraded safety features. The pipeline would carry 830,000 barrels of oil a day.

In Nebraska, the elected state Public Service Commission will review the project. That decision will be based on whether commissioners believe the project serves a public interest, based on evidence presented at a public hearing.

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, March 23

Democracy calls for clear voices

Choose your definition of democracy. All draw vitality from power vested in the people, entrusted with choosing effective leaders to shape laws that govern their lives.

Ideally, elected representatives reflect (or at least respect) the views of the voters, forging a sense of satisfaction in the way governmental affairs are run.

In South Dakota, as another state legislative session comes to a close, that feeling of satisfaction is lacking, and signs of a political awakening — from marches and cracker barrel attendance to an organized “resistance” to our President and his administration — are emerging with regularity.

It would be beneficial to take stock of what has occurred.

When Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed Senate Bill 149, providing “religious protection” for faith-based agencies that deny adoption services to unmarried or same-sex couples, South Dakota was marked as a state willing to enable discrimination.

As with last year’s transgender “bathroom bill” ultimately vetoed by Daugaard, our legislature was viewed as safe harbor by Christian conservative groups seeking revolt against the 2015 Supreme Court ruling upholding a constitutional right to same-sex marriage.

After promising to replace, did lawmakers deliver on IM22?

Since they were successful this time, South Dakota comes off as intolerant, with San Francisco forbidding city employees to travel here on state or city-subsidized business. Let’s hope the NCAA doesn’t decide to pull away athletic events, as it has done in states such as North Carolina where LGBT discrimination becomes law. Or that skilled young people don’t leave our state and potential outside firms or individuals don’t cast a disparaging eye.

In a political sense, there is much irony surrounding the religious protection agenda and the influence of out-of-state groups. Daugaard and the GOP establishment derided such influence in attacking and ultimately destroying Initiated Measure 22, the anti-corruption initiative they claimed was spurred by liberal special interests.

Never mind that IM 22 was approved by voters last November as a way to address the lack of transparency and accountability that allowed scandals such as EB-5 and Gear Up to fester.

Legislators replaced IM 22’s campaign finance and lobbying restrictions with softer guidelines, using an emergency clause to make sure it wasn’t referred back to voters and ensuring that a legal challenge against the measure went unresolved. That coordinated effort showed a disregard for the will of voters that could be seen as demeaning or dismissive or both.

Where this sense of superiority among state lawmakers comes from is not exactly clear. This is the same group that seriously considered a bill allowing teachers to address “strengths and weaknesses” of scientific theories addressed in standard classroom curricula, such as evolution and climate change, before learning that stance was unscientific and ruggedly unconstitutional.

Several 2017 state legislators, including four from the Sioux Falls metro area, failed to be the prime sponsor a single bill throughout the entire session, leading one to wonder why they entered public service in the first place.

And now, disgruntled citizens can be asked a similarly pointed question: What do you propose to do about it?

A year ago, hot-button issues surrounded transgender treatment and teacher pay spurred large and vocal crowds at cracker barrels across the state.

The ensuing presidential campaign underscored that grassroots politics and populism can still play a large role in American democracy.

A downtown Women’s March in January drew a crowd of more than 3,000 to downtown Sioux Falls, and local advocacy groups such as Indivisible 605 and Represent South Dakota add diversity to political

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discourse in a predominantly conservative state.

For it to truly mean anything, average voters must know that their voice can be heard.

The best policy moving forward is that if you feel your interests are being ignored, speak up. Let your concerns rise above the din.

One of the primary tenets of representative democracy is that all representatives are temporary, so let them be unnerved by the noise.

Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, March 30

Barnett Arena's fate is in the mayor's hands

After more than year of work by a Rushmore Plaza Civic Center task force appointed by Mayor Steve Allender, it appears the city wants to make a similar pitch to one that failed to convince voters to support a City Council plan to finance a \$180-million expansion of the facility.

But now the mayor apparently plans to take a different approach than the one his predecessor took that led to 60 percent of the voters rejecting a proposal that promised to bring big shows and concerts to Rapid City and generate a new wave of sales tax revenue for decades to come.

This time, he wants to give residents a choice — replace or fix Barnett Arena — after the city lays out the options in some detail. Allender also told the Civic Center Board of Directors on Tuesday that an important part of future presentations will be the facility's economic impact.

He also said raising taxes is not an option and that he would prefer the matter not be referred to voters again as it was in 2015. Allender also wants to conduct a poll to help determine what residents want done with Barnett Arena, which was built in 1977 and needs improvements to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

There was something missing, however, from the mayor's comments on Tuesday that could be the fatal flaw for those who are convinced Rapid City needs a new Barnett Arena that attracts A-list performers and concerts to the city and visitors who will open their wallets over and over again while in town for the shows.

What is missing is the leadership that only a mayor can provide.

Rather than slowly build up consensus through task forces and presentations, the mayor needs to decide what he wants and then make the case to the public as well as the City Council.

If, for example, the mayor believes it is important to build a new Barnett Arena, he needs to put his political capital on the table and fight for it as we already know it will be a tough sell to convince many residents that the promised boost in sales tax revenue will benefit them, too, especially if he wants to use sales tax proceeds now earmarked for the Vision Fund to pay for it.

It's not going to be easy and that makes the mayor's leadership all the more essential moving ahead. Public information sessions and marketing campaigns by business groups did not work before and it is unlikely the same approach — even with a poll added — will deliver different results unless the mayor succeeds in keeping it off the ballot.

The mayor can't serve as a mediator in this case — he needs to lead and fight for what he believes is best for the future of Rapid City.

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, Yankton, March 28

Small towns and grocery stores

In a small town in the 21st century, everything matters, because everything has consequences.

That's something that the residents of Scotland, Tripp and Tyndall have learned during the last 10 days or so. During that time span, those towns saw their grocery stores suddenly close, leaving them with no easy, local way to purchase food and other items that one buys on grocery trips.

The loss of a town's grocery store may not be as devastating as, say the closure of a school, but it's still a big blow that carries a lot of consequences.

Fortunately, the story looks as though it will turn out well for these three towns. Wagner grocer RF Buche, who owned the three stores (which were leased to another party that suddenly closed the stores about a week ago), has announced the three shuttered markets will reopen next month to again serve their towns.

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The stores will be revamped and will not have the traditional full services, such as grocery baggers. How customers in those towns will react to these changes remains to be seen. But the important thing is, the stores will be open again, allowing locals to purchase grocery items in their own towns.

Small towns and grocery stores have developed a fascinating, bittersweet relationship. Decades ago, when traveling to bigger communities was not always so convenient, many towns had multiple markets that also served as rock-solid pillars of any bustling business district. But times have changed: People are more mobile now and are willing to travel to bigger communities to shop at bigger stores. Also, smaller rural towns are getting smaller, and the demand is shrinking. Where many of these towns once had, perhaps, two or three grocery stores in their midst, now they are fighting just to have one with its doors open.

But small-town grocery stores remain vital to their communities. They not only provide a local shopping convenience and bolster the local tax base, but they also are available for elderly people or those who cannot drive to another town to purchase the food and other items they need.

Thus, grocery stores have become a quality-of-life issue for small communities. This wasn't always the case, since the presence of at least one grocery store was once a given in most every town. But these are different times.

Because of that, some area towns have acted accordingly. Faced with the possible closure of its last grocery store a few years ago, Menno formed a community group to purchase the local business. The civic group ran the store for a number of years before it was sold last year to a private interest. Currently, Lake Andes is in the process of reopening its only grocery store, which closed last year and prompted the formation of a civic committee to find alternatives. And now, efforts to reopen the stores in Scotland, Tripp and Tyndall have resulted in a previous owner providing new life to these operations. (Whether this is a permanent situation or a temporary response until new managers can be found is not certain. But the fact that they will be open is the priority right now.)

These stories tell tales of struggle and triumph in our small rural communities, and they also illustrate a drive of commitment and a need for ingenuity in every community. Those are essential now for small towns to survive in this modern age.

Insurance company lays off 30 workers in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — About 30 Esurance employees in Sioux Falls have lost their jobs as part of cuts within the insurance company.

The Argus Leader reports (<http://argusne.ws/2ocmfH0>) that Esurance cut 100 jobs Tuesday, mostly in Sioux Falls and in two California locations. The San Francisco-based company said the cuts will reduce its operating costs.

The cuts in Sioux Falls come just a week after the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society laid off more than 100 workers in the city.

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

Suspect pleads not guilty in fatal shooting in Pine Ridge

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A suspect in the fatal shooting of a Pine Ridge man in October has pleaded not guilty to a first-degree murder charge.

Twenty-three-year-old Myles Tuttle is accused in the death of 29-year-old Vincent Brewer III. He entered his plea Wednesday in federal court in Rapid City.

Authorities say Brewer was shot to death Oct. 16 in the parking lot of a youth center on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Tuttle is the second person to be charged in his killing.

Missing state prison inmate back in custody in Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A state prison inmate who walked away from a minimum-security facility in Rapid City is back in custody.

South Dakota corrections officials say 51-year-old Robert Running Shield was placed on escape status Monday night after leaving the Rapid City Community Work Center without authorization. He was found and arrested Wednesday.

Running Shield is serving four years in custody on a Minnehaha County drug conviction. He now likely will face a felony escape charge that carries a maximum punishment of five years in prison.

Rural Brown County crash kills 1 teen, injures another

FREDERICK, S.D. (AP) — One teenager was killed and another hurt in a two-vehicle crash in rural Brown County.

The Highway Patrol says a sport utility vehicle driven by a 16-year-old boy collided with a semitrailer at the intersection of state Highway 10 and a county road south of Frederick about 5 p.m. Tuesday.

A 17-year-old male passenger in the SUV died at the scene. The driver suffered what authorities said were serious but not life-threatening injuries. The semi driver wasn't hurt.

The names of the victims weren't immediately released.

Malaysia interviewed, cleared 3 N. Koreans before they left

By EILEEN NG, Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysia's police chief said Friday that three North Koreans who had been hiding out in their country's embassy for weeks were allowed to fly home after investigators cleared them of wrongdoing in the death of Kim Jong Nam.

Malaysia and North Korea struck a deal this week to end a diplomatic standoff over the Feb. 13 murder of Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half brother of North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un.

Although details of what led to the agreement were not released, it gave North Korea custody of the body and allowed Malaysia to question the three men who were hiding in the embassy.

Earlier this month, national police chief Khalid Abu Bakar had hinted that the men had valuable intelligence, saying he would wait to question them, "even if it takes five years."

But on Friday, in the wake of the larger political deal with North Korea, Khalid said authorities recorded statements from the men and released them.

"We have obtained whatever we wanted from them," Khalid told reporters. "We have allowed them to go."

It was an abrupt turnaround in a bizarre case that is part diplomatic drama, part murder mystery. Investigators say Kim Jong Nam, who was in his 40s, was poisoned at the Kuala Lumpur airport by two young women wielding VX nerve agent, a banned chemical weapon.

Although Malaysia never directly accused North Korea of carrying out the attack, speculation is rampant that it orchestrated a hit on a long-exiled member of its ruling elite.

Malaysian investigators had said they wanted to question seven North Koreans in the case: four men who left the country the day of the attack, and the three who were holed up inside the North Korean Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

But now that the three men hiding in the embassy have flown home, Malaysia probably won't get to question anyone from North Korea. The men who left include an embassy official and a North Korean airline worker.

"(The) investigation into the murder is still ongoing," Khalid said Friday. "We are still hoping the North Korea authorities will hand over to us the four North Korean suspects we have named earlier on."

That is highly unlikely. North Korea has denied having anything to do with the killing and has slammed Malaysia's investigation as flawed and politically motivated.

North Korea has not even publicly acknowledged that the victim was, in fact, Kim Jong Nam. Instead, it refers to him as Kim Chol, the name on the passport he was carrying at the time of his death.

On Friday, Khalid said North Korea knows the victim's identity.

"I'm sure they know very well" who the man really is, he said. He added that Malaysia released Kim Jong Nam's body after receiving a request from his next of kin. Without specifying exactly who sent the letter, Khalid said, "Legally speaking, Kim Jong Un is the next of kin."

Kim Jong Nam had three children with two women in Macau and mainland China.

Thursday's political deal also secured the release of ordinary citizens who had been caught up in the diplomatic fight. North Korea was so enraged by Malaysia's investigation that it announced earlier this month that Malaysians could not leave North Korea. Malaysia responded in kind, with an exit ban of its own targeting North Koreans.

Those bans have now been lifted, and the nine Malaysians held in North Korea returned home on Friday.

EU draft guidelines soften line on future UK relationship

By RAF CASERT, Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union softened its public stance on Britain's exit from the bloc Friday, with Council President Donald Tusk signaling some flexibility on allowing talks on a new relationship before the divorce proceedings are complete.

Draft guidelines obtained by the Associated Press say that the EU and Britain must first "settle the disentanglement" of Britain from the bloc. But once there is a tentative consensus on reciprocal treatment of citizens in each other's nations, budget commitments, legal clarity for companies working in Britain and a solution on the Irish border with the United Kingdom, the EU would be willing to look ahead.

"Once, and only once we have achieved sufficient progress on the withdrawal, can we discuss the framework for our future relationship," Tusk said in Valletta, Malta. He said he hoped that could come as soon as the autumn.

It will take a summit of the 27 leaders, however, to signal that that moment has come.

The guidelines say it is a priority to settle questions about British and other European citizens living in each other's countries, and call for "flexible and imaginative solutions" for the issue of the U.K.'s land border with EU member Ireland.

EU leaders warned after a meeting Friday that the two years of talks triggered this week to negotiate Britain's exit will be difficult — but insisted they don't want all-out economic or diplomatic conflict. Tusk is presenting the EU's draft negotiating guidelines to leaders of the remaining 27 member states Friday.

Tusk said the EU will not punish Britain in the talks, saying that Brexit itself is "punitive enough." The head of the rotating EU presidency, Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, insisted the negotiations "will not be a war."

Tusk ruled out the suggestion that there was an inherent threat in British Prime Minister Theresa May's departure letter Wednesday, which some felt hinted that Britain would end security cooperation with continental Europe unless it gets a good Brexit deal.

"I know Theresa May well enough and I know her approach to this issue. This is why I rule out this kind of interpretation ... that security cooperation is used as a bargaining chip. It must be a misunderstanding," Tusk said.

British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson also insisted Friday that Britain's commitment to European defense and security is "unconditional" and "not some bargaining chip in any negotiations" over Brexit.

Johnson, speaking in Brussels upon arrival for a NATO meeting, said he has had good feedback from partners since Wednesday's British formal announcement of its departure from the EU, despite worries on both sides of the Channel about Brexit.

"We really are moving forward now. There's a lot of good will, willingness to achieve what the Prime Minister has said she wants to achieve," he said.

The British government triggered the EU exit process Wednesday with May's letter to the EU and began outlining Thursday how it intends to convert thousands of EU rules into British laws in a Great Repeal Bill.

Lorne Cook in Brussels and Stephen Calleja in Valletta, Malta, contributed to this report.

SpaceX launches its first recycled rocket in historic leap

By **MARCIA DUNN, AP Aerospace Writer**

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — SpaceX successfully launched and then retrieved its first recycled rocket Thursday, a historic feat and the biggest leap yet in its bid to drive down costs and speed up flights.

It was the first time SpaceX founder Elon Musk tried to fly a booster that soared before on an orbital mission. He was at a loss for words after the Falcon 9 core landed on the bull's-eye of the ocean platform following liftoff with a broadcasting satellite, achieving what some had once told him was impossible.

"This is a huge day. My mind's blown, frankly," Musk said. He called it an "incredible milestone in the history of space" and predicted, "this is going to be a huge revolution in spaceflight."

Musk foresees dozens if not hundreds of repeat flights for a booster and rocket turnarounds of as little as 24 hours, perhaps by next year. Land, refuel and then back up again, with everything leading to one day putting humanity "out there among the stars."

This particular first stage landed on an ocean platform almost exactly a year ago after a space station launch for NASA. SpaceX refurbished and tested the 15-story booster, still sporting its nine original engines. It nailed another vertical landing at sea Thursday once it was finished boosting the satellite for the SES company of Luxembourg. SpaceX employees jammed outside Mission Control at the Hawthorne, California, company headquarters cheered loudly every step of the way — and again when the satellite reached its proper orbit.

Longtime customer SES got a discount for agreeing to use a salvaged rocket, but wouldn't say how much. It's not just about the savings, said chief technology officer Martin Halliwell. He called it "a big step for everybody — something that's never, ever been done before."

"Absolutely astounding," Halliwell said after his company's satellite reached the proper orbit. "Just opened the door into a whole new era of spaceflight."

SpaceX granted SES insight into the entire process of getting the booster ready to fly again, Halliwell said, providing confidence everything would go well. SES, in fact, is considering more launches later this year on reused Falcon boosters. At a news conference, Musk personally thanked Halliwell for having faith in SpaceX.

"You've got to get away from the idea that it's secondhand," Halliwell told reporters. "Flight proven," Musk quickly added, his preferred term.

Boosters — the most expensive part of the rocket, according to Musk — typically are discarded following liftoff, sinking into the Atlantic. SpaceX began flying back the Falcon's first-stage, kerosene-fueled boosters in 2015; it's since landed eight boosters, three at Cape Canaveral and five on ocean platforms — actually, six times at sea counting Thursday's redo.

On Thursday, the company even managed to recover the Falcon's \$6 million satellite enclosure, which used thrusters and parachutes to drop into the Atlantic. Until Thursday, trying to retrieve the second stage used to get the satellite into the proper, high orbit seemed like a "Hail Mary" pass, Musk said. But no more.

Musk said this day was 15 years in coming and that, all told, the reusability effort has cost the company at least \$1 billion, which will take time to recoup. He brought all five of his young sons to the launch — and the news conference that followed — wanting them to be witness to history-in-the-making. It was fitting, he noted, that the rocket took off from NASA's Launch Complex 39A at Kennedy Space Center, the starting point for the Apollo moon shots decades ago.

Blue Origin, an aerospace company started by another tech billionaire, Jeff Bezos, already has reflown a rocket. One of his New Shepard rockets, in fact, has soared five times from Texas. These flights, however,

were suborbital; in other words, nothing went into orbit.

NASA also has shared the quest for rocket reusability. During the space shuttle program, the twin booster rockets dropped away two minutes into flight and parachuted into the Atlantic for recovery. The booster segments were mixed and matched for each flight.

As for this SpaceX reused booster, Halliwell said engineers went through it with a fine-toothed comb following its liftoff in April 2016. SES had special access; the satellite provider, after all, has a long history with SpaceX. A SES spacecraft was on board for SpaceX's first commercial satellite launch in 2013.

Halliwell wasn't so sure, though, about the cleaning job. "It's a bit sooty," he said with a smile.

Future refights won't need as much work, Musk conceded,

Given its historic mission, the booster will not fly again, Musk said, but rather remain at Cape Canaveral for viewing.

SpaceX — which aims to launch up to six reused boosters this year, two of them with the yet-to-fly, super-sized Falcon Heavy in late summer — is familiar with uncharted territory.

Besides becoming the first commercial cargo hauler to the International Space Station, SpaceX is building a capsule to launch NASA astronauts as soon as next year. It's also working to fly two paying customers to the moon next year, and is developing the Red Dragon, a robotic spacecraft intended to launch to Mars in 2020 and land. Musk's ultimate goal is to establish a human settlement on Mars.

Key to all of this, according to Musk, is the rapid, repeating turnaround of rockets — and employees. SpaceX posted a help wanted ad on its webcast following the launch.

Online:

SpaceX: <http://www.spacex.com/>

SES: <https://www.ses.com/>

This story has been corrected to show the SpaceX booster is 15 stories, not 15 feet.

Trump faces questions of interference in investigations

By JULIE PACE and EILEEN SULLIVAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is facing new questions about political interference in the investigations into Russian election meddling following reports that White House officials secretly funneled material to the chairman of the House intelligence committee.

Trying to fend off the growing criticism, Trump's top lawyer invited lawmakers from both parties to view classified information at the White House. Thursday's invitation came as The New York Times reported that two White House officials — including an aide whose job was recently saved by President Donald Trump — secretly helped House intelligence committee chairman Rep. Devin Nunes examine intelligence information there last week.

Nunes is leading one of three investigations into Russia's attempt to influence the campaign and Trump associates' possible involvement. The Senate intelligence committee, which has thus far taken a strikingly more measured and bipartisan approach to its own Russia probe, tried to keep its distance from the White House and asked that the documents uncovered by Trump aides be given to lawmakers via the appropriate agencies.

The cloud of investigation has hung over Trump's White House since the day he took office. On Thursday, an attorney for Michael Flynn, Trump's ex-national security adviser, said Flynn is in discussions with the congressional committees about speaking to them in exchange for immunity. The talks are preliminary, and no official offers have been made.

"General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should the circumstances permit," Flynn's attorney, Robert Kelner, said in a statement.

Other Trump associates have volunteered to speak with investigators, but have not publicly raised the

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issue of immunity.

Flynn, a member of the Trump campaign and transition, was fired as national security adviser after it was publicly disclosed that he misled the vice president about a conversation he had with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. Flynn's ties to Russia have been scrutinized by the FBI and are under investigation by the House and Senate intelligence panels.

The House committee's work has been deeply, and perhaps irreparably, undermined by Nunes' apparent coordination with the White House. He told reporters last week that he had seen troubling information about the improper distribution of Trump associates' intercepted communications, and he briefed the president on the material, all before informing Rep. Adam Schiff, the committee's top Democrat.

Speaking on Capitol Hill Thursday, Schiff said he was "more than willing" to accept the White House offer to view new information. But he raised concerns that Trump officials may have used Nunes to "launder information to our committee to avoid the true source."

"The White House has a lot of questions to answer," he declared.

Instead, the White House continued to sidestep queries about its role in showing Nunes classified information that appears to have included transcripts of foreign officials discussing Trump's transition to the presidency, according to current and former U.S. officials. Intelligence agencies routinely monitor the communications of foreign officials living in the U.S., though the identities of Americans swept up in that collection is supposed to be protected.

In Washington early last week, White House officials privately encouraged reporters to look into whether information about Trump associates had been improperly revealed in the intelligence gathering process. Days later, Nunes announced that he had evidence, via an unnamed source, showing that Trump and his aides' communications had been collected through legal means but then "widely disseminated" throughout government agencies. He said the collections were not related to the Russia investigation.

Trump spokesman Sean Spicer said Thursday the material the White House wants the House and Senate intelligence leaders to view was discovered by the National Security Council through the course of regular business. He would not say whether it was the same material Nunes had already seen.

A congressional aide said Schiff did not receive the White House letter until after Spicer announced it from the White House briefing room.

Spicer had previously dismissed the notion that the White House had fed information to Nunes, saying the idea that the congressman would come and brief Trump on material the president's team already had "doesn't pass the smell test." The White House quickly embraced Nunes' revelations, saying they vindicated Trump's explosive and unverified claim that President Barack Obama wiretapped his New York skyscraper.

Nunes has said the information he received did not support that allegation, which has also been disputed by Obama and top intelligence officials.

The Times reported that Ezra Cohen-Watnick, the senior director for intelligence at the White House National Security Council, and Michael Ellis, a White House lawyer who previously worked on the House intelligence committee, played roles in helping Nunes view the materials.

Cohen-Watnick is among about a dozen White House officials who would have access to the types of classified information Nunes says he viewed, according to current and former U.S. officials. He's become a controversial figure in intelligence circles, but Trump decided to keep him on over the objections of the CIA and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, according to the officials. They spoke only on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly by name.

Cohen-Watnick and Nunes both served on the Trump transition team.

Stephen Slick, a former CIA and NSC official, said it would be "highly unusual and likely unprecedented" for a member of Congress to travel to the White House to view intelligence reports "without prior authorization."

Nunes has repeatedly sidestepped questions about who provided him the intelligence reports, though he pointedly has not denied that his sources were in the White House. House Speaker Paul Ryan, in an interview with "CBS This Morning" that aired Thursday, said Nunes told him a "whistleblower-type person" provided the information.

A spokesman for Ryan later said the speaker was not aware of Nunes' source and continues to have "full

confidence" in the congressman's ability to run the Russia investigation.

Associated Press writers Chad Day and Deb Riechmann contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC> and Eileen Sullivan at <http://twitter.com/esullivanap>

Michael Flynn in talks with Congress, wary of prosecution

By CHAD DAY, EILEEN SULLIVAN and JULIE PACE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn is in discussions with the House and Senate intelligence committees on receiving immunity from "unfair prosecution" in exchange for agreeing to be questioned as part of ongoing probes into possible contacts between Donald Trump's presidential campaign and Russia, his attorney says.

"General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should the circumstances permit," attorney Robert Kelner said Thursday.

Kelner said no "reasonable person" with legal counsel would answer questions without assurances that he would not be prosecuted, given calls from some members of Congress that the retired lieutenant general should face criminal charges.

Flynn's ties to Russia have been scrutinized by the FBI and are under investigation by the House and Senate intelligence committees. Both committees are looking into Russia's meddling in the 2016 presidential election and any ties between Trump associates and the Kremlin.

Since July, the FBI has been conducting a counterintelligence investigation into Russia's interference in the election and possible coordination with Trump associates.

Kelner released a statement after The Wall Street Journal first reported that Flynn's negotiations with the committee included discussions of immunity. The lawyer described the talks as ongoing and said he would not comment on the details.

A congressional aide confirmed that discussions with the Senate intelligence committee involved immunity. The aide spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

House intelligence committee spokesman Jack Langer said Flynn has not offered to testify to the panel in exchange for immunity.

Four other Trump associates have come forward in recent weeks, saying they would talk to the committees. As of Wednesday, the Senate intelligence committee had asked to interview 20 people as part of the probe.

In his statement, Kelner said the political climate in which Flynn is facing "claims of treason and vicious innuendo" is factoring into his negotiations with the committees.

"No reasonable person, who has the benefit of advice from counsel, would submit to questioning in such a highly politicized, witch hunt environment without assurances against unfair prosecution," Kelner said.

In September, Flynn weighed in on the implications of immunity on NBC's "Meet the Press," criticizing Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and her associates in the FBI's investigation into her use of a private email server.

"When you are given immunity, that means that you have probably committed a crime," Flynn said during the interview.

Flynn was fired from his job as Trump's first national security adviser after it was disclosed that he misled Vice President Mike Pence about a conversation he had with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. during the transition.

In the weeks after he resigned, Flynn and his business registered with the Justice Department as foreign agents for \$530,000 worth of lobbying work that could have benefited the Turkish government.

The lobbying occurred while Flynn was a top Trump campaign adviser. The Turkish businessman who hired Flynn, Ekim Alptekin, has told the AP that Flynn's firm registered under pressure from the Justice

Department.

Follow Chad Day on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ChadSDay>

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. MICHAEL FLYNN SEEKS IMMUNITY IN RUSSIA PROBE

"General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should the circumstances permit," says his lawyer Robert Kelner, amid investigations into possible contacts between Donald Trump's campaign and Russia.

2. WHAT COULD UNDERMINE US MILITARY CAMPAIGNS IN IRAQ, SYRIA

A sharp spike in civilian casualties said to have been caused by U.S. airstrikes has the potential to undercut the fight against Islamic State militants.

3. WITNESSES: TRUCK WAS SWERVING BEFORE DEADLY WRECK

Authorities in two Texas counties received calls about a pickup driving erratically in the moments leading up to a collision with a church bus that killed 13 people.

4. SKOREA'S EX-LEADER JAILED ON CORRUPTION CHARGES

Former President Park Geun-hye is imprisoned over the allegations that ended her tumultuous four-year rule.

5. NC ROLLS BACK BLOCKS ON LGBT ANTI-DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS

But it isn't yet clear if the repeal is enough to coax back businesses and sporting events that have skipped the state.

6. WHY SPACEX 'RECYCLED ROCKET' IS A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

The rocket's successful launch and retrieval provides the biggest leap yet to drive down costs and speed up flights.

7. EU SOFTENS TONE ON BREXIT

European Council President Donald Tusk signals some flexibility on allowing talks on a new relationship before the divorce proceedings are done.

8. COLLAPSED BRIDGE 'WILL HAVE A TREMENDOUS IMPACT ON TRAVEL'

That's what Georgia Transportation Commissioner Russell McMurry says about an I-85 overpass that crumbled apart following a massive fire.

9. VENEZUELA SUPREME COURT GUTS CONGRESS OF LAST VESTIGES OF POWER

The move "marks a point of no return on the road to dictatorship," says Freddy Guevara, No. 2 congressional leader.

10. WHERE 'SUPER BLOOM' DRAWS HUGE CROWDS

Nurtured by record rains, spectacular wildflower displays carpet California's desert sands about 85 miles northeast of San Diego, attracting 150,000 people in past month.

Civilian casualties in Iraq, Syria undercut US victories

By SUSANNAH GEORGE and ZEINA KARAM, Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Islamic State group and al-Qaida-linked militants are quickly moving to drum up outrage over a sharp spike in civilian casualties said to have been caused by U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, posting photos online of a destroyed medical center and homes reduced to rubble. "This is how Trump liberates Mosul, by killing its inhabitants," the caption reads.

The propaganda points to the risk that rising death tolls and destruction could undermine the American-

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led campaign against the militants.

During the past two years of fighting to push back the Islamic State group, the U.S.-led coalition has faced little backlash over casualties, in part because civilian deaths have been seen as relatively low and there have been few cases of single strikes killing large numbers of people. In Iraq — even though sensitivities run deep over past American abuses of civilians — the country's prime minister and many Iraqis support the U.S. role in fighting the militants.

But for the first time anger over lives lost is becoming a significant issue as Iraqi troops backed by U.S. special forces and coalition airstrikes waded into more densely populated districts of Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, and U.S. -backed Syrian fighters battle closer to the Islamic State group's Syrian stronghold of Raqqa.

That has the potential to undercut victories against the militants and stoke resentments that play into their hands.

At least 300 civilians have been killed in the offensive against IS in the western half of Mosul since mid-February, according to the U.N. human rights office — including 140 killed in a single March 17 airstrike on a building. Dozens more are claimed to have been killed in another strike last weekend, according to Amnesty International, and by similar airstrikes in neighboring Syria in the past month.

In Syria, as fighting around Raqqa intensified, civilian fatalities from coalition airstrikes rose to 198 in March — including 32 children and 31 women — compared to 56 in February, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which documents Syria's war. Over the course of the air campaign, from September 2014 through February, an average of 30 civilians were killed a month, according to the Observatory.

The U.S. military is investigating what role the U.S. played in the March 17 airstrike in Mosul, and American and Iraqi officials have said militants may have deliberately gathered civilians there and planted explosives in the building. The blast left an entire residential block flattened, reducing buildings to mangled concrete.

Among those who lost loved ones, resentment appears to be building toward the U.S.-led coalition and the ground forces it supports.

"How could they have used this much artillery on civilian locations?" asked Bashar Abdullah, a resident of the neighborhood known as New Mosul, who lost more than a dozen family members in the March 17 attack. "Iraqi and American forces both assured us that it will be an easy battle, that's why people didn't leave their houses. They felt safe."

U.S. officials have said they are investigating other claims of casualties in Syria and Iraq.

Islamic State group fighters have overtly used civilians as human shields, including firing from homes where people are sheltering or forcing people to move alongside them as they withdraw. The group has imposed a reign of terror across territories it holds in Syria and Iraq, taking women as sex slaves, decapitating or shooting suspected opponents and destroying archaeological sites. Mass graves are unearthed nearly every day in former IS territory.

Now, the group is using the civilian deaths purportedly as a result of U.S.-led airstrikes in its propaganda machine.

Photos recently posted online on militant websites showed the destruction at the Mosul Medical College with a caption describing the Americans as the "Mongols of the modern era" who kill and destroy under the pretext of liberation. A series of pictures showing destroyed homes carried the comment: "This is how Trump liberates Mosul, by killing its inhabitants under the rubble of houses bombed by American warplanes to claim victory. Who would dare say this is a war crime?"

In Syria, IS and other extremist factions have pushed the line that the U.S. and Russia, which is backing President Bashar Assad's regime, are equal in their disregard for civilian lives.

U.S. "crimes are clear evidence of the 'murderous friendship' that America claims to have with the Syrian people, along with its claimed concern for their future and interests," said the Levant Liberation Committee, an al-Qaida-led insurgent alliance.

Some Syrian opposition factions allied with the U.S. have also criticized the strikes, describing them as

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potential war crimes.

An analysis by the Soufan Group consultancy warned that rumors and accusations of coalition atrocities "will certainly help shape popular opinion once Mosul and Raqqa are retaken, thus serving a purpose for the next phase of the Islamic State's existence."

Criticism has also come from Russian officials, whose military has been accused of killing civilians on a large scale in its air campaign in Syria, particularly during the offensive that recaptured eastern Aleppo from rebels late last year.

"I'm greatly surprised with such action of the U.S. military, which has all the necessary equipment and yet were unable to figure out for several hours that they weren't striking the designated targets," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, speaking at the U.N. Security Council about the March 17 strike.

Joseph Scrocca, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition, acknowledged the spike in civilian casualty reports could change the way the coalition is conducting the war. He said it was a "very valid" concern that loss of life and destruction could play into the hands of IS or cause some coalition members to waver.

"But the coalition is not going to back down when (the fight) gets hard or there's a lot of pressure," he said. "That's what ISIS wants."

In Syria, the deadliest recent strike occurred earlier this month in a rebel-held area in the north. Opposition activists said a mosque was hit during evening prayers, killing around 40 people, mostly civilians, and wounding dozens of others. The U.S. said it struck an al-Qaida gathering across the street from the mosque, killing dozens of militants, adding they found no basis for reports that civilians were killed.

In Mosul, the scale of destruction wrought by increased artillery and airstrikes is immense in some areas. Abdullah, the resident of New Mosul, buried 13 members of his family in a single day.

Standing in a field now being used as a graveyard, he said: "This was not a liberation. It was destruction."

Karam reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Maamoun Youssef in Cairo, Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow and Mstyslav Chernov in Mosul, Iraq, contributed to this report.

Is 'Obamacare' repeal dead -- or a legislative zombie?

By **NANCY BENAC**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's plan to kill Obamacare died last week. Or maybe it didn't. The repeal effort seems to have assumed zombie status — somewhere between dead and alive.

This is never-say-die Washington, where big legislative proposals that are in the casket one day can show signs of a pulse and start climbing out the next.

It's a fairly common condition in the capital, where politicians who invest enormous political capital in a proposal are loath to let go.

"One of the keys to understanding Washington is to think a little bit like a coroner," says consultant Ari Fleischer, former press secretary to President George W. Bush. "You have to know when something's dead and when something's still kicking, and sometimes it's hard to tell the difference."

To say that Trump and Republican congressional leaders are sending mixed signals about the viability of the repeal effort is an understatement.

Last week, when it became clear that House Republicans didn't have enough votes to pass the health-care repeal bill, the White House said Trump had given it his all, left everything on the field, and was ready to move on.

Next up: taxes, the president said, without blinking.

His son Eric channeled Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler" in praising his father for knowing when to walk away. "Guess what? We're moving on," the president's son told Fox News on Tuesday. "The best business people know ... when to hold their cards, know when to fold the cards."

That same night, though, the president told a bipartisan gathering of senators, "We're all going to make a deal on health care. That's such an easy one. So I have no doubt that that's going to happen very quickly."

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Trump spokesman Sean Spicer said Wednesday the president had just been engaging in light-hearted banter.

But it was no laughing matter to plenty of Republicans on Capitol Hill, where conservatives elected on a promise to scrap the law continue to insist that reports of the repeal effort's death are premature.

"We don't quit," said freshman Rep. Brian Mast, a Florida Republican who lost both legs after being wounded in Afghanistan. "That's how we do things on the battlefield; that's how things should be done here."

On Thursday, House Speaker Paul Ryan added to the cacophony of conflicting statements when he told CBS that it's time for Plan B, where "we keep talking to each other and figure out how we get to 'yes.'"

For all of that, there is little evidence that leaders are working on a concrete plan to revive the repeal effort.

Why not admit that?

It could be the emotional attachment to a long-held goal. Or a matter of self-interest.

"These are creatures that need public recognition and public validation," says Stephen Wayne, a Georgetown University professor of government. "When they get behind something and it doesn't go anywhere, or they're embarrassed by it, it's a political failure. It's an ego failure."

Framing the situation more charitably, Fleischer offers this: "People in both parties generally have a lot of heartfelt investments in the policies they're pursuing. Particularly for core promises, the formality of declaring it dead is gut-wrenching, so you cling to hope and you don't declare it dead 'til you have no choice."

There are historical examples that demonstrate both the wisdom and folly of refusing to admit defeat.

President Ronald Reagan's push for a sweeping tax overhaul package was pronounced dead on Capitol Hill more than once before a bipartisan package won approval in 1986.

President Bill Clinton's push to revamp welfare was declared a failure repeatedly before it came together. His years-long effort to remake the health care system was declared a goner more than once — and really did die.

President Barack Obama's attempts to enact gun control measures after the 2012 shooting of schoolchildren in Newtown, Connecticut, ended with the president acknowledging in 2014 that until there was a fundamental shift in public opinion, "it will not change."

Between the clear victories and defeats lies a netherworld of legislative limbo.

Obama's push for big immigration changes stalled after the Senate in 2013 passed a bill with dim prospects of clearing the House, but the idea lived on in people's hopes and dreams. All the discussion of whether immigration reform was dead or alive was a pretty good indication that it was the former.

Obama never explicitly acknowledged the political reality that the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal was dead after Trump was elected. The White House just stopped actively lobbying Congress to pass it.

Obama's day-one vow to close the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba became increasingly less likely to succeed over his eight years in office. But he never admitted it was a promise unfulfilled until his last full day in office.

Robin Wagner-Pacifici, a sociology professor at the New School for Social Research, said there may be parallels to military surrenders, which fell into disuse in the latter part of the 20th century to be replaced by "conflict resolution or dispute resolution or accords of various kinds that had a much more fuzzy quality to them."

She said it may also be partly a matter of Trump's fragmented and sometimes contradictory ways of communication, in which "nothing is ever completely resolved or ended."

AP Writer Erica Werner contributed to this report.

Follow Nancy Benac on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/nbenac>

AP-NORC Poll: Most disapprove of Trump, except on economy

By LAURIE KELLMAN and EMILY SWANSON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Americans disapprove of Donald Trump's overall performance two months into his presidency. But they're more upbeat about at least one critical area: his handling of the economy.

Nearly 6 in 10 Americans disapprove of Trump's overall performance, and about the same percentage say the country is headed in the wrong direction, according to a new poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. It was conducted amid the collapse of the GOP's health care overhaul.

But the poll also found a brighter spot for the businessman-politician on the economy, often a major driver of presidential success or failure. There, Americans split about evenly, with 50 percent approving and 48 percent disapproving of Trump's efforts.

"He's driving the car off the cliff in every other kind of policy and executive action he's trying to push through, but (not) the economy," said Ryan Mills, a 27-year-old tobacco company chemist from Greensboro, North Carolina.

Overall, just 42 percent of Americans approve and 58 percent disapprove of the job Trump is doing as president. That's an unusually poor rating by historical standards for a still-young administration.

By contrast, at this point in their presidencies, Barack Obama's approval rating was above 60 percent in Gallup polling and George W. Bush's was above 50 percent. Gallup's own measure of Trump's approval has dipped below 40 percent.

Trump has suffered defeats in the federal courts, which twice temporarily halted his travel ban on some foreigners, and in Congress, where discord among Republicans has stymied legislation to up-end Obama's signature health care law. The FBI, along with Congress, is probing Russia's meddling in the 2016 election and any possible coordination with the Trump campaign.

The president has responded in public with belligerent tweets often blaming the media, Democrats, conservative Republicans and others.

The AP-NORC poll did show Republicans still far more likely to approve than disapprove of Trump, a fifth of GOP respondents said they don't approve of his performance. Among independents, six in 10 disapprove.

Notably, whites — who formed an important chunk of Trump's political base during the election — divide about evenly on the approval question, 53 percent approving and 47 percent disapproving.

But there are signs in the poll that Trump's base is holding and that people are willing to give him a chance on the still-strong economy.

Fifty-eight percent of whites without a college degree — who were especially likely to vote for Trump — approve of the job he's doing overall.

Nearly 20 percent of those who disapprove of Trump's overall performance still approve of how he's handling the economy. And most Americans — 56 percent — describe the national economy as good, while 43 percent describe it as poor. About a year ago, in April of 2016, just 42 percent of Americans described the economy as good in another AP-NORC poll.

The current majority extends across party lines, with 63 percent of Republicans, 54 percent of independents and 53 percent of Democrats describing the national economy as good.

Trump voter Joshlyn Smith, a Riverside County, California, law enforcement officer, said the president needs to move past "the Twitter stuff" that often mires him in social media spats — and focus instead on the nation's policy.

"I feel like I want to give him a fair shot, especially in terms of helping on taxes and the economy," said Smith, 38. "On a personal level, I think he's too involved with how he's portrayed in the media. I want him to have a little bit tougher skin."

The approval ratings of many presidents through history are linked to the economy, with several — including Harry Truman, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama — suffering politically for downturns during their first year in the White House, according to a project by the Miller Center at The University of Virginia.

Trump inherited a strong economy, which might be leading people to give him a chance to maintain it, said Barbara Perry, director of presidential studies at the Miller Center.

"It starts with how they're feeling about their pocketbooks and their family budget," Perry said. For presidents, "if you can keep the economy going well and having people feel good about (it), good about their lives and therefore good about the country, that can cover a multitude of sins."

The poll, conducted over five days preceding and following last Friday's collapse of the GOP health care bill, suggests the political damage could be hard for Trump to leave behind even if the economy stays strong.

It was a galling setback for the president and the Republicans who control Congress. Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin canceled a House vote that would have spelled defeat for the legislation because too many Republicans opposed it.

In other findings:

— More than 6 in 10 Americans disapprove of Trump's handling of health care, the worst of seven issues tested in the poll. Three in 10 Republicans feel that way, as do 6 in 10 independents and 90 percent of Democrats.

— Eighty-six percent call health care a very or extremely important issue to them personally, nearly as many as the 87 percent who say the same about the economy.

— Along with health care, majorities of Americans also disapprove of Trump's handling of foreign policy, immigration, the budget deficit and taxes. Half approve of how he is handling Supreme Court appointments.

— Most Americans — 62 percent — say the country is headed in the wrong direction, while just 37 percent say it's headed in the right direction. Nearly two-thirds of Republicans say the country is headed in the right direction, while just a third of independents and less than a fifth of Democrats say the same.

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/>

Follow Kellman and Swanson on Twitter at: <http://www.twitter.com/APLaurieKellman> and http://www.twitter.com/EL_Swan.

North Carolina's "bathroom bill" repeal: who's satisfied?

By EMERY P. DALESIO, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina has rolled back a state law that blocked some anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people, but questions persist whether politicians have done enough to coax back the businesses and sports leagues who withdrew lucrative plans from the state.

Initial reactions were largely muted on Thursday's compromise repeal that seems to have pleased no one, and which advocates say still leaves gays, lesbians and transgender people vulnerable to discrimination.

The law passed by the Republican-led legislature and signed quickly by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper repeals the best-known section of House Bill 2: a requirement that transgender people use the public restrooms that correspond to the sex on their birth certificate.

HB2 supporters argued that the law was needed to preserve people's privacy and protect them from sexual predators. Opponents said that was nonsense and that the danger was imaginary.

At stake is whether the repeal legislation was enough to persuade some businesses, state and city governments and sports organizations including the NCAA to end their de facto boycott of North Carolina. An Associated Press analysis (<http://apne.ws/2ocOSnu>) this week found that the law would cost the state more than \$3.76 billion in lost business over a dozen years.

"House Bill 2 stopped a number of businesses from expanding here or coming here to North Carolina," Cooper said at a news conference after signing the repeal. "Companies that I have talked to, companies

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that I have recruited, who were hesitant or refusing to bring businesses to our state before the passage of today's bill now are telling me: We are coming."

Consultants who advise companies looking for a good place to build operations and create jobs were divided on whether North Carolina had turned a page.

Companies seeking to avoid business risks and costs generally avoid places embroiled in turbulent social issues, said Paige Webster, a site selection consultant in Phoenix, Arizona. The repeal could be enough to restore North Carolina's reputation as a dynamic, progressive state, which took a hammering in the year since HB2 became law, he said.

"I think that stigma will go away," Webster said. "It's going to open the doors for corporations to take another look."

But the angry reaction by gay-rights and other liberal groups over provisions that prevent municipalities from passing their own anti-discrimination ordinances until December 2020 means the issue could remain a red flag for companies, said Pete Mohan, a site selection consultant in Jacksonville, Florida. The signal is that the angry discussions over LGBT rights and bathroom protections haven't ended with the repeal law, he said.

"I think it's far from a panacea. It's more of a stopgap than anything else," Mohan said. "The whole situation has sort of soured the broader national desire to locate in North Carolina."

The compromise plan was worked out under mounting pressure from the NCAA, which threatened to withhold sporting events from the basketball-obsessed state until at least 2023. The NCAA pulled events from the state over the past year in part because six states had banned non-emergency spending on travel to North Carolina, for example by sports teams from public universities.

The NCAA's governing board would review North Carolina's law next week, President Mark Emmert said Thursday.

"Everybody loves being in North Carolina for our games. It's a state obviously that in many ways is synonymous with college sport," Emmert said. "Nobody made the decision to leave North Carolina casually. It was a very, very difficult decision for the board to make. And I'm sure the next decision will be very difficult as well."

The stakes are high for North Carolina: The Associated Press calculated that the state made \$71.4 million from 28 neutral-site NCAA events in the five academic years ending last spring. A potentially more lucrative slate of events is in jeopardy in this latest round of decisions.

Cities including Raleigh and Greensboro have submitted 133 bids to host NCAA championship events in such sports as golf, swimming and basketball through the 2021-22 academic year, with a potential economic impact of about \$250 million, according to the North Carolina Sports Association.

Associated Press writer Gary D. Robertson contributed to this report.

Follow Dalesio on Twitter at www.twitter.com/emerydalesio .

White House tells Russia probers: Come see intel yourselves

By **JULIE PACE** and **EILEEN SULLIVAN**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House refused Thursday to say whether it secretly fed intelligence reports to a top Republican lawmaker, fueling concerns about political interference in the investigation into possible coordination between Russia and the 2016 Trump campaign.

Fending off the growing criticism, the administration invited lawmakers from both parties to view classified material it said relates to surveillance of the president's associates. The invitation came as The New York Times reported that two White House officials — including an aide whose job was recently saved by President Donald Trump — secretly helped House intelligence committee chairman Devin Nunes examine intelligence information last week.

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Nunes is leading one of three investigations into Russia's attempt to influence the campaign and Trump associates' possible involvement.

Late Thursday, an attorney for Michael Flynn, Trump's ex-national security adviser, said Flynn is in discussions with the House and Senate intelligence committees about speaking to them in exchange for immunity. The talks are preliminary, and no official offers have been made.

"General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should the circumstances permit," Flynn's attorney, Robert Kelner, said in a statement.

Other Trump associates have volunteered to speak with investigators, but have not publicly raised the issue of immunity.

Flynn, a member of the Trump campaign and transition, was fired as national security adviser after it was publicly disclosed that he misled the vice president about a conversation he had with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. Flynn's ties to Russia have been scrutinized by the FBI and are under investigation by the House and Senate intelligence committees.

The House panel's work has been deeply, and perhaps irreparably, undermined by Nunes' apparent coordination with the White House. He told reporters last week that he had seen troubling information about the improper distribution of Trump associates' intercepted communications, and he briefed the president on the material, all before informing Rep. Adam Schiff, the committee's top Democrat.

Speaking on Capitol Hill Thursday, Schiff said he was "more than willing" to accept the White House offer to view new information. But he raised concerns that Trump officials may have used Nunes to "launder information to our committee to avoid the true source."

"The White House has a lot of questions to answer," he declared.

Instead, the White House continued to sidestep queries about its role in showing Nunes classified information that appears to have included transcripts of foreign officials discussing Trump's transition to the presidency, according to current and former U.S. officials. Intelligence agencies routinely monitor the communications of foreign officials living in the U.S., though the identities of Americans swept up in that collection is to be protected.

The Senate intelligence committee, which has thus far taken a strikingly more measured and bipartisan approach to its own Russia investigation, responded to the White House's invitation by asking for the intelligence agencies "that own the intelligence documents in question to immediately provide them directly to the Committee."

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin said there was nothing to the allegations of election meddling.

Did Russia interfere in the U.S. campaign, he was asked at a forum in the northern Russian city of Arkhangelsk? Injecting a bit of humor, Putin answered by quoting George H.W. Bush from the 1992 U.S. presidential campaign.

"Read my lips: No," he said, pronouncing the last word in English for emphasis.

In Washington early last week, White House officials privately encouraged reporters to look into whether information about Trump associates had been improperly revealed in the intelligence gathering process. Days later, Nunes announced that he had evidence, via an unnamed source, showing that Trump and his aides' communications had been collected through legal means but then "widely disseminated" throughout government agencies. He said the collections were not related to the Russia investigation.

Trump spokesman Sean Spicer said Thursday the material the White House wants the House and Senate intelligence leaders to view was discovered by the National Security Council through the course of regular business. He would not say whether it was the same material Nunes had already seen.

A congressional aide said Schiff did not receive the White House letter until after Spicer announced it from the White House briefing room.

Spicer had previously dismissed the notion that the White House had funneled information to Nunes, saying the idea that the congressman would come and brief Trump on material the president's team already had "doesn't pass the smell test." The White House quickly embraced Nunes' revelations, saying they vindicated Trump's explosive and unverified claim that President Barack Obama wiretapped his New

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York skyscraper.

Nunes has said the information he received did not support that allegation, which has also been disputed by Obama and top intelligence officials.

The Times reported that Ezra Cohen-Watnick, the senior director for intelligence at the White House National Security Council, and Michael Ellis, a White House lawyer who previously worked on the House intelligence committee, played roles in helping Nunes view the materials.

Cohen-Watnick is among about a dozen White House officials who would have access to the types of classified information Nunes says he viewed, according to current and former U.S. officials. He's become a controversial figure in intelligence circles, but Trump decided to keep him on over the objections of the CIA and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, according to the officials. They spoke only on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly by name.

Cohen-Watnick and Nunes both served on the Trump transition team.

Stephen Slick, a former CIA and NSC official, said it would be "highly unusual and likely unprecedented" for a member of Congress to travel to the White House to view intelligence reports "without prior authorization."

Nunes has repeatedly sidestepped questions about who provided him the intelligence reports, though he pointedly has not denied that his sources were in the White House. House Speaker Paul Ryan, in an interview with "CBS This Morning" that aired Thursday, said Nunes told him a "whistleblower-type person" provided the information.

A spokesman for Ryan later said the speaker was not aware of Nunes' source and continues to have "full confidence" in the congressman's ability to run the Russia investigation.

Associated Press writer Deb Riechmann contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC> and Eileen Sullivan at <http://twitter.com/esullivanap>

Deposed S. Korean president arrested, jailed after long saga

By HYUNG-JIN KIM, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's disgraced former President Park Geun-hye was arrested and jailed Friday over the corruption allegations that already ended her tumultuous four-year rule and prompted an election to find a successor.

A convoy of vehicles, including a black sedan carrying Park, entered a detention facility near Seoul before dawn after the Seoul Central District Court granted a prosecutors' request to arrest her.

Many Park supporters waved national flags and shouted "president" as Park's car entered the facility. An opponent held up a mock congratulatory ribbon with flowers that read "Park Geun-hye, congratulations for entering prison. Come out as a human being after 30 years."

Prosecutors can detain Park for up to 20 days, during which they are expected to formally charge her and have her jailed during the next several months of court procedures. A district court in South Korea normally issues a ruling within six months of an indictment.

The detention is yet another humiliation for Park, South Korea's first female president who was elected in 2012 with overwhelming support from conservatives, who recall her late dictator father as a hero who lifted the country from poverty in the 1960-70s despite a record of severe human rights abuses.

Prosecutors accuse Park of colluding with a confidante to extort big businesses, take a bribe from one of the companies and commit other wrongdoing. The allegations led millions of South Koreans to protest in the streets every weekend for months before lawmakers impeached her in December and the Constitutional Court ruled in March to formally remove her from office.

It made Park the country's first democratically elected leader to be forced from office since democracy

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came here in the late 1980s. South Korea will hold an election in May to choose Park's successor. Opinion surveys say liberal opposition leader Moon Jae-in, who lost the 2012 election to Park, is the favorite.

Moon's camp said South Korea took a step toward restoring "justice and common sense." Park's battered ruling party described her arrest as "pitiful."

Prosecutors can charge Park without arresting her. But they said they wanted to arrest her because the allegations against her are "grave" and because other suspects involved the scandal, including her confidante Choi Soon-sil and Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong, have already been arrested.

The Seoul court said it decided to approve Park's arrest because it believes key allegations against her were confirmed and there were worries that she may try to destroy evidence.

Surveys had showed about 70 percent of South Koreans would support Park's arrest. After Park was jailed, some said she deserved it while others expressed sympathy for their ex-leader.

"It is pitiful that she ended up being like this," Kim In-sook, 82, said, watching a special TV program on Park at Seoul's railway station on Friday. Nearby, 77-year-old Park Seong-woo said that prosecutors and the court have done the right thing to do.

A day earlier, Park was questioned at a court hearing for nearly nine hours. As she left for the hearing, hundreds of her supporters, many of them elderly citizens, gathered at her private Seoul home. They wept, chanted slogans and tried to block Park's car before being pushed back by police.

Park is expected to face charges of extortion, bribery and abuse of power. A conviction for bribery alone has a minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and maximum of life imprisonment in South Korea.

Prosecutors believe Park conspired with Choi and a top presidential adviser to bully 16 business groups, including Samsung, to donate 77.4 billion won (\$69 million) for the launch of two nonprofits that Choi controlled. Company executives said they felt forced to donate in fear of retaliatory measures including state tax investigations.

Park and Choi are accused of separately receiving a bribe from Samsung and colluding with top officials to blacklist artists critical of Park's policies to deny them state financial assistance programs, according to prosecutors. Park also is alleged to have passed on state secrets to Choi via a presidential aide.

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.

After her father's killing, Park Geun-hye left the presidential Blue House and secluded herself from the public eye before she entered politics in the late 1990s — when public nostalgia for her father emerged after the country's economy was hit hard by the Asian financial crisis.

She had since become an icon of South Korean conservatives, earning the nickname "Queen of Elections" for her ability to led her conservative party to win tight elections.

Park now becomes South Korea's third head of state to be jailed after leaving office.

Former presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, both previously army generals, received a life sentence and a 17-year prison term, respectively, in 1996 on charges including treason and bribery. They were released in December 1997 on a special presidential amnesty.

Chun and Roh staged a 1979 coup that put Chun in power more than eight years after Park Chung-hee's death. Roh was elected president in 1987 after Chun's government caved to massive pro-democracy protests and accepted direct, free elections.

In 2009, prosecutors questioned former liberal President Roh Moo-hyun over corruption allegations, but they later closed the investigation after Roh leaped to his death.

Associated Press writer Kim Tong-hyung contributed to this story.

Massive fire crumbles Atlanta interstate bridge; none hurt

ATLANTA (AP) — A massive fire caused an interstate bridge to collapse during rush hour Thursday in Atlanta, just minutes after witnesses said police halted traffic and turned cars away from the crumbling overpass. However, officials said no one was hurt despite dramatic images of towering flames and plumes of smoke.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports (<http://on-ajc.com/2nl88ef>) the fire burned for more than an hour under I-85 northbound near Piedmont Road, spewing large clouds of black smoke skyward. The interstate — a major artery for the U.S. South that runs through the heart of Atlanta — was closed indefinitely.

The impact on traffic long-term was not immediately known, but traffic was bumper to bumper on nearby surface streets Thursday night as people scrambled to find alternate routes. The Department of Transportation warned all motorists to stay off I-85.

"This is about as serious a transportation crisis as we can imagine," Mayor Kasim Reed said.

All Rose Diggs told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that she lives less than a mile from the fire site but couldn't get home because of blocked surface streets. She said she was told to walk despite being disabled, "but it's raining and dark."

The state's top transportation official said there's no way to tell when the highway, which carries 250,000 cars per day, can be safely reopened to traffic in either direction.

"We will have to continue to evaluate the situation and adjust as we do," Department of Transportation Commissioner Russell McMurry said. "This incident — make no bones about it — will have a tremendous impact on travel."

The interstate is a major thoroughfare for traffic heading north and south through Atlanta. The bridge collapse effectively "puts a cork in the bottle," Georgia State Patrol Commissioner Mark McDonough said.

Capt. Mark Perry of the Georgia State Patrol told the Journal-Constitution that the agency doesn't know what started the fire beneath the bridge but that terrorism is not suspected.

Gov. Nathan Deal told reporters that some PVC plastic materials in a vehicle may have caught fire. "I do not know why they did or what the source of their transport was," Deal said. "But those are questions that will hopefully be answered at least by tomorrow morning."

Deal added that "to my knowledge we have not had any injuries as a result of this fire on the bridge."

Atlanta Fire Department spokesman Sgt. Cortez Stafford said no cars were on the overpass when it fell. "Our guys got here quickly and shut down the interstate and said, "No one else is driving over this bridge," he said.

Firefighters noticed chunks of concrete falling from the bridge and got out of the way just minutes before it collapsed, Stafford said.

Deal said inspectors were at the scene and they've contacted the original company that built the bridge to come in and assess the extent of the damage.

"We're trying to determine everything we can about how quickly can we repair it and get it back in service," Deal said. "I can assure you we will do everything to expedite the repair and replacement of that section of the bridge."

Information from: WSB-TV, <http://www.wsbtv.com/index.html>

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 31, the 90th day of 2017. There are 275 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 31, 1917, the United States took formal possession of the Virgin Islands from Denmark.

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On this date:

In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain issued an edict expelling Jews from Spanish soil, except those willing to convert to Christianity.

In 1889, French engineer Gustave Eiffel unfurled the French tricolor from atop the Eiffel Tower, officially marking its completion.

In 1923, the first U.S. dance marathon, held in New York City, ended with Alma Cummings, who had danced with six consecutive male partners, setting a world record of 27 hours on her feet.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Emergency Conservation Work Act, which created the Civilian Conservation Corps.

In 1943, "Oklahoma!" the first musical play by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, opened on Broadway.

In 1957, the original version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's TV musical "Cinderella," starring Julie Andrews, aired live in color on CBS.

In 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson stunned the country by announcing during a televised address that he would not seek re-election.

In 1976, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that Karen Ann Quinlan, a young woman in a persistent vegetative state, could be disconnected from her respirator. (Quinlan, who remained unconscious, died in 1985.)

In 1986, 167 people died when a Mexicana Airlines Boeing 727 crashed in a remote mountainous region of Mexico.

In 1993, actor Brandon Lee, 28, was accidentally shot to death during the filming the movie "The Crow" in Wilmington, North Carolina, when he was hit by a bullet fragment that had become lodged inside a prop gun.

In 1995, Mexican-American singer Selena Quintanilla-Perez, 23, was shot to death in Corpus Christi, Texas, by the founder of her fan club, Yolanda Saldivar, who was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

In 2005, Terri Schiavo (SHY'-voh), 41, died at a hospice in Pinellas Park, Florida, 13 days after her feeding tube was removed in a wrenching right-to-die dispute.

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush called for the release of 15 British sailors and marines held by Iran, calling their capture by Tehran "inexcusable behavior." (The 15 were freed four days later.) President Bush again came to the defense of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, under criticism for his role in the firing of federal prosecutors, calling him "honorable and honest." The first "Earth Hour" took place as Sydney, Australia, plunged itself into near-darkness for an hour to promote awareness of climate change. (The event went global the following year.)

Five years ago: Hundreds of world landmarks from Berlin's Brandenburg Gate to the Great Wall of China went dark as part of Earth Hour, a global effort to highlight climate change. Carolina Kostner of Italy won the ladies' world figure skating title while Patrick Chan of Canada captured the men's title in Nice, France. Brittney Griner was named The Associated Press' women's college basketball Player of the Year, the first Baylor player to win the award.

One year ago: An overpass collapsed onto a crowded Kolkata, India, neighborhood, killing 26 people. A man who was convicted of fatally beating another man to death after a night of drinking and drug use in 1994 was put to death in Georgia. A 34-year-old Illinois man fatally shot a Virginia state trooper at a busy bus terminal in Richmond before being killed by other troopers. A Maryland man accused of fatally beating his girlfriend's 9-year-old son over a missing piece of birthday cake pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 30 years in prison. Denzel Valentine of Michigan State was named The Associated Press Player of the Year. George Washington won its first National Invitation Tournament championship, beating Valparaiso 76-60 at Madison Square Garden.

Today's Birthdays: Actor William Daniels is 90. Actor Richard Chamberlain is 83. Actress Shirley Jones is 83. Musician Herb Alpert is 82. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., is 77. Former U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass.,

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is 77. Actor Christopher Walken is 74. Comedian Gabe Kaplan is 73. Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, is 73. Rock musician Mick Ralphs (Bad Company; Mott the Hoople) is 73. Former Vice President Al Gore is 69. Author David Eisenhower is 69. Actress Rhea Perlman is 69. Actor Robbie Coltrane (Film: "Harry Potter" films) is 67. Actor Ed Marinaro is 67. Rock musician Angus Young (AC/DC) is 62. Actor Marc McClure is 60. Actor William McNamara is 52. Alt-country musician Bob Crawford (The Avett (AY'-veht) Brothers) is 46. Actor Ewan (YOO'-en) McGregor is 46. Actress Judi Shekoni is 39. Rapper Tony Yayo is 39. Actress Kate Micucci is 37. Actress Melissa Ordway is 34. Jazz musician Christian Scott is 34. Pop musician Jack Antonoff (fun.) is 33. Actress Jessica Szohr is 32.

Thought for Today: "Nowhere are prejudices more mistaken for truth, passion for reason and invective for documentation than in politics." — John Mason Brown, American critic and lecturer (1900-1969).

(Above Advance for Use Friday, March 31)

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