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Service Notice: Genevieve Trembl

Mass of Christian Burial for Genevieve Trembl, 99, of Aberdeen and formerly of Groton will be 10:00 a.m. Saturday, April 8th at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, Groton. Father Mike Kelly will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garner Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the chapel on Friday from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Jenny passed away Friday, March 31, 2017 at Avera Mother Joseph Manor, Aberdeen.



DAIRY QUEEN HELP WANTED

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

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

The cardboard/paper
recycling trailer at the school is **OPEN**

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Sunday, 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 lunch following the concert (will be carried live on GDILIVE.COM)

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

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

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

Monday, April 3

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

Senior Menu: Tater tot hotdish, green beans, orange half, sugar cookie, whole wheat bread.

Tuesday, April 4

United Methodist: Bible Study at 10 a.m.

Track at Ipswich at 12:30 p.m.

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, macaroni salad, squash, pineapple strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.

Wednesday, April 5

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML at 1:30 p.m., Confirmation at 3:45 p.m., Lenten Service at 7 p.m.

Dakota Brush

Brooms, Brushes, Mops, Can Liners, Paper Products.

Get Ready for Spring With
Wash Brushes & Squeegees

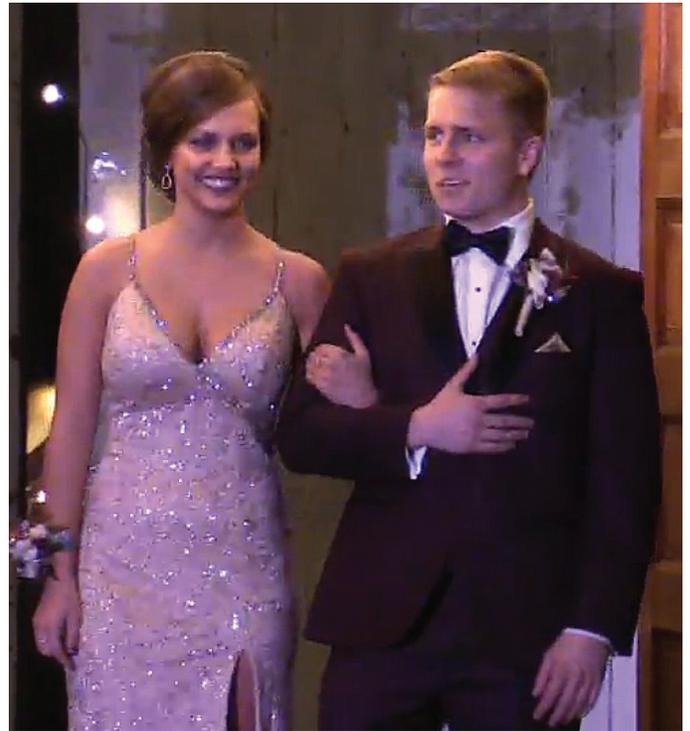
397-9337

104 N. Main, Groton

GHS Prom Couples - Part 1



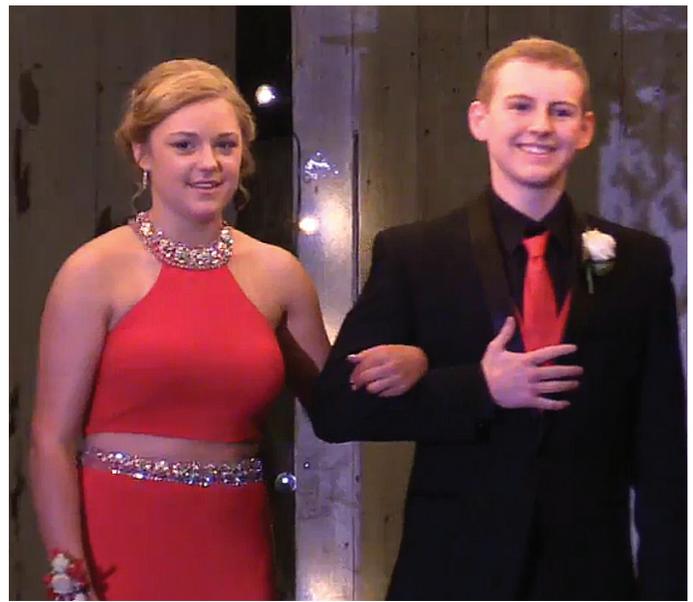
Junior Class President Marshall Lane escorting Maria Barker.



Senior Class President Macy Knecht escorted by Jackson Oliver.



Jessica Bjerke escorted by Luke Thorson.



Mitchel Thurston escorting Kaelyn Somsen.

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Emily Locke escorted by Joe Groeblichhoff.



Patrick Gengerke escorting Jacey Williams.



Hannah Lewandowski escorted by Landon Marzahn.



Madison Sippel escorted by Landon Werdel.

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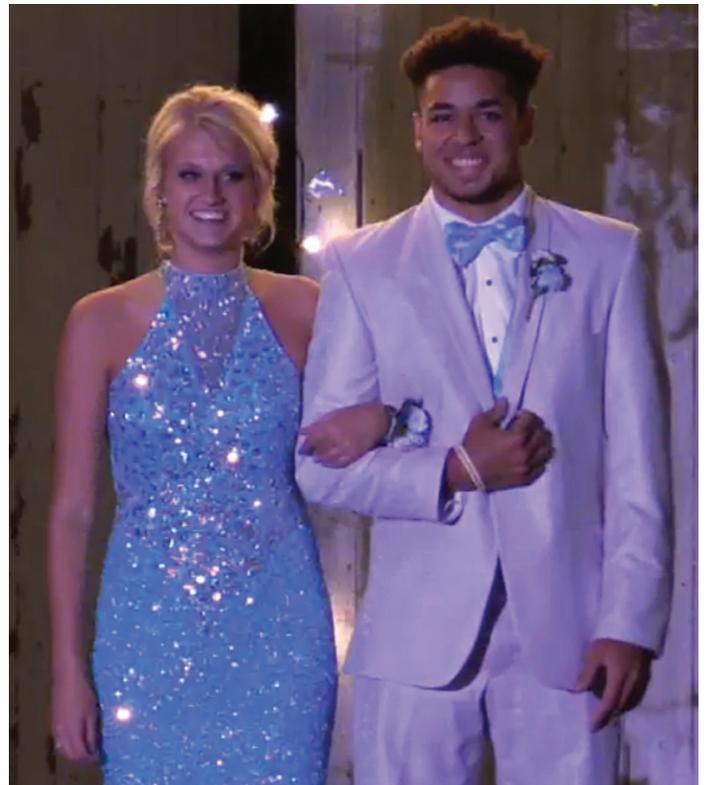
Emma Watje escorted by Trey Wright.



Corbie McKay escorted by Austin Anonidas.



Seric Shabazz escorting Cassidi Schimmel.



Harleigh Stange escorted by Bennett Shabazz.

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Today in Weather History

April 2, 1998: The James River began to flood in early April from Columbia to Stratford. The James rose to around 1.5 feet above flood stage at Columbia and Stratford through April into May. The James River mainly flooded farmland, pastureland, and a few roads in the vicinity of the channel.

April 2, 2010: In South Dakota, a band of heavy snow set up across Corson and Dewey counties during the early morning hours of April 2nd. Along with heavy wet snow, northwest winds gusting up to 40 mph developed. By the time the snow ended in the late morning hours, 6 to 8 inches of snow had fallen. The heavy snow, combined with the strong winds, downed many power poles across the region along with making travel treacherous. Some snowfall amounts included; 4 inches at Eagle Butte; 6 inches at Timber Lake, McLaughlin, and 14 miles north of Isabel; 7 inches at Isabel and 6 miles southeast of McIntosh; 8 inches southwest of Keldron. More than 400 poles were lost to the heavy snow leaving approximately 800 people without power. Eighty linemen worked through the Easter weekend in the snow and mud. McLaughlin and Keldron were the hardest hit. Several hundred people were still without power on April 5th.

1936: An estimated F4 tornado cut a 15-mile path through Crisp County, GA. The hardest hit area was the town of Cordele, where 276 homes were destroyed in a five-block swath through the town. The storm was on a course that would have missed the center of town, but it made a left turn towards the end of its path. 23 people were killed and 500 injured. Total damage was \$3 million dollars.

1957: An F3 tornado tore through Dallas, TX. 10 people were killed and 216 were injured. Total damage was \$1.5 million dollars. This tornado was among the most photographed and studied in history.

1975 - The northeastern U.S. was in the grips of a severe storm which produced hurricane force winds along the coast, and two to three feet of snow in Maine and New Hampshire. Winds atop Mount Washington NH gusted to 140 mph. (David Ludlum)

1975 - The biggest snowstorm of record for so late in the season paralyzed Chicago, IL. Up to 20 inches of snow fell in extreme northeastern Illinois, and 10.9 inches of snow closed Chicago's O'Hare Airport. (The Weather Channel)

1982: Severe thunderstorms spawned fifty-six tornadoes in the central U.S., including seventeen in the Red River Region of Texas and Oklahoma. The tornadoes claimed thirty lives and injured 383 other persons. A violent tornado near Messer, Oklahoma left only the carpet tack strips on the slab of a house it destroyed, and carried a motel sign thirty miles.

1987 - Eleven cities in Florida reported record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee with a reading of 31 degrees. The low of 48 degrees at Key West smashed their previous record for the date by 13 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

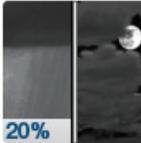
1988 - Thunderstorms produced up to nine inches of rain around New Orleans LA causing 18 million dollars damage. A tornado caused three million dollars damage at Slidell LA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Strong and gusty winds prevailed from California to Colorado and Wyoming. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Lancaster CA, and reached 85 mph at Berthoud Pass CO. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in the Colorado Rockies. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

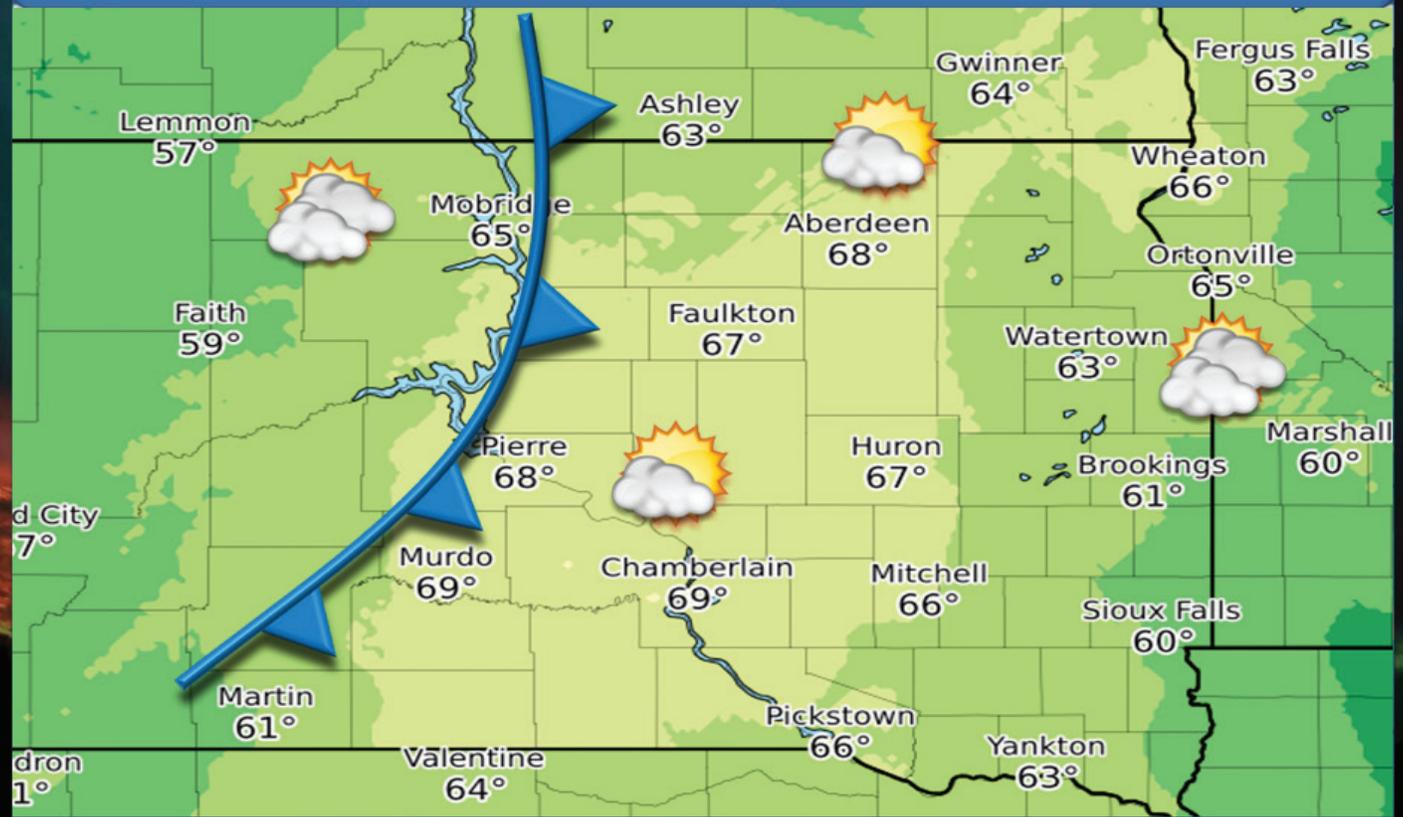
1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in North Carolina and Virginia during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail, and spawned a tornado near Chester VA which caused half a million dollars damage. A storm system produced snow and gale force winds across northern Michigan, with 8.3 inches of snow reported at Marquette. Temperatures in the north central U.S. soared from morning lows in the 20s and 30s to afternoon highs in the 60s and 70s. Eight cities reported record highs for the date, including Havre MT with a reading of 77 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Today	Tonight	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
						
Mostly Sunny	20% Slight Chance Showers then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	20% Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Rain	20% 20% Slight Chance Rain then Slight Chance Rain/Snow	10% 20% Slight Chance Snow then Slight Chance Rain
High: 68 °F	Low: 36 °F	High: 59 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 58 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 52 °F

Very Mild Temperatures Today!



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 4/2/2017 5:53 AM Central

Published on: 04/02/2017 at 5:56AM

A warm air mass will stream northward across the region today ahead of an approaching cold front. Highs will rise into the mid to upper 60s for most areas. The cold front will make its way into central South Dakota this afternoon, so look for increasing clouds and winds switching to the northwest. Slightly cooler temperatures will be felt today behind this front over the western Dakotas.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 65.0 F at 5:01 PM

Low Outside Temp: 33.4 F at 7:56 AM

High Gust: 16.0 Mph at 6:18 PM

Snow: Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 84° in 1921

Record Low: 3° in 1975

Average High: 49°F

Average Low: 26°F

Average Precip in April.: 0.09

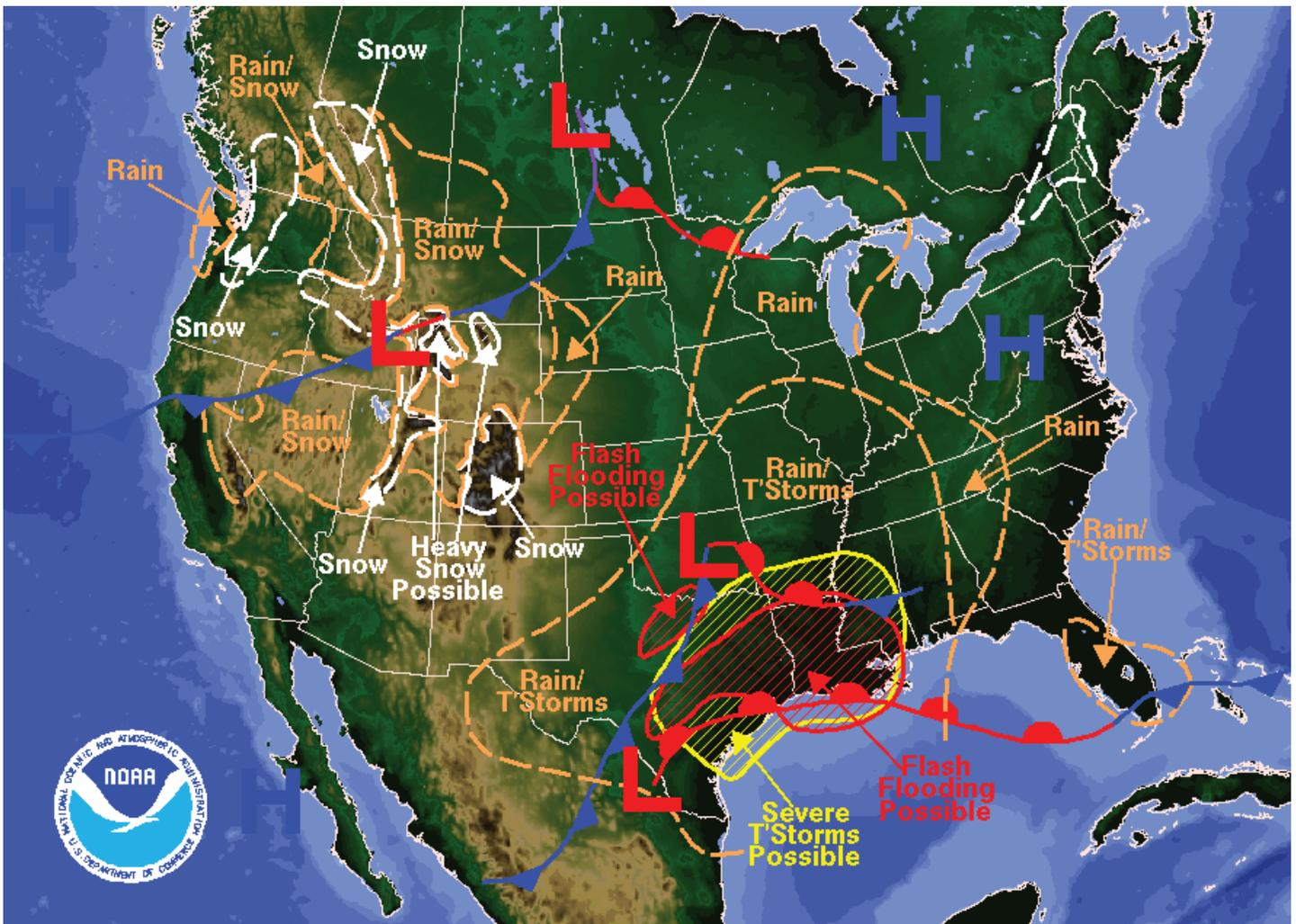
Precip to date in April.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 2.27

Precip Year to Date: 0.59

Sunset Tonight: 8:03 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:09 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Sun, Apr 02, 2017, issued 4:57 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Santorelli based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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BEST ABILITY IS DEPENDABILITY

"Old Faithful" is a faithful geyser. It is not the biggest geyser or the highest spouting geyser. But it is the most popular geyser. Why? Because it is dependable.

"Old Faithful" received its name in 1870 by a group of explorers who stood in awe as it spewed its water nearly 200 feet into the air. But they were more amazed when they recognized that it erupted every ninety-one minutes. For that reason it became recognized as the most predictable geographical feature on earth by geologists and other scientists.

Being dependable is essential – especially for the Christian. The Psalmist wrote, "Help, O Lord, for the godly are fast disappearing! The faithful have vanished from the earth!"

The Christian can always count on God's faithfulness. His Word reveals that time and time again: If He said it, He did it. And because of that fact we can have faith in Him and can always count on Him.

But the question He asks of us is this: Can I always count on you? Will you be faithful to Me in your daily walk? Can I depend on you to honor Me in all things? As the Psalmist asked, "Because the godly are fast disappearing...and the faithful have vanished?"

Can He depend on us? What a sad statement! God is not seeking famous people but faithful people. More than any ability He has given us, He wants our dependability and faithfulness.

Prayer: We know, Father, that if You are first in our lives You will find us faithful to You, Your Word and Your ways. May You find us dependable at all times. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 12:1 Help, LORD, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race.

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News from the  Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
02-08-16-17-27
(two, eight, sixteen, seventeen, twenty-seven)
Estimated jackpot: \$61,000

Hot Lotto
01-07-11-36-45, Hot Ball: 4
(one, seven, eleven, thirty-six, forty-five; Hot Ball: four)
Estimated jackpot: \$5.2 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$15 million

Powerball
09-32-36-44-65, Powerball: 1, Power Play: 3
(nine, thirty-two, thirty-six, forty-four, sixty-five; Powerball: one; Power Play: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$60 million

Authorities say 5 children killed in Spearfish house fire

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say five children died in a house fire in Spearfish. The fire was reported at 4:23 a.m. Saturday at a two-story residence at the intersection of Ames and Oliver streets in Spearfish, a town of about 11,000 people in western South Dakota. Spearfish police and fire officials say the victims were believed to be between the ages of 6 and 9 years old. Spearfish Fire Chief Mark Sachara says some adults tried to rescue the children and were taken to Spearfish Regional Hospital for treatment of smoke inhalation. Their conditions were not known. Officials say the house was engulfed in flames when firefighters arrived. A cause has not been determined.

South Dakota church destroyed by tornado to reopen soon

DELMONT, S.D. (AP) — A church in Delmont that was destroyed by a 2015 tornado is almost ready to reopen. The Zion Lutheran Church is tentatively scheduled to open Memorial Day weekend. A grand opening may get pushed to June in case remaining work still needs to be completed, the Daily Republic reported (<http://bit.ly/2ofZxyl>). Pastor Brian Bucklew said that even with the new, smaller design, the church still needs to install the pews, altar, windows, insulation, electricity and plumbing. "You see it now, and it looks like there's a long way to go, but there's really not," he said. "But what we have left will go pretty fast."

The roughly 10,000-square-foot space will have the capacity to hold about 200 people, less than the

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former church that could hold 350. Bucklew said the smaller structure is a conscious move to accommodate for a small congregation and spiraling population in Delmont.

"You look at what we have left of the town and how many people will still be coming here when it's all said and done and sometimes you wonder," church president Terry Klumb said. "There are people that are gone, but there are still people that are here. You can't just shut down because a few decided to go away."

Bucklew said the project has fallen within budget so far, but declined to disclose the cost.

Even with differences from the old church, the new one will continue to hold onto the German gothic design, using the original altar, remnants of some original stained-glass windows and the old cornerstone with the church's name in German.

"It's been quite a ride," Klumb said. "We're ready to be home."

Information from: The Daily Republic, <http://www.mitchellrepublic.com>

Grocery stores to reopen in 3 small South Dakota towns

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — Three abruptly-closed grocery stores are returning to three small South Dakota communities.

Wagner grocer RF Buche said that the stores in Scotland, Tripp and Tyndall are expected to reopen by mid- to late April, the Yankton Press & Dakotan reported (<http://bit.ly/2oc7NQ2>).

"All three stores will open sometime after Easter," Buche said. "The stores will have all of the departments that they had in the past. They'll have the groceries, frozen foods, dairy, meat products and produce. It'll even have some dollar items."

The stores have been closed for over a week, and shoppers have had to get groceries in neighboring towns, which are at least 10 miles away.

Buche said the reopened stores will feature a new look and format called "Cash Smart," where store products will be marked at cost, and then 10 percent of that price is calculated at the register.

"There's nothing really like it in the Midwest. It's kind of like an associate wholesaler," he said. "You have the cost plus the additional 10 percent."

Buche is hoping the format change will help keep down expenses.

"It's about efficiency and selling groceries at the right prices," he said. "This will help to make it possible to have a grocery store in each of these towns."

Mark and Pam Mora had leased all three stores from Buche since May, but closed them for good after March 18. They did not provide the newspaper a comment.

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

Pig that fell from truck in South Dakota on way to new home

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Wally the pig is headed to hog heaven.

The 250-pound pig was rescued last week after he fell off a truck on Interstate 90 in South Dakota, just a few miles from a hog processing facility. He has been staying at the Sioux Falls Humane Society.

Wally has been adopted by the SoulSpace Farm Sanctuary in New Richmond, Wisconsin. The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reports (<http://argusne.ws/2nu9m7F>) that he left for his new home on Friday.

Wally was not eager to get back on the road. His movers tried using a trail of Milk-Bones to get him into the trailer, to no avail. It eventually took a pole and a harness to get him inside.

Wally will join 32 other animals at the Wisconsin farm.

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

Oxford-Cambridge boat race to go on after WWII bomb removed

LONDON (AP) — British police say the hotly contested annual Oxford-Cambridge boat race will proceed as planned after they removed an unexploded World War II-era bomb near the start of the race on the River Thames.

The bomb was discovered by a member of the public near Putney Bridge in southwest London, just meters (yards) from the starting line of the famous race that pits rowers from Cambridge University against those from Oxford University.

Police say the ordnance was found submerged on the Chelsea shoreline Saturday. The marine policing unit removed it.

Chief Inspector Tracy Stephenson says "I'm very happy to update that the ordnance has now been safely removed and the race will be going ahead as planned."

Hall of Fame coach vs future Hall of Famer for NCAA title

By RALPH D. RUSSO, AP College Sports Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — Roy Williams has been here before. Just last year, in fact. And five times altogether, playing for the NCAA championship. Twice he got to celebrate winning the final game of the season with the Tar Heels, pushing their total to five tournament titles.

For Mark Few and Gonzaga, this is all new. Just getting to the Final Four was a first, and now they are one victory from lifting the trophy.

If it came down to history, tradition and experience, North Carolina would run away with Monday's NCAA championship game. If only it were that easy for the Tar Heels.

"You know, on game night, kids got to play. That's the bottom line," Williams said Saturday night after the Tar Heels beat Oregon 77-76. "I've never won a game from the bench. I may have lost some, but I know I've never won one."

The 66-year-old Williams called Few one of his best friends in coaching and said he was stressed out hoping that his poker buddy would finally break through and reach the Final Four this year.

The last time they played each other in the NCAA Tournament was 2009, when the Tar Heels eliminated the Bulldogs in the Sweet 16. Since the Zags graduated from upstart to national power, there have been lots of early exits in the tournament.

Few has been the coach of Gonzaga for 18 seasons and never once have the Zags missed the NCAA Tournament. He is 503-112 at Gonzaga, but there were always questions about whether the program was good enough to really be considered among the best in the country.

Those should be gone now and if there are any lingering doubters, the Bulldogs can take care of that on Monday by beating one of the bluest of college basketball's blue bloods. This is North Carolina's record 20th Final Four.

"I know Gonzaga, they don't have the history that we do. But they've only lost one game this year. They're a pretty good team," North Carolina guard Joel Berry II said. "While the history matters to show how great your program is, at the same time it doesn't because you got to play that game on Monday."

For years Williams was the coach who couldn't win the big one. During his time at Kansas, Williams made it to the Final Four four times but never won one. He left for North Carolina, his alma mater where he played and worked as an assistant for Dean Smith.

Williams shook that label in his second season at North Carolina, winning it all in 2004-05 and then came back with another title in 2008-09. A gut-wrenching loss to Villanova in a championship game classic last year denied Williams a third career title. Now he will get another chance to pass his mentor, Smith (who won two) and become just the sixth coach with at least three NCAA championships on his resume.

"I'm coaching a new group of kids," Williams said. "And making it back to the national championship

game is amazing. Oh, you did that last year? Well, that still makes it even more amazing kind of thing.”

Few joked earlier in the tournament about not worrying about having a monkey on his back. He has, like Williams, always gone out of his way to make it about his players — and this season he has some really great players such as Nigel Williams-Goss and Przemek Karnowski.

“I’ve had some really, really tough teams. I’ve had some really close teams. I’ve had some teams that have been crazy efficient on the offensive end and ones that have been pretty darned good on the defensive end that probably didn’t get credit for it,” Few said. “These guys are all of that. All of it.”

The matchup is set: the Hall of Fame coach with a chance to move into company that includes the likes of Mike Krzyzewski, Bob Knight and John Wooden against the future Hall of Famer looking to add the only thing missing on his resume.

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

As Colombia death toll mounts, desperate quest for survivors

By **CHRISTINE ARMARIO, Associated Press**

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Rescuers prying through piles of rocks and wooden planks left by floodwaters from three rivers that surged through a Colombian city vowed to resume their search at first light Sunday as the death toll from one of the worst disasters in the country’s recent history neared 200.

With no electricity to light Mocoa, authorities were forced to suspend the search Saturday night almost a day after heavy rains caused the rivers to overflow and send a wall of water through the city near the Ecuador border around midnight, sweeping away homes, cars and trees while residents slept in their beds.

President Juan Manuel Santos said 193 people had been killed and authorities said as many as 220 were feared missing. The bodies were being placed in a temporary morgue where three teams of medical examiners were working around the clock to swiftly identify the remains.

“They are going to work 24 hours a day,” said Carlos Valdes, director of the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science, the agency leading the medical team working to identify the deceased.

Authorities and residents in the city tucked between mountains along Colombia’s southern border spent Saturday tending to victims, trying to find homes on streets reduced to masses of rubble and engaged in a desperate search to locate loved one who disappeared in the dark of night. Authorities expect the death toll to rise.

Eduardo Vargas, 29, was asleep with his wife and 7-month-old baby when he was awoken by the sound of neighbors banging on his door. He quickly grabbed his family and fled up a small mountain amid the cries of people in panic.

“There was no time for anything,” he said.

Vargas and his family huddled with about two dozen other residents as rocks, trees and wooden planks ripped through their neighborhood below. They waited there until daylight, when members of the military helped them down.

When he reached the site of his home Saturday, nothing his family left behind remained.

“Thank God we have our lives,” he said.

Santos traveled to Mocoa and declared the city a disaster zone Saturday. The Air Force transported 19 patients to a city further north and said 20 more would be evacuated soon. Medicine and surgical supplies were being sent to the city as the area’s regional hospital struggled to cope with the magnitude of the crisis.

Herman Granados, an anesthesiologist, said he worked throughout the night on victims and that the hospital doesn’t have a blood bank large enough to deal with the number of patients and was quickly running out of its supply.

Some of the hospital workers came to help even though their own relatives remained missing.

“Under the mud,” Granados said, “I am sure there are many more.”

Santos blamed climate change for triggering the avalanche, saying that the accumulated rainfall in one night was almost half the amount Mocoa normally receives in the entire month of March. With the rainy

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season in much of Colombia just beginning, he said local and national authorities need to redouble their efforts to prevent a similar tragedy.

The crisis is likely to be remembered as one of the worst natural disasters in recent Colombian history, though the Andean nation has experienced even more destructive environmental catastrophes. Nearly 25,000 people were killed in 1985 after the Nevado del Ruiz volcano erupted and triggered a deluge of mud and debris that buried the town of Armero.

As rescuers shifted through debris, many residents in Mocoa were conducting their own searches for lost loved ones.

Oscar Londono tried in vain throughout the night to reach his wife's parents, whose home is right along one of the flooded rivers. He decided it was too dangerous to try to reach them in the dark. So he called over and over by phone but got no answer.

Once the sun began to rise he started walking toward their house but found all the streets he usually takes missing. As he tried to orient himself he came across the body of a young woman dressed in a mini-skirt and black blouse.

He checked her pulse but could not find one.

"There were bodies all over," he said.

When he finally reached the neighborhood where his in-laws live he found "just mud and rocks." Rescue workers with the military oriented him toward the mountain, where he found his relatives camped with other survivors.

"To know they were alive," he said, "it was a reunion of tears."

Associated Press writers Cesar Garcia and Alba Tobella in Bogota, Colombia, contributed to this report.

Chicago police arrest 14-year-old in sex assault on Facebook

CHICAGO (AP) — A 14-year-old boy has been arrested in the sexual assault of a 15-year-old Chicago girl that was streamed live on Facebook and watched by about 40 people who didn't report it to authorities, police said late Saturday.

Chicago police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said more arrests are expected as the investigation continues. Police have said the attack involved five or six males, and Guglielmi said the boy "was one of the offenders in the video."

Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson is slated to provide more details at a news conference Sunday morning.

Guglielmi said the juvenile suspect faces felony charges of aggravated criminal sexual assault, manufacturing of child pornography and dissemination of child pornography.

The spokesman has said police were not aware of the mid-March attack until the girl's mother approached Johnson as he was leaving a police station on the city's West Side and showed him the video. Johnson was "visibly upset" after he watched, both by the video's content and the fact that there were "40 or so live viewers and no one thought to call authorities," Guglielmi said.

The girl's mother told The Associated Press last month that her daughter received online threats following the attack and that neighborhood kids were ringing her doorbell looking for the girl. The Chicago Sun-Times later reported that the girl's family had been relocated.

The video marks the second time in recent months that Chicago police have investigated an apparent attack that was broadcast live on Facebook. In January, four people were arrested after video showed them allegedly taunting and beating a mentally disabled man.

Hacked New York Post app sends out 'Heil President' alert

NEW YORK (AP) — The New York Post app has been hacked on April Fools' Day, sending out push alert notifications that included "Heil President Donald Trump."

The Post apologized Saturday night, shortly after its app sent out a series of alerts. The Post said in a follow-up alert: "Our push alert notification system was compromised this evening. We are working to resolve the issue. Please accept our apologies."

The messages appeared directed at Trump. One message said, "Open your heart to those you do not understand and listen to all those you fear and look down upon."

The alerts even included lyrics from Nirvana's song "Come As You Are": "Take your time, hurry up, the choice is yours, but dont be late..."

The Post is owned by Trump-friendly media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

Senate heads for Supreme Court showdown

By ERICA WERNER and MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate is headed for a tense showdown over President Donald Trump's Supreme Court nominee that could have far-reaching consequences for Congress, the high court and the nation.

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and his Republicans are determined to confirm Judge Neil Gorsuch within the week. But to do so, they will likely have to override Democratic objections and unilaterally change Senate rules so that Gorsuch can be confirmed with a simple majority in the 100-seat chamber, instead of the 60-voter threshold.

Though it may seem arcane, the approach is known on Capitol Hill as the "nuclear option," because it strikes at the heart of the Senate's traditions of bipartisanship and collegiality.

It would allow all future Supreme Court nominees to be confirmed without regard to the objections of the minority party. And senators of both parties say that proceeding with the rules change could ultimately lead to complete elimination of the minority party's ability to block legislation via filibuster, one of the few remaining mechanisms that force bipartisan cooperation in Congress.

"Once you go down this path it's awful easy just to keep going, and that is not a good thing," said Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., a senior lawmaker.

Nevertheless, Republican senators are fully prepared to take the step, blaming Democrats for forcing them into it by preparing to filibuster a well-qualified nominee.

And Democrats are just as ready to push the GOP to pull the trigger, even as they argue that McConnell and Republicans will have only themselves to blame.

"He can prove that he cares about the Senate by not changing the rules," Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York told The Associated Press, referring to McConnell.

As of now, Gorsuch claims support from 54 senators — the 52 Republicans, along with two moderate Democrats who are up for re-election in states Trump won, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota. One by one, most of the other Democrats have lined up against Gorsuch, citing his rulings in favor of corporations or his vague answers during his confirmation hearings. Though Democrats remain a handful shy of the 41 votes that would be required to mount a filibuster and trigger a rules change, it is the widely expected outcome.

"I remain very worried about our polarized politics and what the future will bring, since I'm certain we will have a Senate rule change that will usher in more extreme judges in the future," Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri said Friday as she became the latest Democrat to announce plans to join the filibuster against Gorsuch.

Gorsuch, 49, has served more than a decade as a federal appeals court judge based in Denver. He is mild-mannered but deeply conservative, in the mold of the justice he would replace, Antonin Scalia, who died in February 2016.

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McCaskill and other Democrats have pointed out that while Gorsuch's confirmation won't change the ideological balance of a court that will be likely to split 5-4 on important cases, that could be what happens next as liberal justices age along with Justice Anthony Kennedy, 80, who often acts as a swing vote.

Republicans argue that the filibuster has almost never been used against a Supreme Court nominee and they are right; even Clarence Thomas got onto the court without a filibuster, despite highly contentious confirmation hearings over sexual harassment claims from Anita Hill.

The only Supreme Court nominee to have been blocked by a filibuster was Abe Fortas, President Lyndon Johnson's nominee for chief justice in 1968. After a procedural vote failed, Johnson withdrew Fortas' nomination. Fortas was already a sitting justice on the Court.

But the Supreme Court blowup has been a long-time coming, and both parties share the blame. Republicans were prepared to invoke the "nuclear option" on lower court nominees in 2005, but a bipartisan group of 14 senators made a deal that stopped it. Then Democrats took the step in 2013 when they grew frustrated over lower court nominees getting blocked, but left the Supreme Court subject to a 60-vote threshold.

Now, with Trump in the White House and politics ever more polarized, there appears to be no room for compromise.

Democrats are still fuming over the treatment of former President Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Merrick Garland, who never even got a hearing from Republicans last year after Scalia died. And for Republicans, Gorsuch's nomination is the one positive note so far in the trouble-plagued Trump administration, and they are determined to get a win.

Though some GOP senators have privately counseled caution, McConnell has no plans to wait and has declared definitively that Gorsuch will be confirmed on Friday. If Gorsuch joins the court shortly thereafter, he would be in time to hear the last set of cases in the court's current term, including one about church-state separation.

The stage will be set for the next Supreme Court nominee to be confirmed with a simple majority, potentially tilting the court ideologically for decades to come. And an uncertain future will await the filibuster itself, and the Senate as a deliberative, bipartisan institution.

"It just continues on a downward spiral; it's us that's to blame, it's the base, it's responding to the base on each side," said Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn. "It's both sides that have taken us to this place."

With Trump approval, Pentagon expands warfighting authority

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Week by week, country by country, the Pentagon is quietly seizing more control over warfighting decisions, sending hundreds more troops to war with little public debate and seeking greater authority to battle extremists across the Middle East and Africa.

This week it was Somalia, where President Donald Trump gave the U.S. military more authority to conduct offensive airstrikes on al-Qaida-linked militants. Next week it could be Yemen, where military leaders want to provide more help for the United Arab Emirates' battle against Iranian-backed rebels. Key decisions on Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan are looming, from ending troop number limits to loosening rules that guide commanders in the field.

The changes in Trump's first two months in office underscore his willingness to let the Pentagon manage its own day-to-day combat. Under the Obama administration, military leaders chafed about micro-management that included commanders needing approval for routine tactical decisions about targets and personnel moves.

But delegating more authority to the Pentagon — and combat decisions to lower level officers — carries its own military and political risks. Casualties, of civilians and American service members, may be the biggest.

The deepening involvement in counterinsurgency battles, from the street-by-street battles being fought in Iraq right now to clandestine raids in Yemen and elsewhere, increases the chances of U.S. troops dy-

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ing. Such tragedies could raise the ire of the American public and create political trouble with Congress at a time when the Trump administration is trying to finish off the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria and broaden efforts against similarly inspired groups.

Similarly, allowing lower level commanders to make more timely airstrike decisions in densely populated areas like the streets of Mosul, Iraq, can result in more civilian deaths. The U.S. military already is investigating several bombings in Mosul in mid-March that witnesses say killed at least 100 people. And it is considering new tactics and precautions amid evidence suggesting extremists are smuggling civilians into buildings and then baiting the U.S.-led coalition into attacking.

Alice Hunt Friend, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, cited yet another concern: Military operations becoming "divorced from overall foreign policy" could make both civilian leaders and the military vulnerable to runaway events.

"Political leaders can lose control of military campaigns," she warned.

But top military leaders say they need to be able to act quicker against U.S. enemies. And they've been staunchly supported by Trump, who has promised to pursue Islamic extremists more aggressively and echoed the view of Pentagon leaders that the Obama administration's tight control over military operations limited effectiveness.

Explaining his request for more leeway in Somalia against al-Shabab militants, Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, head of U.S. Africa Command, told Congress this month that more flexibility and "timeliness" in decision-making process was necessary.

Approved by Trump on Wednesday, it was hardly the first military expansion.

The Defense Department has quietly doubled the number of U.S. forces in Syria. It has moved military advisers closer to front lines in Iraq. It has publicly made the case for more troops in Afghanistan.

The White House is tentatively scheduled this coming week to discuss providing intelligence, refueling and other assistance to U.A.E. as it fights Houthi rebels in Yemen, according to officials who weren't authorized to speak about a confidential meetings and demanded anonymity.

Some changes are happening with little fanfare. While there is limited American appetite for large-scale deployments in Iraq and Syria, additions are coming incrementally, in the hundreds of forces, not the thousands.

The result may be confusing for the public. Trump hasn't eliminated Obama's troop number limits. Thus, the caps of 503 for Syria and 5,262 for Iraq are still in effect.

But the military is ignoring them with White House approval and using an already-existing loophole to categorize deployments as temporary. For example, several hundred Marines and soldiers were recently sent to Syria to assist U.S.-backed Syria forces, including in the fight to retake IS' self-declared capital of Raqqa. All were deemed temporary so not counted against the cap.

On Friday, the Pentagon said that officially there are 5,262 U.S. troops in Iraq even as officials privately acknowledge at least a couple thousand more there.

It's still early in the Trump administration. And as the White House juggles complex details of several military campaigns, it is dealing with tax reform, its health care repeal failure, partisan infighting and expanding investigations into possible Russian ties to his presidential campaign. Observers say the expanding military power may reflect the administration's limited "bandwidth" at the moment.

But the military wants some decisions quickly.

Iraqi forces are trying to complete the recapture of Mosul, IS' stronghold, and more American advisers closer to the battle can help. U.S.-backed fighters are closing in on Raqqa and the Pentagon is pushing to accelerate the effort. Conducting both operations at the same time, the Pentagon argues, will put a lot of pressure on IS.

Associated Press writer Josh Lederman contributed to this report.

Venezuela walks back move to strip congress' power

By HANNAH DREIER and FABIOLA SANCHEZ, Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's president and Supreme Court backed down Saturday from an unprecedented move to strip congress of its legislative powers that had sparked widespread charges that the South American country was no longer a democracy.

President Nicolas Maduro asked the Supreme Court in a late-night speech to review a ruling nullifying the branch of power that set off a storm of criticism from the opposition and foreign governments. The court on Saturday reinstated congress' authority.

It was a rare instance of the embattled socialist president backing away from a move to increase his power. Opposition leaders dismissed the reversal as too little too late. They said the clarification issued by the judges only proved yet again that Maduro controls the courts and there is no longer a real separation of powers in Venezuela.

"The dire situation we're living through in Venezuela remains the same. There is nothing to "clarify" when it comes to respecting the Constitution," said moderate leader and former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles.

At the same time, critics celebrated the reversal as proof that cracks are beginning to show in Maduro's control of a country spiraling into chaos, with his approval ratings dipping below 20 percent amid the worsening economic and humanitarian crisis.

Opposition leaders recast a planned Saturday protest as an open air meeting. Hundreds of supporters joined congress members in a wealthy Caracas neighborhood to celebrate the rare victory.

Later, soldiers fired tear gas on activists who attempted to march on government offices downtown and blocked their path with barricades and armored cars. Some of protesters jumped atop the military vehicles and made triumphant gestures.

"It's not clear exactly how wounded the government is. This is the first time since the opposition won the National Assembly in 2015 that they have managed to get the president to reverse a decision. So this is huge," said Javier Corrales, who teaches Latin American politics at Amherst College in Massachusetts.

Saturday's revision undoes most of the original court decision, but will still allow Maduro to enter into joint oil ventures without congressional approval. Supreme Court president Maikel Moreno met with diplomats in the morning and warned that the court would not "remain passive" in the face of attacks on the country's right to self-rule.

Maduro issued his instructions to the court after an emergency night meeting of the National Security Council Friday night that was boycotted by congress leaders. The three-hour meeting capped an extraordinary day in which Venezuela's chief prosecutor and long-time loyalist of the socialist revolution launched by the late President Hugo Chavez broke with the administration and denounced the court ruling. Luisa Ortega said it was her "unavoidable historical duty" as the nation's top judicial authority to decry what she called a "rupture" of the constitutional order.

That statement, and the internal division that it exposed for the first time, may have been the most damaging moment of the whole episode.

"It was really perhaps the first sign of public dissent within the ranks. And it was huge that Maduro did not trash her. Maduro must have realized that Ortega was not acting alone," Corrales said.

Images posted on Communications Minister Ernesto Villegas' Twitter account showed Ortega heading to the government palace on Saturday to meet with Maduro.

Small protests popped up all around the capital beginning at dawn Friday. Troops from the National Guard fired buckshot and swung batons at students protesting in front of the Supreme Court, and several journalists had their cameras seized.

As the country's currency hemorrhaged value and some analysts began to project the beginning of the end of 18 years of socialist rule in Venezuela, Maduro invited congress president Julio Borges to speak with him about the situation. But Borges refused, breaking a years-long streak in which the opposition ramps up pressure on the administration only to help diffuse it at the last minute by coming to the bargaining

table, usually fruitlessly.

"In Venezuela the only dialogue possible is the vote," Borges said Friday night.

The Supreme Court ruled late Wednesday that until lawmakers abided by previous rulings that nullified all legislation passed by congress, the high court could assume the constitutionally assigned powers of the National Assembly, which has been controlled by the opposition since it won a landslide victory in elections in late 2015.

The ruling had brought down two days of condemnation by governments across Latin America, along with the United States and the United Nations. Colombia, Chile and Peru withdrew their ambassadors over the ruling.

The South American trade bloc Mercosur, which suspended Venezuela in December, called an emergency meeting. And the Organization of American States announced that it would hold an emergency meeting at its Washington headquarters on Monday to discuss what Secretary General Luis Almagro called a "self-inflicted coup."

Maduro was conspicuously silent during much of the two days of turmoil. Then on Saturday, dressed in black and waving copy of Venezuelan constitution, likened the international condemnation to a "political lynching."

He concluded his remarks with a call for more dialogue.

"I'm ready with whoever is willing," he said.

Hannah Dreier is on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/hannahdreier> . Her work can be found at <https://www.ap.org/explore/venezuela-undone> .

Document: Crack-smoking man charged in Atlanta overpass fire

By KATE BRUMBACK and BILL BARROW, Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The man accused of starting the raging fire that destroyed part of Interstate 85 north of downtown Atlanta was talking about smoking crack just before the blaze began, according to his arrest affidavit.

Basil Eleby told city and federal investigators that he had discussed smoking crack cocaine with two companions under the highway overpass before deciding to do the drug alone, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported Saturday.

Jail records show Eleby has been arrested 19 times since 1995, mostly on drug charges. Accused of starting the fire below the elevated highway, Eleby now faces charges of first-degree arson and first-degree property damage.

Sophia Brauer and Barry Thomas were arrested along with Eleby on Friday, both charged with criminal trespass in the area used to store state-owned construction materials and equipment.

"We believe they were together when the fire was set and Eleby is the one who set the fire," Deputy Insurance Commissioner Jay Florence said.

Flames and smoke billowed high above Atlanta's skyline Thursday. The fire burned so hot that the concrete and steel overpass disintegrated, crippling traffic in a city known for dreadful rush-hour congestion.

Thomas told investigators a different story, the paper reported. "Mr. Thomas watched Basil Eleby place a chair on top of a shopping cart, reach under the shopping cart and ignite it," the affidavit says.

Both Eleby and Thomas said they fled the scene before the fire became a roaring blaze that disintegrated the concrete and steel overpass.

Police and firefighters kept motorists out of harm's way and retreated when they saw telltale signs of an imminent collapse.

"They heard the cracking of the concrete," Atlanta Fire Chief Joel Baker said. "They could see concrete was flying all over the place toward firefighters."

Experts in structural engineering said fires on highways and bridges rarely burn long enough or hot enough to cause a complete collapse — but it has happened. Intense heat can compromise even steel-

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reinforced concrete, said Lauren Stewart, director of the Structural Engineering and Materials Laboratory at Georgia Tech in Atlanta.

"With fires, especially fires that burn for long periods and with high heat, you can see structures, anything from buildings to bridges, can have their material properties degrade," Stewart said.

Atlantans struggling to find different routes or use mass transit had better get used to longer commutes: Repairs will take "at least several months," said Russell McMurry, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation.

McMurry announced Friday that 350 feet of highway will need to be replaced in both directions on I-85, which carries about 400,000 cars a day through Atlanta. Demolition crews were working around the clock to pound through tons of melted rock and twisted metal.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao released \$10 million for initial repair work, and the Federal Highway Administration promised more in emergency funds.

Eleby's bond was set at \$200,000 pending his next court appearance on April 14.

Judge James Altmon said he had considered setting a higher bond to match the damage inflicted, "but in this case, that would amount to hundreds of millions of dollars."

AP writers Alex Sanz in Atlanta; Russ Bynum in Savannah, Georgia; and Kevin McGill and Rebecca Santana in New Orleans contributed to this report.

Interior minister, police chief fired after Paraguay clashes

By PEDRO SERVIN, Associated Press

ASUNCION, Paraguay (AP) — President Horacio Cartes fired Paraguay's interior minister and top police official on Saturday following the killing of a young opposition party leader and violent overnight clashes sparked by a secret Senate vote for a constitutional amendment to allow presidential re-election.

Dozens of people, including a police officer, were arrested Friday evening in demonstrations that saw protesters break through police lines and enter the first floor of Paraguay's legislature, setting fire to papers and furniture. Police used water cannon and fired rubber bullets to drive protesters away from the building while firefighters extinguished blazes inside.

In the early hours Saturday, 25-year-old Rodrigo Quintana was shot and killed at the headquarters of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party, a different location than the congress building where most of the protests took place. Anti-riot police with rifles and their heads and faces covered by helmets had stormed the opposition headquarters amid the anti-government protests.

Security camera footage showed people in a corridor running desperately away from police and Quintana falling to the ground, apparently hit from behind. Seconds later, a policeman carrying a gun is seen stepping on Quintana, who is face-down to the ground.

Before his dismissal, police commander Crispulo Sotelo identified Gustavo Florentin as the police agent responsible for Quintana's death and said he had been arrested. Later Saturday, Cartes announced that he had accepted the resignations of Sotelo and Interior Minister Miguel Tadeo Rojas.

"I submit to a self-criticism because we politicians have not been able to settle our differences with dialogue and peace," Cartes said in a message posted on his Facebook account hours after the dismissal of Rojas and Sotelo. "It hurts me that civilians and police officers were injured."

The protests broke out after a majority of senators approved the amendment allowing for presidential re-election, a move opponents said was illegal because the vote was taken without all members of the senate present. Presidents are limited to a single 5-year term and the proposal would allow Cartes and Paraguay's previous presidents to run for the top job again in the 2018 election — a hot button issue in a country haunted by the 35-year rule of Gen. Alfredo Stroessner.

"My colleagues have carried out a coup because of the irregular and illegal manner in which they modified no less than the Constitution," Sen. Luis Alberto Wagner of the opposition Authentic Radical Liberal

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Party said after the Friday evening vote.

The U.S. Embassy in Paraguay released a statement saying any change to the constitution should be done "in a transparent and open" fashion, respecting the democratic process and institutions. It called on Paraguay's political actors to work together to overcome their differences.

The process to pass the amendment began on Tuesday when 25 senators changed the internal procedures to speed up the vote against the wishes of Senate President Roberto Acevedo and other members of the chamber.

Acevedo, of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party, said that process violated Senate rules and he filed an appeal to the Supreme Court seeking to have the decision overturned.

Political analyst Ignacio Martinez said the extreme reaction to the move likely lies in fears of another long-running government like that of Stroessner, who ruled Paraguay from 1954-1989 after a military coup.

The measure for a constitutional amendment allowing for presidential re-election was backed by 25 of the country's 45 senators. The yes votes came from members of the governing Colorado Party and from several opposition groups.

After approval in the Senate, the proposal goes to the Chamber of Deputies, where 44 of the 80 members belong to the Colorado Party. Approval there would require the scheduling of a national referendum on the amendment.

Because of the violence, Saturday's and Monday's sessions of the Chamber were cancelled. "We will evaluate the situation on Tuesday," said legislative president Hugo Velazquez.

Cartes said that Vice Minister of Internal Security Lorenzo Lezcano would replace Rojas as interior minister, and police subcommander Luis Carlos Rojas would take over for Sotelo.

AP writer Patricia Luna contributed to this report.

Ship carrying 16 Filipinos, 8 S.Koreans missing near Uruguay

By KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A cargo ship being used by a South Korean shipping company went missing in seas near Uruguay with 24 crew members and authorities said Saturday that two people had been rescued.

The ship went out of contact late Friday, South Korea time, shortly after one of the crew members sent a text message to the shipping company saying the ship was taking on water, according to an official from Seoul's Foreign Ministry.

The official said the Uruguayan maritime police and a commercial vessel that had been in neighboring waters were searching for the Stella Daisy, which had departed from a port in Brazil on March 26.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, citing office rules, said 16 Filipinos and eight South Koreans were on the ship. He said it wasn't clear whether the ship sank or if the crew members escaped. He said the ship was registered in the Marshall Islands.

On Saturday, Uruguay's navy said that two of the 24 crew members had been found alive. Navy spokesman Gaston Jaunsolo said the search continues for more survivors.

Acclaimed Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko dies in Oklahoma

By KEN MILLER, Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Acclaimed Russian poet Yevgeny A. Yevtushenko, whose work focused on war atrocities and denounced anti-Semitism and tyrannical dictators, has died. He was 84.

Ginny Hensley, a spokeswoman for Hillcrest Medical Center in the eastern Oklahoma city of Tulsa, confirmed Yevtushenko's death. Roger Blais, the provost at the University of Tulsa, where Yevtushenko was

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a longtime faculty member, said he was told Yevtushenko died Saturday morning.

Yevtushenko's son, Yevgeny Y. Yevtushenko, said his father died at about 11 a.m. and that doctors said he was suffering from stage 4 cancer.

"He passed away pretty peacefully, painlessly," the younger Yevtushenko said. He said family members and friends, including his widow, Maria Novikova, were with his father in his final hours.

"I was holding his hand about the last hour or so," he said. "He knew he was loved."

He said his father was first diagnosed with cancer about six years ago and underwent surgery to have part of his kidney removed, but the cancer had recently re-emerged.

"With cancer, you can't always catch it," the younger Yevtushenko said. "His situation kind of snowballed. His health kind of snowballed on Friday."

Yevtushenko gained notoriety in the former Soviet Union while in his 20s, with poetry denouncing Josef Stalin. He gained international acclaim as a young revolutionary with "Babi Yar," the unflinching 1961 poem that told of the slaughter of nearly 34,000 Jews by the Nazis and denounced the anti-Semitism that had spread throughout the Soviet Union.

At the height of his fame, Yevtushenko read his works in packed soccer stadiums and arenas, including to a crowd of 200,000 in 1991 that came to listen during a failed coup attempt in Russia. He also attracted large audiences on tours of the West.

With his tall, rangy body, chiseled visage and declaratory style, he was a compelling presence on stages when reading his works.

"He's more like a rock star than some sort of bespectacled, quiet poet," said former University of Tulsa President Robert Donaldson, who specialized in Soviet policy during his academic years at Harvard.

Until "Babi Yar" was published, the history of the massacre was shrouded in the fog of the Cold War.

"I don't call it political poetry, I call it human rights poetry; the poetry which defends human conscience as the greatest spiritual value," Yevtushenko, who had been splitting his time between Oklahoma and Moscow, said during a 2007 interview with The Associated Press at his home in Tulsa.

Yevtushenko said he wrote the poem after visiting the site of the mass killings in Kiev, Ukraine, and searching for something memorializing what happened there — a sign, a tombstone, some kind of historical marker — but finding nothing.

"I was so shocked. I was absolutely shocked when I saw it, that people didn't keep a memory about it," he said.

It took him two hours to write the poem that begins, "No monument stands over Babi Yar. A drop sheer as a crude gravestone. I am afraid."

Yevtushenko was born deep in Siberia in the town of Zima, a name that translates to winter. He rose to prominence during Nikita Khrushchev's rule.

His poetry was outspoken and drew on the passion for poetry that is characteristic of Russia, where poetry is more widely revered than in the West. Some considered it risky, though others said he was only a showpiece dissident whose public views never went beyond the limits of what officials would permit.

Dissident exile poet Joseph Brodsky was especially critical, saying "He throws stones only in directions that are officially sanctioned and approved." Brodsky resigned from the American Academy of Arts and Letters when Yevtushenko was made an honorary member.

Donaldson extended an invite to Yevtushenko to teach at the university in 1992.

"I like very much the University of Tulsa," Yevtushenko said in a 1995 interview with the AP. "My students are sons of ranchers, even cowboys, oil engineers. They are different people, but they are very gifted. They are closer to Mother Nature than the big city. They are more sensitive."

He was also touched after the 1995 bombing of a federal government building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. He recalled one woman in his class who lost a relative in the blast, then commented that Russian women must have endured such suffering all their lives.

"This was the greatest compliment for me," he said.

Blais, the university provost, said Yevtushenko remained an active professor at the time of his death.

His poetry classes were perennially popular and featured football players and teenagers from small towns reading from the stage.

"He had a hard time giving bad grades to students because he liked the students so much," Blais said.

Years after he moved to Oklahoma, Yevtushenko's death inspired tributes from his homeland.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said on the Russian social media site Vkontakte: "He knew how to find the key to the souls of people, to find surprisingly accurate words that were in harmony with many."

A spokesman for President Vladimir Putin said the poet's legacy would remain "part of Russian culture."

Natalia Solzhenitsyna, widow of the novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, said on Russian state television that Yevtushenko "lived by his own formula."

"A poet in Russia is more than a poet," she said. "And he really was more than a poet — he was a citizen with a pronounced civic position."

Yevtushenko's son said his father was proud of the high regard in which he was held in his homeland.

"He was also proud of being a global citizen," he said. "There's more that unites us than there is that divides us."

Associated Press writers Jim Heintz in Moscow, Nomaan Merchant in Houston and Tim Talley in Oklahoma City contributed to this report.

Mormon leaders encourage more baptisms for the dead

By **BRADY McCOMBS**, Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Mormon leaders reminded church members Saturday about the importance of performing ceremonial baptisms on dead ancestors who didn't receive the ordinance while alive — a practice unique to the faith that came under fire in the past from Jews when they discovered Holocaust victims were being baptized.

Henry Eyring told a worldwide audience during a twice-yearly Mormon conference in Salt Lake City that God wants all his children "home again, in families and in glory." He encouraged listeners to use the religion's massive genealogical database to trace their roots.

Ceremonial baptisms occur when a member brings an ancestor's name to a temple. Mormons believe the ritual allows deceased people a way to the afterlife if they choose to accept what they see as an offering of love. The belief that families are sealed for eternity is one of the faith's core tenets.

The practice is becoming more common because young church members have embraced it, said Eyring, a member of a top governing body of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, called the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

"They have learned that this work saves not just the dead; it saves all of us," Eyring said. "There are now many people who have accepted baptism in the spirit world. ... This is the work of our generation."

But ceremonial baptisms offend members of other religions, especially Jews, who became upset years ago when they discovered attempts by Mormons to alter the religion of Holocaust victims. They included Anne Frank, a Jewish teenager forced into hiding in Amsterdam during the Holocaust and killed in a concentration camp.

In the 1990s, after negotiations with Jewish leaders, the church agreed to end the ceremonial baptism of Holocaust victims. After it was revealed that they continued, Mormon leaders in 2012 spoke out against the practice and reminded the public that a virtual firewall was put in the database to block anyone who tried to access the names of people who died in the Holocaust.

Some early Christian groups may have engaged in a similar practice, but the Mormons are the only mainstream Christian faith that currently practices baptisms for the deceased, said Mormon scholar Matthew Bowman, an associate professor of history at Henderson State University.

The "proxy baptisms" also were mentioned Saturday at the conference in a speech by Russell M. Nelson, another member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who is next in line to assume the church presi-

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dency. Nelson said Mormons who keep their covenants to Jesus Christ are given "Godly power."

"God's plan provides for those blessings to be extended to ancestors who died without an opportunity to obtain them during their mortal lives," Nelson said.

Mark Bragg, a member of a secondary governing body, applauded the increase in baptisms for the deceased: "We are experiencing great joy and celebration on both sides of the veil."

Their speeches came during the first day of a two-day conference in which leaders implored the faith's 15.8 million members worldwide to be compassionate and devout while avoiding the many temptations of the modern world that can pull them away from their faith.

Nearly 100,000 church members are expected to attend five sessions on Saturday and Sunday. Thousands more around the world will listen to the conference or watch it on television, radio, satellite and internet broadcasts in 90 different languages.

Jeffrey Holland, a long-time member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said in a speech about inclusivity that there's room in the faith for people of different "sexual attractions" if they love God and honor his commandments.

His remark marked the latest attempt by the faith to foster a climate of empathy for gays and lesbians while the religion still clings to fundamental doctrinal beliefs that homosexuality activity is a sin.

He said there's room in the faith for all types of people, including from different cultures; those from different family structures; and those questioning their faith. Holland also encouraged church members to embrace their uniqueness.

"When we disparage our uniqueness or try to conform to fictitious stereotypes — stereotypes driven by an insatiable consumer culture and idealized beyond any possible realization by social media — we lose the richness of tone and timbre that God intended when he created a world of diversity," Holland said.

Dale Renlund, one of the newest members Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, told church members to guard against being intolerant of others with different opinions.

"We must not be guilty of persecuting anyone inside or outside the church," Renlund said. "Church history gives ample evidence of our members being treated with hatred and bigotry. How ironically sad it would be if we were to treat others as we have been treated."

Fox backs O'Reilly after reports of sexual harassment

By TALI ARBEL, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Fox News host Bill O'Reilly said Saturday that he is "vulnerable to lawsuits" because of his high-profile job, in response to a New York Times report detailing payouts made to settle accusations of sexual harassment and other inappropriate behavior.

O'Reilly posted the statement to his website after the Times report Saturday, and Fox News' parent company 21st Century Fox backed him in a statement.

The newspaper reported (<http://nyti.ms/2nHTteJ>) that O'Reilly or 21st Century Fox have paid \$13 million to five women since 2002 over these complaints "in exchange for agreeing to not pursue litigation or speak about their accusations against him."

The story said more than 60 people were interviewed, including current and former employees of Fox News or its parent company and people who know the women behind the complaints or are close to O'Reilly. Most demanded anonymity.

21st Century Fox, which is still dealing with the legal fallout from sexual harassment charges against former Fox News head Roger Ailes, did not reply to questions about the O'Reilly payouts or whether any disciplinary action was taken against O'Reilly. But the company said in a statement that it had looked into "these matters" in the past few months and discussed them with O'Reilly.

The company said O'Reilly denied the merits of "these claims" but has "resolved those he regarded as his personal responsibility."

The company said it "takes matters of workplace behavior very seriously" and that "Mr. O'Reilly is fully

committed to supporting our efforts to improve the environment for all our employees at Fox News.”

O'Reilly's statement did not deny the payments. "Just like other prominent and controversial people, I'm vulnerable to lawsuits from individuals who want me to pay them to avoid negative publicity," it said. Requests for comments sent to a lawyer and a spokesman for O'Reilly were not immediately answered.

Ailes left last summer amid sexual harassment charges, which he has denied. Fox also reportedly fired an executive, Francisco Cortes, after a sexual assault complaint and paid his accuser more than \$2.5 million in a settlement.

News of the settlements capped a difficult few days for O'Reilly, who was criticized earlier this week for saying he had a hard time concentrating on California Rep. Maxine Waters during a speech because he was distracted by her "James Brown wig." O'Reilly later said that his comment about her hair was dumb and apologized.

Hospital struggles with Mosul's injured _ and its dead

By **BALINT SZLANKO** and **YESICA FISCH**, Associated Press

QAYARA, Iraq (AP) — The hospital in Qayara sometimes receives so many dead bodies that they do not fit in the refrigerator unit and have to be left in the corridors. Inside the mortuary, the dead are simply put on the floor because there are no containers, sometimes piled one on top of the other in a gruesome fashion and wrapped in a blanket, just as they were brought in.

The bodies are casualties from Mosul, where Iraqi forces backed by U.S.-led coalition forces have been battling the Islamic State group for over five months to take control of the city.

"We asked for shelves but they gave us nothing," shrugged Dr. Mansour Marouf, the hospital's chief surgeon.

The beleaguered Qayara hospital is one of only two public hospitals within a 120-mile (193-kilometer) radius, between Mosul and the central Iraqi city of Tikrit. It is overwhelmed with casualties from the field clinics in Mosul. Activity in the hospitals mirrors the intensity of the operation: There were 21 dead on Friday, nothing on Saturday.

Since it reopened in January, after Qayara was retaken by Iraqi troops from IS, the hospital has treated over 2,000 patients, including some 600 battle casualties.

The hospital is also responsible for general health care, including maternity care, for the hundreds of thousands of people living in the surrounding area. Yet it receives no government support — even doctors' salaries are covered by a foreign aid organization. It has only six surgeons who get so busy when the injured start flowing in that sometimes they sleep no more than a few hours in several days. It has only two operating theaters and 50 beds because the upper levels of the hospital were destroyed in the fighting, leaving only the ground floor usable. Medical equipment is also lacking.

"It is shameful to say this but we have received no help and no support from the government at all even though the town was liberated eight months ago," said Dr. Mansour.

He said the only public help they got was from the local governorate, which sent forensic inspectors twice a week to try to identify the dead who come in without an identity card or a relative. Everything else, including all the equipment and the medical disposables, have been paid for by WAHA, a foreign aid organization that focuses on health issues.

It has even occurred to Dr. Mansour that they are being ignored by officials because of suspicions they might harbor toward local residents who spent over two years under IS rule. "But every employee has been checked by the security services so they cannot even blame it on that," he said.

The hospital's situation underscores the extent to which the Iraqi government's efforts to reclaim the areas that it lost to IS in 2014 have been uneven at best. Military operations, assisted by the U.S.-led coalition, have been proceeding relatively evenly, if slowly, but the provision of public services, let alone reconstruction, has only barely begun or not at all in most liberated towns.

Dr. Mansour recalled that the hospital hosted a visit by the European Union's humanitarian-aid commissioner several weeks ago when it was announced that the EU would donate \$42.5 million emergency

aid to Iraq this year, some of it for health care. When asked if any of that aid has reached them yet, the surgeon only laughed.

"We requested a lot of things. We sent a lot of lists. Every time we ask them they say we will help but then nothing happens," he said.

Trump advisers richer than previous White House officials

By **JULIE BYKOWICZ** and **STEPHEN BRAUN**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's son-in-law and daughter are holding onto scores of real estate investments — part of a portfolio of at least \$240 million in assets — while they serve in White House jobs, according to new financial disclosures.

The revelations about Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump were part of a massive White House release of financial disclosure forms Friday night for dozens of its top administration officials.

Kushner, Trump's senior adviser, resigned from some 260 entities and sold off 58 businesses or investments that lawyers identified as posing potential conflicts of interest, the documents show.

But lawyers for Kushner and in the Office of the White House Counsel, in consultation with the Office of Government Ethics, determined that his real estate assets, many of them in New York City, are unlikely to pose the kinds of conflicts that would trigger a need to divest.

"The remaining conflicts, from a practical perspective, are pretty narrow and very manageable," said Jamie Gorelick, an attorney who has been working on the ethics agreements for Kushner and Ivanka Trump.

Kushner began selling off the most problematic parts of his portfolio shortly after Trump won the election, and some of those business deals predate what is required to be captured in the financial disclosure forms. For example, Kushner sold his stake in a Manhattan skyscraper to a trust his mother oversees. Jared Kushner, Ivanka Trump and their three minor children have no financial interest in that trust, his lawyer said. The Kushner Companies, now run by Jared Kushner's relatives, are seeking investment partners for a massive redevelopment of the building.

Top officials in the Trump White House tend to be far wealthier — and therefore more entangled in businesses that could conflict with their government duties — than people in previous administrations.

Trump's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, disclosed assets between \$13 million and \$56 million, including his influential political consultancy, Bannon Strategic Advisors Inc., worth as much as \$25 million. Bannon also disclosed that he earned slightly less than \$200,000 last year as executive director of Breitbart News Network LLC, before he resigned to join Trump's campaign last August.

The documents show he was vice president of the data firm Cambridge Analytica for more than two years, before resigning in August 2016 to help run Trump's campaign. Cambridge was the main data provider for Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who waged a bitter battle with Trump for the Republican nomination. Bannon's consulting firm pulled in more than \$125,000 from Cambridge last year. He has between a \$1 million and \$5 million stake in Cambridge, but the disclosure said he has an "agreement in principle" to sell his investment.

White House chief of staff Reince Priebus received more than \$500,000 in salary and bonuses from the Republican National Committee, which he led through the long and divisive presidential primary. He also earned at least \$750,000 from equity buyout and partner-distribution income from the law firm Michael Best & Friedrich.

One of the wealthiest members of the Trump administration — aside from the billionaire business owner president himself — is Gary Cohn, who left a top position at Goldman Sachs to become Trump's chief economic adviser.

His financial disclosure shows he received at least \$40 million in income from Goldman Sachs-related dividends, interest, salary and bonuses, about half of which was in some form of stock compensation.

Cohn also reported more than \$1 million in income from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China; the White House has said he is in the process of divesting from that bank, as well as his Goldman holdings.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer described the business people who have joined the adminis-

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tration as "very blessed and very successful," and said the disclosure forms will show that they have set aside "a lot" to go into public service.

The financial disclosures — required by law to be made public — give a snapshot of the employees' finances as they entered the White House. What's not being provided: the Office of Government Ethics agreements with those employees on what they must do to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Those documents will not be disclosed, White House lawyers said, although the public will eventually have access to "certificates of divestiture" issued to employees who are seeking capital gains tax deferrals for selling off certain assets.

Kushner, for example, received certificates of divestiture for his financial interests in several assets, including several funds tied to Thrive Capital, his brother Joshua Kushner's investment firm.

He and Ivanka Trump built up companies the documents show are worth at least \$50 million each and have stepped away from their businesses while in government service. Like the president himself, however, they retain a financial interest in many of them. Ivanka Trump agreed this week to become a federal employee and will file her own financial disclosure at a later date.

Jared Kushner's disclosure shows he took on tens of millions of dollars of bank debt in 2015 and 2016, including liabilities with several international banks whose interests could come before the Trump administration.

Kushner has as much as \$25 million in liabilities to Deutsche Bank, a prime lender to Kushner family real estate ventures as well as a major creditor for Trump Organization-branded real estate projects. Kushner and his father, Charles, also have liabilities worth much as \$5 million to the U.S. unit of Israel Discount Bank. The Kushner Companies have separately acknowledged "long-standing" dealings with two other Israeli banks.

Financial information for members of Trump's Cabinet who needed Senate confirmation has, in most cases, been available for weeks through the Office of Government Ethics.

The president must also file periodic financial disclosures, but he is not required to make another disclosure until next year.

Associated Press writers Chad Day, Jack Gillum and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

Witness account highlights dangers of texting while driving

By JUAN A. LOZANO, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A witness says the driver of a pickup truck that collided with a church minibus in rural Texas, killing 13 people, acknowledged he had been texting while driving — highlighting the dangers of sending messages on smartphones while behind the wheel.

Texas Department of Public Safety Sgt. Conrad Hein wouldn't comment Friday on whether texting might have played a role in the Wednesday collision on a two-lane road about 75 miles west (120 km) of San Antonio, near the town of Concan. But officials have said the truck driver appeared to have crossed the center line.

Jennifer Morrison, the investigator in charge of the team from the National Transportation Safety Board, would only say that distracted driving will be among the issues investigated.

The witness, Jody Kuchler, a 55-year-old self-employed welder, told The Associated Press he and his girlfriend were driving back to their home in the nearby town of Leakey when he came across a truck that was driving erratically across the road.

"He kept going off the road and into oncoming traffic and he just kept doing that," said Kuchler, who first shared the account of what happened with the San Antonio Express-News.

Kuchler, who followed the truck for at least 15 minutes, said he called the sheriff's offices for both Uvalde and Real counties and told them "they needed to get him off the road before he hit somebody."

Kuchler said he witnessed the crash and afterward, he checked on both the bus and the truck and was

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able to speak with the driver of the truck, who the Department of Public Safety has identified as 20-year-old Jack Dillon Young, of Leakey.

"He said, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I was texting.' I said, 'Son, do you know what you just did?' He said, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry,'" Kuchler recalled.

Texas is unusual in that it has no statewide ban on texting while driving. Dozens of cities across the state prohibit the practice, but local ordinances may not have applied in the rural area where Wednesday's crash occurred. Laws in 46 other states ban sending or reading email, using apps or engaging in other use of the internet while driving.

The Republican-controlled Texas Legislature approved a statewide ban in 2011 but it was vetoed by then-Gov. Rick Perry, who characterized such prohibitions as government micromanagement and said educating drivers was the key to deterrence. A similar proposal passed the Texas House a few weeks ago but has yet to make it to a Senate floor vote.

The wreck on Wednesday occurred along a curve in the road where the speed limit is 65 mph, according to Department of Public Safety officials. The bus occupants — members of First Baptist Church of New Braunfels in Texas — were returning from a three-day retreat in Leakey, about 9 miles (15 kilometers) from where the crash happened.

Twelve people on the bus died at the scene, authorities said. Another died at a hospital. One bus passenger remains hospitalized in serious but stable condition, according to the church.

Young, the driver of the pickup, also remains hospitalized.

The number of motor vehicle deaths in the U.S. last year topped 40,000 for the first time since 2007, according to the National Safety Council. The number of vehicle crash deaths in Texas rose 7 percent last year to 3,464, slightly higher than the national rise. One-in-10 driving fatalities in 2015 were caused by some kind of distraction, the U.S. Department of Transportation said.

Morrison said most, if not all, of the bus occupants in the Texas crash — who ranged in age from 61 to 87 — were wearing seat belts. The driver and front-passenger seats had three-point lap-and-shoulder belts while the rest of the seats behind had lap belts only, she said.

Three-point seat belts are always preferable to lap belts because they hold the upper torso in place and help prevent head injuries, said automotive safety advocate Joan Claybrook. One of the problems with lap belts only is that in a frontal impact crash, people will remain in their seats but their upper bodies will go forward and their heads can strike the back of the seat in front, she said.

If the passengers wearing lap-only belts are seated along the sides of the buses, instead of facing forward, they will often hit their heads on the sides of the vehicle or the windows, said Henry Jasny, senior vice president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. A frontal crash of this type would be like "hitting a brick wall," he said.

The NTSB identified the church vehicle as a 2004 Ford E-350 series van that had been converted to a minibus. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the only safety issues identified with that vehicle model from that particular year was a fuse problem reported in 2007 in vehicles that had been retrofitted to become ambulances.

Associated Press writers Joan Lowy in Washington, D.C., Will Weissert in Austin and David Warren in Dallas contributed to this report.

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter at www.twitter.com/juanlozano70

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Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Sunday, April 2, the 92nd day of 2017. There are 273 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war against Germany, saying, "The world must be made safe for democracy." (Congress declared war four days later.)

On this date:

In 1792, Congress passed the Coinage Act, which authorized establishment of the U.S. Mint.

In 1800, Ludwig van Beethoven premiered his Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op. 21, in Vienna.

In 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis and most of his Cabinet fled the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, because of advancing Union forces.

In 1932, aviator Charles A. Lindbergh and John F. Condon went to a cemetery in The Bronx, New York, where Condon turned over \$50,000 to a man in exchange for Lindbergh's kidnapped son. (The child, who was not returned, was found dead the following month.)

In 1942, Glenn Miller and his Orchestra recorded "American Patrol" at the RCA Victor studios in Hollywood.

In 1956, the soap operas "As the World Turns" and "The Edge of Night" premiered on CBS-TV.

In 1968, the science-fiction film "2001: A Space Odyssey," produced and directed by Stanley Kubrick, had its world premiere in Washington, D.C.

In 1974, French President Georges Pompidou, 62, died in Paris.

In 1982, several thousand troops from Argentina seized the disputed Falkland Islands, located in the south Atlantic, from Britain. (Britain seized the islands back the following June.)

In 1986, four American passengers, including an 8-month-old girl, her mother and grandmother, were killed when a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a TWA jetliner en route from Rome to Athens, Greece.

In 1992, mob boss John Gotti was convicted in New York of murder and racketeering; he was later sentenced to life, and died in prison.

In 2005, Pope John Paul II died in his Vatican apartment at age 84.

Ten years ago: In its first case on climate change, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*, ruled 5-4 that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases were air pollutants under the Clean Air Act. Florida won its second consecutive college basketball championship, beating Ohio State 84-75; the Gators became the first team to repeat since Duke in 1991-92. Coaches Phil Jackson and Roy Williams were among those named to the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Five years ago: A gunman killed seven people at Oikos University, a Christian school in Oakland, California. (Suspected gunman One Goh, a former student, was found not mentally fit to stand trial.) The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that jailers may perform invasive strip searches on people arrested even for minor offenses. Five-time All-Star Reggie Miller joined longtime NBA coach Don Nelson and college standout Ralph Sampson as part of a 12-member class to be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame. Kentucky won its eighth men's national NCAA basketball title, holding off Kansas for a 67-59 victory.

One year ago: Mormon leaders meeting in Salt Lake City called on church members to practice tolerance despite political differences, providing guidance at a conference amid a presidential campaign marked by harsh rhetoric and bickering. Connecticut senior Breanna Stewart won the AP Player of the Year award for a record third time; her coach, Geno Auriemma (aw-ree-EH'-muh), won the Coach of the Year award for the eighth time. Sixteen-year-old Evgenia Medvedeva of Russia capped a dominant debut season by winning the world championship in Boston with a record-setting free skate score; Ashley Wagner of the U.S. came in second while another Russian, Anna Pogorilaya, placed third.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Sharon Acker is 82. Actress Penelope Keith is 77. Actress Linda Hunt is 72. Singer Emmylou Harris is 70. Actor Sam Anderson is 70. Social critic and author Camille Paglia is 70. Actress Pamela Reed is 68. Rock musician Dave Robinson (The Cars) is 64. Country singer Buddy Jewell is 56. Actor Christopher Meloni is 56. Singer Keren Woodward (Bananarama) is 56. Country singer Billy Dean is

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55. Actor Clark Gregg is 55. Actress Jana Marie Hupp is 53. Rock musician Greg Camp is 50. Rock musician Tony Fredianelli (Third Eye Blind) is 48. Actress Roselyn Sanchez is 44. Country singer Jill King is 42. Actor Pedro Pascal is 42. Actor Adam Rodriguez is 42. Actor Jeremy Garrett is 41. Actor Michael Fassbender is 40. Actress Jaime Ray Newman is 39. Rock musician Jesse Carmichael (Maroon 5) is 38. Actress Bethany Joy Lenz is 36. Singer Lee Dewyze (TV: "American Idol") is 31. Country singer Chris Janson is 31. Actor Drew Van Acker is 31. Actor Jesse Plemons is 29. Singer Aaron Kelly (TV: "American Idol") is 24.

Thought for Today: "We crucify ourselves between two thieves: regret for yesterday and fear of tomorrow." — Fulton Oursler, American journalist and author (1893-1952).