

# Groton Daily Independent

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## SD37 to be closed Monday

Residents along SD 37 and west 5th Ave need to pump their sump pumps into the sanitary sewer and not in the street during construction. SD 37 will be closed on Monday from Railroad Ave to 12th Ave. There was a question about increasing the north-south stop light by 5 seconds. The DOT will look into this. The construction schedule is catching up.

There will be 2 crossings between west and east. From what I understand it will be 2nd and 5th, but that will change as the project moves forward. There will always be 2 crossings available.

RR Ave is the detour all the way east to US 12. The road south of the golf course has been upgraded.

**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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### Friday, May 12

**Senior Menu:** Hearty Vegetable Beef SOup, chicken salad sandwich, Mandarin oranges, Oatmeal raisin cookie.

**School Lunch:** Ham and cheese, smiley potato, carrots and dip, fruit.

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

**Groton Schools:** NEC Track at Clark, 11 a.m.; D.A.R.E. graduation at 2 p.m.

### Sunday, May 14

**St. John's Lutheran:** Worship at 9 a.m. with graduation reception at 10 a.m.

**Emmanuel Lutheran:** Worship with communion at 9 a.m.

**United Methodist Church:** Conde worship with communion, 9 a.m.; coffee fellowship time, 10 a.m., Confirmation Sunday, 10 a.m.; Groton worship with communion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School starts after children's sermon.

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

**First Presbyterian:** Bible Study at 9:30 a.m., Worship at 11 a.m.

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

### Monday, May 15

**Groton Schools:** NEC Girls Golf at Sisseton, 10 a.m.; 7th/8th NEC track at Sisseton, 10 a.m.

**School Lunch:** Pizza, green beans, romaine salad, fruit.

**Senior Menu:** Hamburger cabbage roll hot dish, mixed vegetables, pears, cookie, whole wheat bread.



**Dakota Outdoors**

Erik Dean

402 N Main St  
Aberdeen, SD 57401  
605.229.0123

dakoutdoors@midconetwork.com

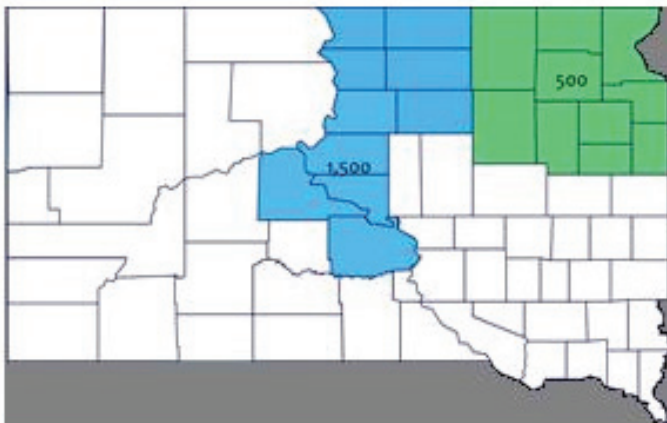
## GFP Commission Revises Proposed Changes to Nonresident Waterfowl Licenses

PIERRE, S.D. – Last week, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission adjusted its current proposal to the proposed distribution and number of nonresident temporary (three day) waterfowl licenses and made additional adjustments.

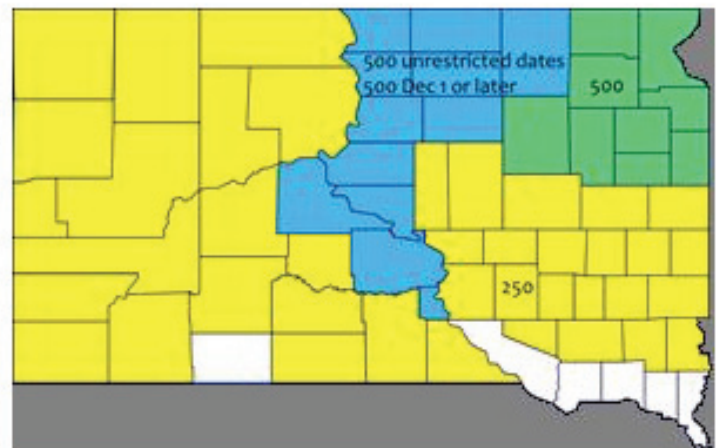
Currently, nonresidents holding the three day, NWR-00X license can hunt the counties of Campbell, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, Walworth, Potter, Stanley, Sully, Hughes and Lyman. The 00X licenses are good for private land only in Potter, Stanley, Sully, Hughes and Lyman counties. A nonresident NWR-00Y license is valid in Brown, Spink, Marshall, Day, Clark, Roberts, Codington, Hamlin, Grant and Deuel county; in which both public and private land can be hunted.

The proposal reduces the overall number of three day licenses from 2,000 to 1,750; allocates 1,000 licenses for NWR-00X with 500 valid only from Dec. 1 through the end of waterfowl seasons. It also establishes a new statewide unit with 250 licenses and excludes the counties in NWR-00X, NWR-00Y along with Bennett, Charles Mix, Bon Homme, Yankton, Clay and Union counties. The proposal would also make all temporary three day licenses valid on private land only except for NWR-00Y; and move Brown county from the NRW-00Y to the NRW-00X unit.

**Current Allocations**



**Proposed Allocations**



“Over the past month, members of the GFP Commission have listened to residents and nonresidents regarding how the three day nonresident waterfowl licenses should be allocated and decided to refine a proposal that was issued in April,” said Tony Leif, director of the GFP Division of Wildlife. “This revised proposal replaces the April proposal and is open for public comment until the June 8.”

The Commission will finalize this proposal on June 8 at Cedar Shore Resort in Oacoma. Written comments can be sent to [wildinfo@state.sd.us](mailto:wildinfo@state.sd.us). To be part of the public record, comments must be received by 12 p.m. CDT on June 8. Please include a full name along with the city and state of residence. To comment in person, the public hearing will be held June 8, at 2 p.m. CDT at the Cedar Shore Resort in Oacoma.

## Parks and Wildlife Foundation Elects New Board Members

PIERRE, S.D. - President of the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation (PWF), Karen Gundersen Olson, announced today that William May of Rapid City, Jim Spies of Watertown and Dale Jahr of Sioux Falls will serve on the Foundation's Board of Directors.

"Each new board member has exceptional abilities to further the Foundation's mission of soliciting and encouraging support to preserve and protect South Dakota's natural resources and outdoor heritage while expanding recreational and educational opportunities in our state," said Gundersen Olson.

William May is a resident of Rapid City and has served as CEO/General Counsel for the Black Hills Surgical Hospital, LLP since 2004. He is also a member of the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce.

Jim Spies is the President of Spies Corporation, which owns and manages the Cowboy Country convenience stores throughout the region. Spies is a Watertown resident and a lifetime member of the following organizations: Dallas Safari Club, the Safari Club International, Ducks Unlimited, Wild Sheep Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wild Turkey Foundation, Grand Slam/OVIS, Boone and Crocket Club and the Wild Sheep Foundation. He recently retired as a member of the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission.

Dale Jahr is a private consultant providing business, strategic and creative services to businesses, including publicly traded, privately held and start-up companies and is a recent resident of Sioux Falls. He has successfully led corporate efforts in the areas of communication, marketing, public and media relations, investor relations and strategic planning.

These three join 11 other board members including: Jeff Scherschligt, Sarah Richardson Larson (Vice President), Kathryn Anderson and Kevin Nyberg of Sioux Falls, Larry Ness of Yankton, Tom Krafka (Secretary-Treasurer) of Rapid City, Spencer Hawley of Brookings, Dick Behl of Scotland, Karen Gunderson Olson (President) and Jack Lynass of Rapid City. Ex officio members include Kelly Hepler, GFP department secretary and Barry Jensen, GFP Commission vice chair.

## Avoid Pesticide Drift During Spraying Season

PIERRE, SD – The South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) would like to remind pesticide applicators of drift risk during this spraying season.

Applicators should prevent risk of drift to non-target areas or susceptible crops and should evaluate factors such as wind speed, wind direction, temperature, spray pressure, nozzle height and surrounding properties before they begin spraying a field.

"Product labels give applicators information about safe handling, rates, personal protective equipment, labeled crops, susceptible crops, tank mixes, avoiding drift, weeds controlled and more," said Agricultural Services assistant director Tom Gere. "Reading the label of a pesticide is one of the most important things an applicator can do to get a job done correctly and safely."

Although pesticide applicators are trained to apply pesticides safely and products are labeled with instructions to prevent drift, occasionally damage occurs. SDDA receives complaint calls on pesticide drift, damage and a variety of other related incidents.

When is it appropriate to file a complaint?

- If damage has been done to the environment (trees, bushes etc.) or a non-target field because of spray drift
- If you notice pesticide drift occurring while an applicator is spraying
- A spill of over 25 gallons of liquid material or 500 lbs. dry material occurs

"A complaint must be filed within 30 days after the date the damage occurs," said Gere. "If a growing crop is allegedly damaged, the complaint must be filed with at least 75 percent of the crop still standing."



## GROTON KIWANIS CLUB

Thirteen members and one guest attended the weekly dinner meeting of the Groton Kiwanis Club, on Wednesday noon

Mike Ehresmann was program leader, and introduced Randy Hartman, from Pierre, who gave hand-outs and talked emergency management Scott Meintz is Brown County's emergency officer Randy also stayed that Pierre will be welcoming Matt Thorson, from Groton; as a new teacher in their school system next year.

Lee Schinkel announced that the scholarship committee chose Kate Helmer , from Andover, to receive this year's Kiwanis college scholarship.

President Tom Paepke announced that Lee will also be chairman for the HOBY project. The Kiwanis annually sponsors this program for GHS students.

Next week's program leader is LaVonne Helmer, followed by Reed Litch and Tom Mahan.



**The brick work is progressing on the new addition to the Groton Area Elementary School. The new addition will serve as the new lunchroom, freeing up the gym.**

## Today in Weather History

May 12, 1984: An F3 tornado wiped out seven farms, crippled fifteen others, killed livestock and scattered several cars and machinery in its path. The tornado first touched down seven miles north and one mile east of Clark and moved southeast through the southwestern sections of Henry until it dissipated at Grover in Codrington County. The path of destruction began on a farm where two barns, a steel grain bin, and a pole barn were demolished, and machinery was damaged. As the tornado moved further southeast, it struck the southwest sections of Henry and split into two tornados that moved in two different directions. One went to the northeast that inflicted no damaged and dissipated while the other went southeast that continued its destruction path to Grover. Small hail, accumulation to fifteen inches deep, was experienced at Henry and tornado damage included broken windows, numerous homes and three trailer homes were demolished. Along the path, 80 power poles and several miles of power lines were lost, affecting the power to over 1,000 people. A small plane, southwest of Garden City, was wrapped around a pole.

1760: Ben Franklin was the first person to identify nor'easters. In a letter on this date to Alexander Small of London, Franklin described an experience that happened to him in November 1743 when storm clouds in Philadelphia blocked his view of an eclipse. Franklin assumed that the storm had blown in from the northeast because the surface winds at his location were from that direction. He was puzzled to find out later that his brother had viewed the eclipse with no problems and that the storm had arrived in Boston four hours later. The information caused Franklin to surmise correctly that the storm had moved from southwest to northeast. Click [HERE](#) to read the letter to Alexander Small.

1886: An estimated F4 tornado touched down in Vermilion County near Armstrong, Illinois, and passed between Alvin and Rossville before moving into Indiana. At least five houses were destroyed, two of which were entirely swept away. Three people were killed. Five other strong tornadoes occurred across Illinois that day: two near Mt. Carroll, one near Odell, one near Jacksonville, and one in Iroquois County.

1926 - A hurricane came inland near Daytona Beach, FL. The hurricane caused 2.5 million dollars damage in eastern Florida, including the Jacksonville area. (David Ludlum)

1939 - The temperature at Lewiston, ID, hit 117 degrees to establish an all-time record high for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1943 - On a whim, and flying a single engine AT-6, Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair and Colonel Duckworth were the first to fly into a hurricane. It started regular Air Force flights into hurricanes. (The Weather Channel)






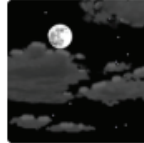

1987 - Thunderstorms in Minnesota spawned a tornado which moved in a southwesterly direction for a distance of thirty miles across Rice County and Goodhue County. Trees were uprooted and tossed about like toys, and a horse lifted by the tornado was observed sailing horizontally through the air. Thunderstorms drenched La Crosse, WI, with 5.26 inches of rain, their second highest 24 hour total of record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Hot weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Williston, ND, reported a record high of 108 degrees. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the eastern U.S., and in southeastern Texas. Richland County, SC, was soaked with up to 5.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Yuma, AZ, experienced their most severe thunderstorm of record. Strong thunderstorm winds, with unofficial gusts as high as 95 mph, reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Yuma got nearly as much rain in one hour as is normally received in an entire year. The storm total of 2.55 inches of rain was a record 24 hour total for July. Property damage due to flash flooding and high winds was in the millions. (Storm Data)

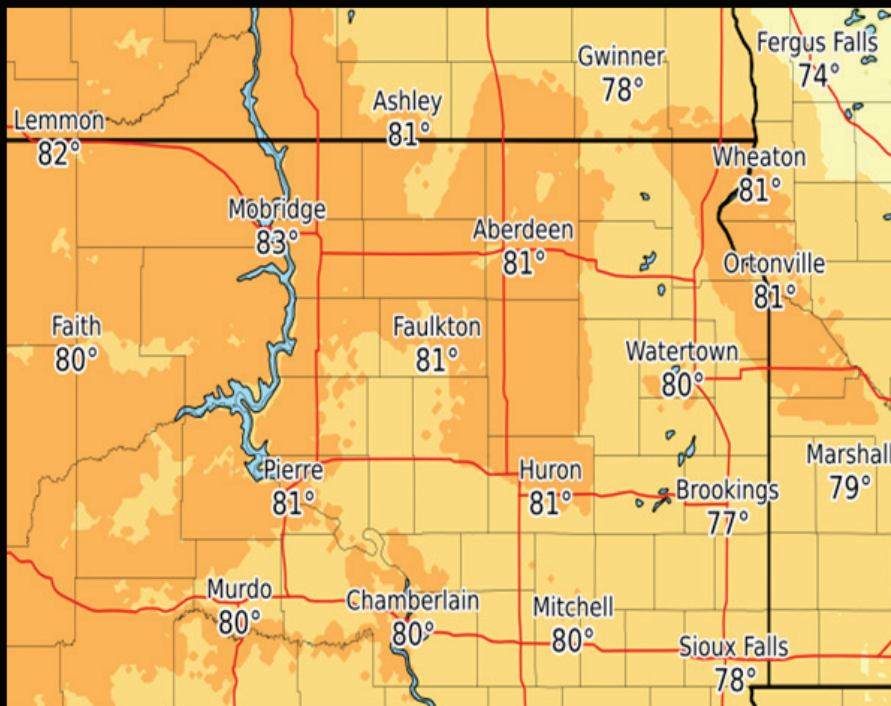
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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny then Chance Showers
High: 81 °F	Low: 52 °F	High: 83 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 84 °F	Low: 54 °F	High: 80 °F



## Warm And Dry Today



**Sunny W/  
80s For Highs  
Saturday**

**Isolated Weak  
Showers &  
Storms  
Possible  
Sunday**

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD



[weather.gov/Aberdeen](http://weather.gov/Aberdeen)



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen

Updated: 5/12/2017 5:28 AM Central

Published on: 05/12/2017 at 5:44AM

Warm and dry conditions will persist through Saturday, with a front and a chance for showers and weak storms Sunday. A more active pattern is headed our way for next week too.



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## Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 74.2 F at 7:28 PM

Low Outside Temp: 36.9 F at 6:11 AM

High Gust: 16.0 Mph at 2:03 PM

Snow: Precip: 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 90° in 1900

Record Low: 17° in 1946

Average High: 68°F

Average Low: 43°F

Average Precip in May: 1.23

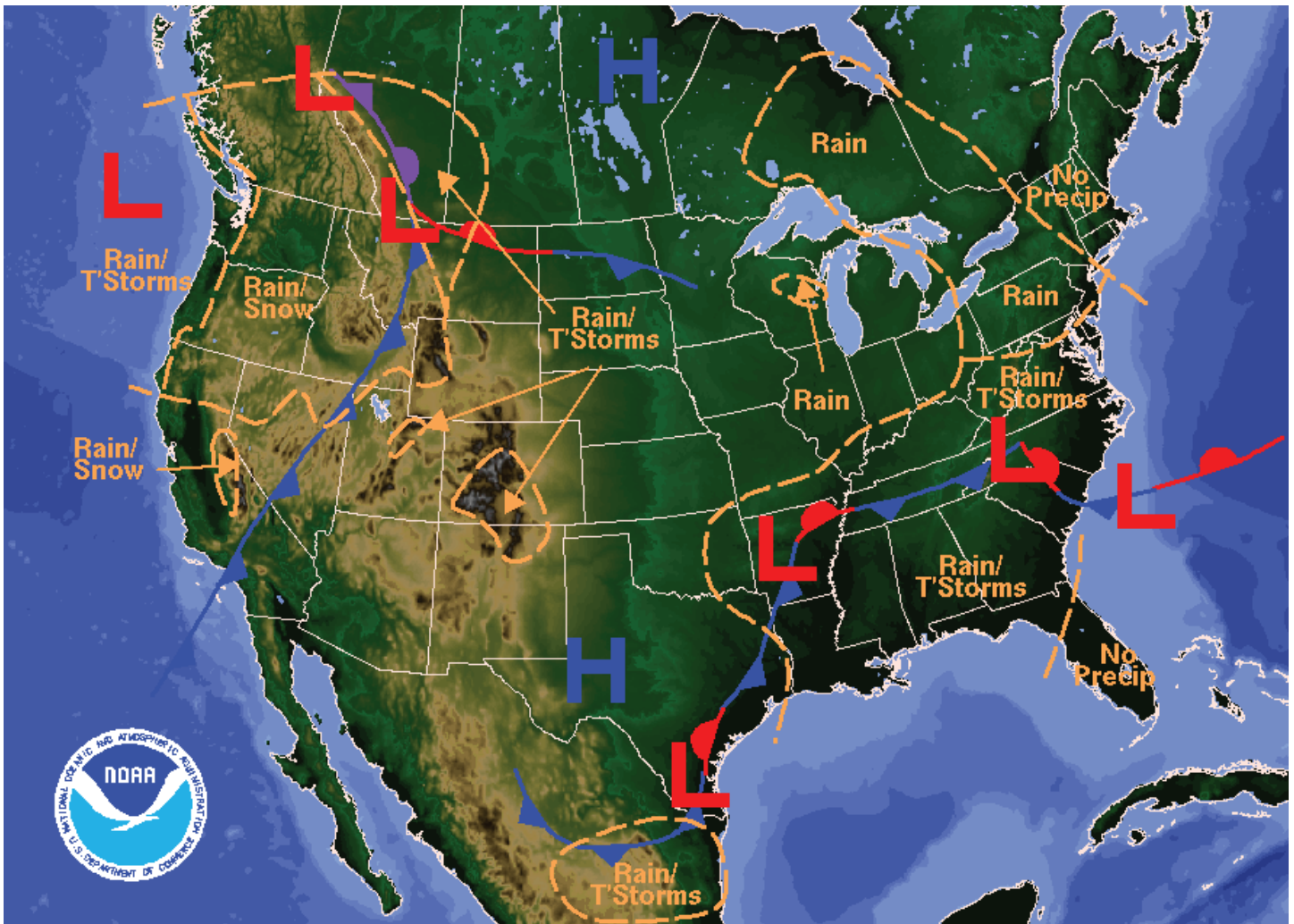
Precip to date in May: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 5.26

Precip Year to Date: 1.98

Sunset Tonight: 8:54 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:05 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Fri, May 12, 2017, issued 4:21 AM EDT  
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center  
Prepared by Mcreynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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## GREAT ESCAPES

"Jet away from it all" was a successful advertising campaign of a major airline a few years ago. "If you need to get away from it all, we can help you make it happen" was the intent of their message.

Many people, however, spend their entire life trying to "get away from it all." But is "it" the problem? Some move from one job to another. Others from one spouse to another. Then there are many who "bar hop" - looking for the perfect drink and a place to make friends and find consul. Confused minds and broken hearts often cause people to seek help from others who have no hope to offer.

"What's going on?" we might ask.

It's like a person who has been injured and is in so much pain that they can't be still. They try to "walk it off" only to discover that the pain and injury are inside and follow them wherever they go.

So it is with life. "What's going on" is that we cannot run away from our problems! They follow us wherever we go.

If we want relief from the pain and problems of our past, it is possible. If we choose to carry the guilt and grief that trouble our minds and disturb our peace it is because we want to. Life is choice.

The Psalmist wrote, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?" The guilt and grief, pain and problems that trouble us during the day and keep us awake at night is God's Spirit convicting us of our need to repent from our sinful ways. It is Christ pursuing us wherever we go - calling us to "come back."

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for loving us so much that You refuse to give up on us. Teach us to hear Your voice. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 139:7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?



## News from the Associated Press

### **Workforce education grants totaling over \$1 million awarded**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The state Department of Education says four South Dakota school districts and one private nonprofit corporation have been awarded workforce education grants totaling over \$1 million.

The agency said Thursday that the five grants are for projects ranging from developing a new architecture and construction program at Webster Area School District to creating a new agriculture program at Northwestern Area School District.

The state Legislature established the Workforce Education Fund in 2013, and part of it was designated to give grants for career and technical education programs in secondary schools.

Tiffany Sanderson is the Department of Education's director of career and technical education. She says the grants help make sure that career and technical education programs offer students up-to-date training that leads to entry into the workforce or postsecondary education.

### **Yankton Sioux police turn to tribe for help against drugs**

LAKE ANDES, S.D. (AP) — The Yankton Sioux police chief says his department has made progress against drugs, but he needs more help from tribal members.

Chris Saunsoci said at an annual drug summit Wednesday that people may find it difficult to report friends and family for drug use, but that they should view it as getting their loved ones the help they need, the Yankton Daily Press and Dakotan reported (<http://bit.ly/2qXrvzP>).

"We're seeking community outreach," he said. "We want people to come to us when they run into issues with meth or other drugs."

He added that coming forward about drug use in the community can also help protect children or others close to drug users.

Saunsoci is also asking tribal members to change laws that no longer help or may even hinder drug enforcement.

Yankton Sioux tribal chairman Robert Flying Hawk commended the police for reaching out to the community.

"Within the community, Chris is reaching out. But people hold a lot of negativity in their view of the police," he said. "We need to realize (police officers) help and protect us, and they need our support."

Over the years, Yankton Sioux law enforcement has increased their number of officers so they're better equipped to deal with drug problems.

In addition to Saunsoci, the force now has a lieutenant, criminal investigator and law enforcement assistant as well as seven patrol officers and six dispatchers.

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

### **South Dakota farmers, businesses help ranchers hit by fires**

CORSICA, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota farmers, ranchers and businesses are raising money to help their counterparts in Kansas and Oklahoma who were affected by devastating wildfires that burned more than 1,000 square miles along the Kansas-Oklahoma border in early March.

South Dakota farmers have been donating hay to be auctioned, with the money going to a fund called

"Southern States Fence Benefit," the Daily Republic reported (<http://bit.ly/2qXAroE> ).

Dakota Hay Auction owner Willy Groeneweg has been helping with the fundraising efforts and says nearly \$2,000 has been raised so far. He says more than 16,000 miles of fence was destroyed and ranchers are having a difficult time keeping livestock on their property.

All of the hay that is donated is sold commission-free, Groeneweg said, so there is no selling fee. Groeneweg held a free appreciation luncheon Monday to help spread awareness about the fundraising efforts. The total raised from that event is still to be determined.

"We deal with ranchers and farmers and we felt South Dakota can be heard that way. We're caring about what happened in Kansas and Oklahoma," Groeneweg said

Last month farmer Steve Roduner helped deliver four loads of hay to farmers in need in Kansas. Roduner said hay is no longer needed in the southern states and the focus has shifted to raising money for fencing supplies.

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

## Historic Rapid City hotel to celebrate end of big renovation

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A historic Rapid City hotel is set to celebrate the completion of a major renovation nearly 90 years after construction first started on what would become a city landmark.

The Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2pB0ygs>) reports that the Hotel Alex Johnson is holding an open house Friday to display its renovated rooms, including the Presidential Suite.

It marks the hotel's first major renovation since the 1970s, and workers are putting on the final touches this week. As part of the renovation, all guest rooms in the 11-story hotel were stripped to the walls and totally rebuilt.

Initial construction on the hotel started in October 1927, and the first guests checked in the following year. The hotel is on the National Register of Historic Places.

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

## High school senior never missed a day of class in 13 years

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City teen who will soon graduate has quite a record.

Central High School senior Tyler Cameron has never missed a day of classes his 13 years in the school system. Cameron says he's never been sick enough to skip a day and considers his attendance key to academic success. He says perfect attendance leads to a better education, a better job and a better life.

KOTA-TV (<http://bit.ly/2qvMTw6> ) reports Cameron has already taken 10 courses at Western Dakota Tech and hopes to earn a criminal justice degree.

Although Cameron has never missed a day of school, he was tardy one time. That's when he had a fender bender accident recently on the way to school. His tardy was excused.

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Information from: KOTA-TV, <http://www.kotatv.com>

## Barking dogs save rural Bath woman from house fire

BATH, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a woman who escaped unharmed from a house fire near Bath was saved by her dogs.

Brown County Emergency Manager Scott Meints tells the American News (<http://bit.ly/2qXJc25> ) that

the barking dogs woke Chastidy Pletten early Wednesday and alerted her to the flames.

Pletten and her pets weren't harmed, though the house was extensively damaged. The cause of the fire isn't known.

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

## **Acting FBI director undercuts White House on Comey firing**

**By ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — In ways both overt and subtle, the acting director of the FBI undermined White House explanations for the firing of former Director James Comey.

Andrew McCabe, testifying before Congress Tuesday in place of his fired boss, contradicted the administration's characterizations of an investigation into potential coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign to influence the presidential election.

McCabe told lawmakers a counterintelligence investigation that a White House spokeswoman dismissed a day earlier as "one of the smallest things" on the FBI's plate was actually "highly significant." And though the White House has asserted Comey lost the backing of rank-and-file agents, McCabe flatly said, "that is not accurate."

"I can tell you that the majority, the vast majority of FBI employees, enjoyed a deep and positive connection to Director Comey," said McCabe, who called it the "greatest privilege and honor in my professional life to work with him." Comey, he added, "enjoyed broad support within the FBI and still does to this day."

McCabe's testimony undercut a White House narrative that has evolved in the two days since Comey was ousted. The White House initially said President Donald Trump made the call at the recommendation of the top two officials at the Justice Department, but in an NBC News interview that aired Thursday, the president said he would have fired Comey even without the recommendation.

Testifying before the Senate Intelligence Committee, McCabe repeatedly — and at times bluntly — rejected some of the claims the White House has used to explain the firing and to describe the investigation.

In one of the more dramatic exchanges, he was asked whether the investigation was — as White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders maintained Wednesday — a small investigation in relation to the other work the FBI is conducting.

"Sir," he told Sen. Angus King of Maine, "we consider it to be a highly significant investigation."

He also said he would refrain from discussing the investigation with the White House, pledged to report to the committee any efforts to interfere in it and said the dismissal of the director would do nothing to impede the probe.

"You cannot stop the men and women of the FBI from doing the right thing," he declared.

Trump maintains Comey told him that he was not under investigation, but McCabe suggested under questioning that was highly improbable.

He refused to comment on what Comey did or didn't say, but when asked whether it would be common for an FBI director to notify someone they were not the target of an investigation, said "I'm not aware of that being a standard practice."

McCabe's willingness to cut against White House talking points may reflect an understanding that he may not serve for long as acting director. The Justice Department seemed to be laying the groundwork for that possibility even before his congressional appearance, with leaders there interviewing four other



candidates for the interim job Wednesday.

McCabe, a career FBI agent who ran the Washington field office and oversaw national security investigations out of headquarters, was a target of Trump's on the campaign trail following reports that his wife had accepted campaign donations from a close ally of Hillary Clinton during a failed bid for the state Senate.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

## **Forum on China's economic reach helps leader extend his own** **By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN and GILLIAN WONG, Associated Press**

BEIJING (AP) — China will seek to burnish President Xi Jinping's stature as a world-class statesman at an international gathering centered on his signature foreign policy effort that envisions a future world order in which all roads lead to Beijing.

The Belt and Road Forum opening Sunday is the latest in a series of high-profile appearances aimed at projecting Xi's influence on the global stage ahead of a key congress of the ruling Communist Party later this year. All feed a fundamental yearning among ordinary Chinese: to see their country's prestige and status rise.

"Xi is now seen as a world leader with a lot of influence and respect internationally and that will definitely boost his domestic appeal," said Joseph Cheng, a long-time observer of Chinese politics now retired from the City University of Hong Kong.

Leaders from 28 countries are set to attend, including Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines. The most prominent attendee from the West will be Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni.

Other Western nations, including the United States, will be represented by junior officials. Washington is sending a delegation led by Matt Pottinger, special assistant to the president and senior director for east Asia at the National Security Council. Britain, Germany and France are to be represented by finance officials.

That's partly because of developments at home, but also is a reflection of concerns that China may be exporting its standards on human rights, the environment and government transparency, while leaving poor countries with unsustainable levels of debt.

Yet the forum is as much about promoting Xi's image at home as it is about pushing his vision abroad.

Chinese state media outlets have linked Xi inextricably to the two-day gathering in Beijing, which will revolve around Xi's plan for a vast network of ports, railways and roads expanding China's trade with Asia, Africa and Europe. Xi has even popped up in a series of English-language promotional videos produced by the official China Daily called "Belt and Road Bedtime Stories."

"He's showing vision. Leaders have to be visionary. He's showing hope in their economic future by proposing a very significant economic plan," former U.S. ambassador to China Max Baucus told The Associated Press. "I think it's going to help him very much ahead of the next party congress."

The party will hold its twice-a-decade congress this fall at which Xi will oversee an infusion of fresh blood in leading bodies, most importantly the all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee. Xi rose to the top of an intensely competitive system riven by factions and rivalries to take the reins of the party in 2012, and has steadily accrued powers well beyond those of his predecessors in areas such as defense, internal security and the economy.

He's also fallen back on the hallowed tradition of political campaigns and sloganeering, preaching the "Chinese Dream" of prosperity and national rejuvenation, pushing a sweeping anti-corruption campaign

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and cracking down on the infiltration of "Western" democratic values that could threaten party control.

In the international sphere, he's presided over both the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and the G-20 meeting of industrialized states, both of which were attended by former President Barack Obama. In January, Xi sought to portray himself as a champion of globalization and free trade at the World Economic Forum in Davos, in contrast to President Donald Trump's protectionist rhetoric.

On an entirely different level though is his signature initiative formally known as "One Belt, One Road."

It aims to reassert China's past prominence as the dominant power in Asia whose culture and economy deeply influenced its neighbors as far as Africa and Europe. It speaks deeply to Chinese pride in their country's explosive economic growth and political clout after a century of humiliation at the hands of foreign powers that formally ended with Mao Zedong's communist revolution in 1949.

The initiative also furthers the Xi administration's reputation for muscular foreign policy. Under Xi, China has strongly asserted its claim to virtually the entire strategic South China Sea and established the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank as a global institution alongside the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and International Monetary Fund.

And unlike APEC and Davos, it involves the disbursal of potentially trillions of dollars in contracts, expanding both China's economic reach and Xi's personal authority as holder of the purse strings. The ADB says the region, home to 60 percent of the world's people, needs more than \$26 trillion of infrastructure investment by 2030 to keep economies growing.

"China has not just the resources now, which is key, but also the vision and desire and strategy to push its engagement outside its borders," Afghan Ambassador Janan Mosazai told the AP.

A rail cargo link between China and Central Asia across the northern Afghan province of Balkh opened in August and the country is discussing possible Chinese investment in rail, hydropower and fiber-optic networks.

Yet the initiative also comes with significant risks to Xi's stature and legacy.

So far, it's been loosely defined and appears to be including more and more projects of peripheral importance and questionable value. Since so many of the states involved have weak economies and limited capacity for growth outside of mining, the potential for waste and corruption is high, raising the possibility of small returns on the vast sums being spent and massive losses for the Chinese state banks funding the projects.

The initiative could also set back the goal of establishing a domestic economy centered on consumption rather than investment, warns political commentator Hu Xingdou.

"China's investment priority should be at home, not abroad," Hu said, adding that such forward-leaping overseas investments "may delay domestic development."

Already, there is much discussion of Chinese foreign policy failures and economic losses in places such as North Korea, Sri Lanka and Venezuela, said Cheng, the Hong Kong scholar.

"It's easy to just give out money," Cheng said. "China has to prove that these projects are sound and they have the management expertise to carry them through."

## US prosecutors told to push for more, harsher punishments

By **SADIE GURMAN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Jeff Sessions is directing federal prosecutors to pursue the most serious charges possible against the vast majority of suspects, a reversal of Obama-era policies that is sure to send more people to prison and for much longer terms.

The move has long been expected from Sessions, a former federal prosecutor who cut his teeth during the height of the crack cocaine epidemic and who has promised to make combating violence and drugs

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the Justice Department's top priority.

"This policy affirms our responsibility to enforce the law, is moral and just, and produces consistency," Sessions wrote in a memo sent Thursday night to U.S. attorneys and made public early Friday.

The move amounts to an unmistakable undoing of Obama administration criminal justice policies that aimed to ease overcrowding in federal prisons and contributed to a national rethinking of how drug criminals were prosecuted and sentenced. Critics said the change will subject more lower-level offenders to unfairly harsh mandatory minimum sentences.

Sessions contends a spike in violence in some big cities and the nation's opioid epidemic show the need for a return to tougher tactics.

"The opioid and heroin epidemic is a contributor to the recent surge of violent crime in America," Sessions said in remarks prepared for a Thursday speech in Charleston, West Virginia. "Drug trafficking is an inherently violent business. If you want to collect a drug debt, you can't, and don't, file a lawsuit in court. You collect it by the barrel of a gun."

The policy memo says prosecutors should "charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense" — something more likely to trigger mandatory minimum sentences. Those rules limit a judge's discretion and are typically dictated, for example, by the quantity of drugs involved in a crime. The memo concedes there will be cases in which "good judgment" will warrant a prosecutor to veer from that rule. But any exceptions will need to be approved by top supervisors, and the reasons must be documented, allowing the Justice Department to track the handling of such cases by its 94 U.S. attorney's offices.

And even if they opt not to pursue the most serious charges, prosecutors are still required to provide judges with all the details of a case when defendants are sentenced, which could lengthen prison terms.

The requirements "place great confidence in our prosecutors and supervisors to apply them in a thoughtful and disciplined manner, with the goal of achieving just and consistent results in federal cases," the memo states.

The directive rescinds guidance by Sessions' Democratic predecessor, Eric Holder, who told prosecutors they could in some cases leave drug quantities out of charging documents so as not to trigger long sentences. Holder's 2013 initiative, known as "Smart on Crime," was aimed at encouraging shorter sentences for nonviolent drug offenders and preserving Justice Department resources for more serious and violent criminals.

Though Holder did say that prosecutors ordinarily should charge the most serious offense, he instructed them to do an "individualized assessment" of the defendant's conduct. And he outlined exceptions for not pursuing mandatory minimum sentences, including if a defendant's crime does not involve violence or if the person doesn't have a leadership role in a criminal organization.

The Obama policy shift coincided with U.S. Sentencing Commission changes that made tens of thousands of federal drug prisoners eligible for early release, and an Obama administration clemency initiative that freed convicts deemed deserving of a second chance. Combined, those changes led to a steep decline in a federal prison population that now stands at just under 190,000, down from nearly 220,000 in 2013. Nearly half of those inmates are in custody for drug crimes, records show.

Obama administration officials cited that decline and a drop in the overall number of drug prosecutions as evidence that policies were working as intended. They argued prosecutors were getting pickier about the cases they were bringing and were seeking mandatory minimum sentences less often.

Still, some prosecutors felt constrained by the Holder directive and expressed concern that they'd lose plea bargaining leverage — and a key inducement for cooperation — without the ability to more freely pursue harsher punishments.



Sessions and other Justice Department officials argue Holder's approach sidestepped federal laws that impose such sentences and created inconsistency across the country in the way defendants are punished. Even while in the Senate, Sessions repeatedly asserted that eliminating mandatory minimums weakened the ability of law enforcement to protect the public.

Advocates for the previous policy said the change will revive the worst aspects of the drug war.

"It looks like we're going to fill the prisons back up after finally getting the federal prison population down," said Kevin Ring, president of Families Against Mandatory Minimums. "But the social and human costs will be much higher."

## 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. SHIFTING WHITE HOUSE EXPLANATIONS FOR FBI DIRECTOR'S FIRING

President Donald Trump is now declaring he had planned to fire that "showboat" all along.

### 2. A HIGH-STAKES INTERNATIONAL GATHERING FOR CHINA'S PRESIDENT

The "Belt and Road Forum" opening Sunday will showcase Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy effort envisioning a future world order in which all roads lead to Beijing.

### 3. JORDAN SENDING THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES BACK TO SYRIA

Entire Syrian families have been sent back for the first time, including large numbers of children, which a rights groups says is a violation of international norms.

### 4. POPE FRANCIS VISITS FATIMA TO HONOR CHILDREN WHO CHANGED CHURCH

Pilgrims from around the world are flocking to the shrine town in Portugal to honor two illiterate shepherd children whose visions of the Virgin Mary 100 years ago marked one of the most important events of the 20th-century Catholic Church.

### 5. WORLD'S TOP FINANCE OFFICIALS TO HEAR ABOUT TRUMP'S TAX AND TRADE PLANS

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is due at the gathering in Italy to explain the president's push for what he considers more balanced trading relationships.

### 6. ARGENTINA'S FEDERAL POLICE WELCOMES BACK TRANSGENDER OFFICER

Analia Pasantino served in Argentina's federal police as a man for 20 years before being forced to resign when she came out as a transgender woman.

### 7. NEW TV AD AIMS TO RECRUIT MORE WOMEN FOR US MARINES

The smallest military service has the lowest percentage of women, and wants at least 10 percent representation by 2019.

### 8. WHO IS FACING PRISON TIME FOR OBSTRUCTING AN FBI INVESTIGATION

Former Los Angeles Sheriff Lee Baca is relying on a lifetime of public service, letters of support and his diagnosis of Alzheimer's in a bid for probation at his sentencing hearing.

### 9. WHY NEW ZEALAND WANTS TO GET RID OF ALL OF ITS RATS

The plan is part of an ambitious — some say impossible — goal of ridding the entire nation of non-native predators to save its birds.

### 10. NEW YORK COUPLE TO WED AFTER LOSING ALMOST 600 POUNDS TOGETHER

Ronnie Brower was on a four-year fitness journey when he met Andrea Masella at his gym where she was similarly trying to lose a lot of weight.

## US Treasury chief to brief key allies on Trump policies

By DAVID McHUGH, AP Business Writers

BARI, Italy (AP) — Top finance officials from seven advanced economies have gathered to hear more about U.S. President Donald Trump's economic policies on taxation and trade as well as to look for ways to promote growth, combat terrorist financing and stop tax avoidance by major corporations.

The meeting of the Group of 7 finance ministers in the southern Italian seaside town of Bari kicked off Friday with a discussion with economists on how to make growth benefit more people.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin was due to explain Trump's plans to cut business taxes and regulation, as well as the president's push for what he considers more balanced trading relationships. He was to meet separately Friday with Germany's finance minister, Wolfgang Schaeuble, and then with Japan's deputy prime minister and finance minister Taro Aso.

The group is gathering with the global economy showing steady growth. There are concerns that the economy has not reached the levels seen before the global financial crisis, and that labor productivity continues to lag. Increasing output per worker is key to generating growth, and economists say it may be held back by businesses' reluctance to invest in plants and equipment due to lingering fear from the Great Recession, as well as uncertainty about new regulations.

In theory, corporate tax cuts and deregulation along the lines proposed by Trump could address some of those problems in the world's largest economy. But the details, and to what extent those policies will be implemented, remain unclear.

During his presidential campaign, Trump repeatedly charged that past administrations had failed to take a tough stand on enforcing trade agreements and this failure had cost millions of good-paying factory jobs and resulted in an enormous U.S. trade deficit. Since taking office, his administration has issued a report that names two G-7 countries, Germany and Japan, for special monitoring because of their large trade surpluses with the U.S. and has sparked a trade battle with Canada, another G-7 country, by imposing higher tariffs on imports of Canadian softwood lumber.

Mnuchin said a trade deal announced Friday with China showed the success of the Trump administration's trade approach.

"We are excited about U.S. trade policies and I think you probably saw last night we made an announcement on a hundred day economic plan with the Chinese," he said as he headed into the meeting in the town's 13th-Century fortress. "We are very happy on how we are proceeding on trade."

The deal would allow U.S. companies to ship liquefied natural gas to China and tackles a range of long-standing barriers, ending a ban on imports of U.S. beef and moving a step closer to allowing Chinese poultry on American supermarket shelves. It covers a range of long-standing barriers from agriculture to energy to the operation of American financial firms in China.

The Italian hosts say the meeting themes will include making economic growth benefit more people; coordination among international financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; and efforts to stop companies from dodging taxes by moving income across borders.

The meeting prepares the way for a summit at the level of presidents and prime ministers in Taormina, Sicily, on May 26-27.

The G-7 countries are Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, the United States and U.K., with representatives of the European Union also attending.

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Martin Crutsinger in Washington contributed to this report.

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This story has been corrected to show that the summit in Taormina will be held May 26-27, not May

25-26.

## **New TV ad shows Marines looking for a few good women**

**By LOLITA C. BALDOR, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Marine in full combat gear moves through dark, frigid water, gripping an M-16 rifle, before plunging under barbed wire and through a submerged drainage pipe. It is only when the fighter shouts an order over the sound of explosions does the historical nature of the TV advertisement become clear: the Marine is a woman.

For a Corps that has struggled with the perception that it is the least welcoming of women among the military services, the new ad is part of a campaign to appeal to a new generation of Marines. It is also a bid for more female recruits for “the few, the proud,” particularly athletes capable of meeting the tough physical standards required.

“The water was 27 degrees and coated with a layer of thick ice,” said Marine Capt. Erin Demchko, describing the great difficulty of the gauntlet, all while being surrounded by camera crews. “Giving the film production staff what they wanted, while maintaining my bearing as a Marine officer and trying not to look cold, was a challenge.”

Demchko, a deputy commander at Camp Courtney in Okinawa, Japan, is part of the Marine Corps’ expanding effort to recruit women. The smallest military service has the lowest percentage of women, and wants at least 10 percent representation by 2019. While female Marines occasionally have appeared in ads and been featured in online videos, this is the first time a woman is the focus of a national television commercial for the Corps.

The service is battling an image problem, especially after a recent scandal involving nude photos shared online. Many were accompanied by crude, derogatory or even violent comments about women. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service is investigating the matter and several Marines have been disciplined.

But the perception of the Marines as a male domain goes back further. They were the only service to seek an exception when the Pentagon moved to allow women to serve in all combat jobs. That request was denied in late 2015 by then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter.

Since then, 74 women have moved into combat jobs previously open only to men. In total, women make up about 8.3 percent of the 183,000-strong Corps.

The Marines want more. And the ad aims to increase awareness among women about new opportunities, said Maj. Gen. Paul Kennedy, head of Marine Corps Recruiting Command.

The message is for potential recruits to “not think that we are only looking for a few good men, that we’re actually using all of our recurring efforts to find good women as well,” he said.

The Marines don’t expect instant results. Low unemployment rates, competition among employers, and the need to increase the overall size of the Marine Corps make recruiting women a challenge.

“We’re facing headwinds now that we didn’t have even a year ago,” said Kennedy, who huddled with counterparts from the other military services last week. “There’s a train wreck coming for some folks. They’re not getting tail winds that they used to have — the high unemployment, the money that was associated with enlistment bonuses.”

Still, he said he expects female recruits to comprise almost a tenth of the Marines entering the service this year.

The ad is being released Friday. It shows a young school girl interceding when students bully another girl. It then follows her as she plays rugby and trains and serves as a Marine. Titled “Battle Up,” the



commercial seeks to show the Marines' fighting spirit and how it carries from youth through combat missions.

For Demchko, filming the commercial was unlike anything she'd ever done.

Small scenes were shot again and again, with multiple cameras following her every move. At a school for Marine Corps officer candidates in Virginia, the crew chopped through a thick layer of ice to film the scenes in the water. They followed her as she pulled herself over logs and barbed wire in the obstacle course at Quantico, known as the Quigley. And she and others shot live rounds during a convoy scene.

While the maneuvers and combat actions were familiar, "everything felt different with all the staff and cameras," said Demchko, who grew up in Hackensack, N.J., and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy. She already has served a tour in Afghanistan.

While the ad "is targeted at young women who are seeking a way to challenge themselves," she said it could entice anyone who wants to fight for their country.

"I am extremely humbled to be a part of such a big production," she said. "Professional actors can keep their jobs, though. I'd rather be a Marine."

## Trump contradicts White House on reasons for Comey firing

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — Contradicting previous White House explanations, President Donald Trump has declared he had planned to fire FBI Director James Comey all along, regardless of whether top Justice Department officials recommended the stunning step. His assertions came as Comey's temporary replacement joined in, contradicting other administration statements on the snowballing controversy.

In an interview with NBC News, Trump also said he'd asked Comey point-blank if he was under investigation and was assured three times he was not. Trump showed no concern that the request might be viewed as interference in an active FBI probe into his 2016 campaign's possible ties to Russia's election meddling.

"I said, 'If it's possible, would you let me know, am I under investigation?' He said you are not under investigation," Trump said. He said the discussions happened in two phone calls and at a dinner in which Comey was asking to keep his job.

Comey has not confirmed Trump's account.

The New York Times late Thursday cited two unnamed Comey associates who recounted his tale of a January dinner with the president in which Trump asked for a pledge of loyalty. Comey declined, instead offering "honesty." When Trump then pressed for "honest loyalty," Comey told the president, "You will have that," said the associates, who told the newspaper they agreed to keep the story confidential while Comey was FBI director.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders disputed the report and said the president would "never even suggest the expectation of personal loyalty."

But the account echoed wording in a comment made a day earlier to The Associated Press by long-time Comey friend Daniel Richman, a former federal prosecutor, who said the president had removed "somebody unwilling to pledge absolute loyalty to him."

The White House initially cited a Justice Department memo criticizing Comey's handling of last year's investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails as the impetus for Trump's decision. But Trump on Thursday acknowledged for the first time that the Russia investigation — which he dismissed as a "made-up story" — was also on his mind as he ousted the man overseeing the probe.

The shifting accounts of the decision to fire Comey, whom Trump derided as a "showboat" and "grandstander," added to a mounting sense of uncertainty and chaos in the West Wing, as aides scrambled

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to get their stories straight and appease an angry president. Not even Vice President Mike Pence was spared the embarrassment of having told a version of events that was later discredited by Trump.

The White House's explanations continued to crumble throughout the day Thursday. On Capitol Hill, acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe strongly disputed the White House's assertion that Comey had been fired in part because he had lost the confidence of the FBI's rank-and-file.

"That is not accurate," McCabe said. "Director Comey enjoyed broad support within the FBI and still does to this day."

Unfazed, Sanders insisted she had heard from "countless" members of the FBI who welcomed the president's decision.

McCabe also pointed out the remarkable nature of Trump's version of his conversations with Comey. McCabe told a Senate panel it was not "standard practice" to tell an individual whether they are or are not under investigation.

Previous presidents have made a public show of staying out of legal matters, so as not to appear to be injecting politics. Trump's comments demonstrated his striking deviation from that practice.

The ousted director himself is said to be confident that his own version of events will come out, possibly in an appearance before Congress, according to an associate who has been in touch with him since his firing Tuesday.

Trump and Comey's relationship was strained early on, in part because of the president's explosive and unsubstantiated claims that Barack Obama wiretapped Trump Tower. Comey found the allegations confounding, according to his associate, and wondered what to make of what he described as strange thoughts coming from his new boss.

The president was no kinder to Comey on Thursday, calling him names and saying he'd left the FBI in "virtual turmoil." He said that while he received a scathing assessment of Comey's performance from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on Monday, that memo was not a catalyst for his dramatic decision as the White House had said earlier.

"I was going to fire Comey," Trump said. "Regardless of recommendation I was going to fire Comey."

That's far different than the White House's initial account in the hours after Comey's firing. Multiple officials, including Pence, said the president was acting at the behest of Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

But it quickly became clear that the president had been stewing for days over the Russia investigation and Comey's refusal to defend him in appearances before lawmakers. By Wednesday afternoon, the officials, like Trump, were saying he had in fact been considering ousting the FBI director for months because of a lack of confidence in his ability to lead the agency.

And the Russia investigation was still on his mind.

"In fact when I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said you know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story, it's an excuse by the Democrats for having lost an election that they should have won," he said.

Sanders attributed the disconnect in the week's explanations to the fact that she had not directly asked Trump when he'd made the decision to fire Comey until shortly before Thursday's press briefing.

White House officials and others insisted on anonymity in order to disclose private conversations and internal deliberations.

The White House said Trump is weighing options for replacing Comey, a decision that could have broad implications for the future of the Russia investigation. Some senior officials have discussed nominating Rep. Trey Gowdy, the South Carolina Republican who ran the House committee that investigated

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's actions in connection with the 2012 attack on a U.S. compound in Benghazi, Libya.

Trump's advisers have repeatedly tried to downplay the Russia-election matter, with Sanders saying Wednesday the FBI was "doing a whole lot more than the Russia investigation."

But McCabe characterized the investigation as "highly significant" and assured senators that Comey's firing would not hinder it. He promised he would tolerate no interference from the White House and would not provide the administration with updates on its progress.

"You cannot stop the men and women of the FBI from doing the right thing," he declared. He said there has been no interference so far.

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Pearson reported from New York. Associated Press writers Darlene Superville, Deb Riechmann and Eric Tucker in Washington contributed to this report.

## **China, US reach agreement on beef, poultry and natural gas**

**By MARTIN CRUTSINGER and JILL COLVIN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — China will finally open its borders to U.S. beef while cooked Chinese poultry is closer to hitting American supermarket shelves as part of a U.S.-China trade agreement.

Trump administration officials hailed the deal as a significant advance toward boosting U.S. exports and close America's trade gap with the world's second-largest economy.

The United States would also allow U.S. companies to ship liquefied natural gas to China as part of the bilateral agreement reached following President Donald Trump's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in April. It covers a range of long-standing barriers from agriculture to energy to the operation of American financial firms in China.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross hailed the agreement as "a herculean accomplishment" forged in record time.

"This is more than has been done in the whole history of U.S.-China relations on trade," Ross told reporters Thursday evening at the White House. "Normally trade deals are denominated in multiple years, not tens of days."

In Beijing, Vice Finance Minister Zhu Guangyao told reporters that the early results of the agreement showed that economic collaboration between the two sides "couldn't be closer."

But while the agreement touches on many of the trade barriers American companies have long complained about, it remains to be seen how far China will go to allow more American exports. Previous administrations have hailed market-opening agreements only to be left disappointed.

"The key in these negotiations is specifics that are enforceable — literally the devil is in the details," said Scott Mulhauser, the former chief of staff at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

"The more these agreements include real, concrete outcomes rather than platitudes, rehashing old ground or punts to the future, the better they are. American companies, workers, farmers and more are eager for more access to Chinese markets and they'll look to ensure reality matches the rhetoric of these promises," Mulhauser said.

Trump has made America's massive trade deficits and specifically the gap with China a major issue in his campaign and during the early days of his administration. He's argued that America's perennial trade deficits have cost millions of factory jobs and pledged to take a tougher stance in trade negotiations to lower the imbalances.

Under the agreement, the United States would welcome Chinese companies negotiating agreements



to purchase U.S.-produced liquefied natural gas. The Energy Department has already authorized the shipment of 19.2 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas exports to China and other interested countries, the Commerce Department said.

A number of U.S. companies are seeking permits to build facilities to process liquefied gas, which would allow America to become a net exporter of gas, something it has not been since the 1950s. China is attempting to turn to natural gas as a way to reduce its dependence on coal and combat the country's extensive air pollution. The move would allow China to diversify its supply and provide a significant market for American suppliers — though the expansion could boost prices for U.S. consumers.

Ross downplayed the impact, pointing to the decline in natural gas prices. "If you look at it on a historical basis, there's plenty of room to go back up," he said. "It's not as though this is going to wreck anybody's pocketbook."

The agreement would also ease import restrictions on agricultural goods, including ending China's ban on beef imports that was imposed in 2003 after a case of mad-cow disease. The Bush and Obama administrations have sought for years to get it removed.

In exchange, the U.S. would allow the sale of cooked Chinese poultry — a move Ross said could be done safely. "We do not intend to endanger anybody's health or safety in the U.S.," he said.

The agreement would also streamline the evaluation of pending U.S. biotechnology product applications; pave the way for allowing American-owned suppliers of electronic payment services to begin the licensing processes in China and facilitate the entrance of Chinese banks into the U.S. banking market, among other measures.

The agreement grew out of negotiations both countries agreed to start after Trump's meeting at his Mar-a-Lago estate with the Chinese president. The areas dealt with in the initial agreement represent export opportunities that American companies have long sought.

America's trade deficit in goods and services with China totaled \$310 billion last year, by far the largest imbalance with any country. The deficit with China represented about 60 percent of the country's total deficit last year of \$500.6 billion.

The two countries have also agreed to hold high-level talks this summer to be led by Ross, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang to work on a one-year plan.

These talks represent the latest effort to resolve contentious trade issues between the world's two largest economies in a process that began during the administration of George W. Bush under Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson. Both countries got together twice a year. The Obama administration continued that effort but reduced the frequency of the talks to once a year.

While Trump had earlier said China could receive more favorable trade terms from the U.S. in return for help in persuading North Korea to cease its nuclear and missile activities, Zhu downplayed any suggestion of a link between the two.

"Both sides have a deep and close understanding that the U.S.-China economic relationship can't be politicized," Zhu said.

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Associated Press writers Gerry Shih in Beijing and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

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Associated Press writers Gerry Shih in Beijing and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

## **Mormon church severs some of its ties to the Boy Scouts.**

**By BRADY McCOMBS, Associated Press**

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The Mormon church, the biggest sponsor of Boy Scout troops in the United States, announced Thursday it is pulling as many as 185,000 older youths from the organization as part of an effort to start its own scouting-like program.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said the move wasn't triggered by the Boy Scouts' decision in 2015 to allow gay troop leaders, since Mormon-sponsored troops have remained free to exclude such adults on religious grounds.

But at least one leading Mormon scholar said that the Boy Scouts and the church have been diverging on values in recent years and that the policy on gays was probably a contributing factor in the split.

Saying it wants a new, simplified program of its own that is more closely tailored to Mormon teenagers, the church announced that boys ages 14 to 18 will no longer participate in the Boy Scouts starting next year. The church said the decision will affect 185,000 teens; the Boy Scouts put the number at 130,000.

The loss is only a small portion of the 2.3 million youths in the Boy Scouts of America, but the organization has been grappling with declining membership for years and has enjoyed an unusually close bond with the Mormon church for more than a century because of their shared values. Joining the Boy Scouts is practically automatic among Mormon boys.

Boy Scouts of America spokeswoman Effie Delimarkos said the organization is saddened by the decision but understands the church's desire to customize a program.

About 280,000 Mormon boys ages 8 to 13 will remain in the Scouts while the church develops its program, the Mormons said. The Boy Scouts estimated their number at 330,000. The church did not

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say when the younger boys will be withdrawn from the Boy Scouts.

Bryan Burton, a 26-year-old Mormon in Salt Lake City, said the decision makes sense. He likes the idea that the church is moving toward its own scouting program.

"We're trying to be an inclusive church worldwide," Burton said. "If our Boy Scouts is only for boys in America, what are we doing for the rest of the world?"

Like other conservative faiths, the Mormon church opposes gay marriage and teaches that being in a homosexual relationship is a sin. The church initially said it was "deeply troubled" by the Boy Scouts' policy change on gays but stayed with the organization after receiving assurances it could appoint troop leaders according to its own religious and moral values.

In Thursday's announcement, the church said that it learned recently that the Boy Scouts are considering admitting girls, but that its decision was made independently of that.

Matthew Bowman, a Mormon scholar and history professor at Henderson State University, said the schism reflects the two organizations' diverging values, with gays and girls among the issues on which they are moving apart.

"The church is wedded very much to traditional gender roles and they see the Boy Scouts of America increasingly move away from that," Bowman said. "That means that they have come to see it as less of a hospitable place."

Thursday's announcement represents a first step toward something that has been in the works for years: a Mormon-run scouting-type program that could be used in congregations around the world. The church has 15.8 million members, nearly 6 in 10 of them outside the U.S. and Canada. The programs the church uses with the Boy Scouts of America are only available in the U.S. and Canada.

"The long game here is the church looking forward to a time when Americans are even more of a minority in the church than they are now," Bowman said.

Mormon teenagers who want to continue working toward the Eagle Scout rank will be able to do that on their own while also participating in the new program, said church spokesman Eric Hawkins.

The Boy Scout movement has been entrenched in Mormon culture for as long as anyone can remember.

In 2013, the church put on an extravagant theatrical production inside its 21,000-seat auditorium in Salt Lake City to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the faith's alliance with the Boy Scouts.

A Boy Scout training complex in West Virginia is named after Mormon church President Thomas S. Monson, a longtime member of the Boy Scouts' executive board and a major supporter. Charles Dahlquist II, a Mormon, holds the top volunteer position with the Boy Scouts.

Becoming an Eagle Scout is an especially proud badge of honor within Mormon culture. Many Utah lawmakers list it on their resumes. Social media was buzzing with jokes Thursday about Mormon women adjusting their hopes of finding a husband who was an Eagle Scout.

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This story has been corrected to show that the Mormon church says 185,000 teenagers will no longer participate in the Boy Scouts, not 180,000.

## Spurs rout James Harden, Rockets 114-75 to win series

By KRISTIE RIEKEN, AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — San Antonio is heading to the Western Conference finals for the 13th time thanks to a player who has never been there.

The Spurs eliminated the sluggish James Harden and Houston Rockets with a 114-75 victory in Game 6 on Thursday night behind a season-high 34 points from LaMarcus Aldridge in a game they played



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without All-Star Kawhi Leonard.

Aldridge, who is in his 11th season and second in San Antonio, had failed to get out of the second round in his previous six postseason trips. He added 12 rebounds in his second big game of the Western Conference semifinal series to pick up the scoring slack with Leonard out after rolling his ankle in San Antonio's overtime victory in Game 5 on Tuesday night.

"He's really turned it on," coach Gregg Popovich said. "Demanded the ball, got in good position ... he was wonderful on the boards and of course he passes it really, really well and gets it moving for us."

Aldridge became the first Spur to score 34 points with 12 rebounds in a playoff game since Tim Duncan against Phoenix in 2008.

"I just touched it a little bit more tonight so I had a chance to figure it out," Aldridge said. "I was trying to be more dominant down there. So I was willing to take some contested shots tonight and I got into my rhythm early and after that I was good to go."

The Spurs were up by 19 by halftime in a game that was over quickly, and didn't let up to reach the Western Conference finals for the first time since winning the title in 2014. The 4-2 series win sends them to conference finals against the Golden State Warriors.

Trevor Ariza led Houston with 20 points on a night when MVP hopeful Harden capped his stellar season by tying a season low with 10 points on 2-of-11 shooting before fouling out with 3:15 left.

A somber Harden was clear about who was to blame for the loss.

"Everything falls on my shoulders," he said. "I take responsibility for it, both ends of the floor. It's tough, especially the way we lost at home for Game 6. But it happened and we move forward."

Houston coach Mike D'Antoni wasn't sure if the disappointment of losing a winnable Game 5 could have lingered with his team and contributed to this embarrassing blowout.

"It could," he said. "I've been on both sides of this thing. Sometimes life hits you in the face. No matter what it was, we just didn't have it tonight."

Jonathon Simmons filled in nicely for Leonard, scoring 18 points and hounding the Rockets on defense.

San Antonio was up by 23 after the third quarter and scored the first seven points of the fourth to make it 94-64 and send many of the home fans streaming to the exits.

Already without veteran Tony Parker, who suffered a season-ending quadriceps injury in Game 2, the Spurs looked to be the underdog entering this one without Leonard's scoring and defense.

Instead, things went wrong early for the Rockets with Aldridge scoring 10 points in the first quarter as San Antonio dashed out to a 31-24. Houston was already down 50-29 when Harden took his first shot midway through the second quarter. He made that 3-pointer to whittle the lead a bit, but it didn't get the Rockets going.

The Spurs opened the third quarter with an 8-1 run, with six points from Aldridge, to extend their already big lead to 69-43 with about 9 1/2 minutes left.

The Rockets used a 7-2 spurt after that with 3-pointers from Ariza and Eric Gordon to cut the lead to 71-50 with about seven minutes remaining in the third.

A 3-pointer by Harden not long after that got Houston within 20, but San Antonio scored the next four points to make it 77-53 a couple of minutes later.

Houston, which relied on its 3-point shooting to get this far, couldn't make shots from long-range going 13 of 40. But the Rockets also had trouble scoring in general, making just 28.6 percent (22 of 77) of their shots overall.

TIP-INS

Spurs: Danny Green got a technical in the third quarter for a scuffle with Ariza. ... Patty Mills had 14 points and seven assists, and Pau Gasol added 10 points and 11 rebounds.

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Rockets: Ariza received a technical in the third for the scuffle with Ariza. ... Coach Mike D'Antoni added Sam Dekker to the rotation after being criticized for not adding anyone to the rotation Tuesday in the first game since Nene suffered a season-ending thigh injury. Dekker had six points ... Clint Capela finished with 15 points and 12 rebounds.

## STINGY DEFENSE

The Spurs held the Rockets to less than 100 points for the third time in this series after they been limited to less than 100 points just five times in the regular season. The 75 points Houston scored on Thursday night was a season low and the fewest points the franchise had scored in a playoff game since managing just 70 against the Los Angeles Lakers on May 17, 2009.

## THEY SAID IT

Gasol on the lopsided win: "No one expected a Game 6 ... win like this, but we just played hard."

## UP NEXT

Game 1 of the conference finals is Sunday at Golden State.

More AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/tag/NBAbasketball>

## 4-nation drills postponed after craft runs aground on Guam

By HAVEN DALEY and AUDREY McAVOY, Associated Press

NAVAL BASE GUAM (AP) — Multinational military drills on Guam designed to show support for the free passage of vessels in international waters amid concerns China may restrict access to the South China Sea have been indefinitely postponed after a French landing craft ran aground Friday.

U.S. Navy Capt. Jeff Grimes, chief of staff for Joint Region Marianas, told reporters he didn't know when the drills would resume.

"Currently we are working with our partners to include the Coast Guard, the Guam Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and other federal and local agencies and stakeholders to further assess the situation," Grimes said. "Finally, I have directed that we stop all operations associated with this exercise until we conduct a further assessment of the situation as we gather all the facts."

A French catamaran landing craft ran aground just offshore, said Jeff Landis, a spokesman for Naval Base Guam. The vessel didn't hit coral or spill any fuel, he said. No one was injured. Friday's landing was meant to be a rehearsal for a drill at Tinian island on Saturday, Landis said.

The exercises involving the U.S., U.K., France and Japan were expected to begin Friday and last a week.

The drills around Guam and Tinian islands were scheduled to include amphibious landings, delivering forces by helicopter and urban patrols.

Two French ships on a four-month deployment to the Indian and Pacific oceans were to be featured in the drills. Joining were Japanese forces, U.K. helicopters and 70 U.K. troops deployed with the French amphibious assault ship FS Mistral. Parts of the exercise were to feature British helicopters taking U.S. Marines ashore from a French vessel.

"The message we want to send is that we're always ready to train and we're always ready for the next crisis and humanitarian disaster wherever that may be," U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col Kemper Jones, the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, said before the exercises were to begin. About 100 Marines from Jones' unit were expected to be part of the drills slated for this weekend and next week.

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China claims virtually the entire South China Sea and has aggressively tried to fortify its foothold in recent years by transforming seven mostly submerged reefs into island outposts, some with runways and radars and — more recently — weapons systems. The work is opposed by the other claimants to the atolls and the United States, which insists on freedom of navigation in international waters.

Critics fear China's actions could restrict movement in a key waterway for world trade and rich fishing grounds.

China says its island construction is mainly for civilian purposes, particularly to increase safety for ships. It has said it won't interfere with freedom of navigation or overflight, although questions remain on whether that includes military ships and aircraft.

Mira Rapp-Hooper of the Center for New American Security, a Washington think tank, said the exercises will send a strong message in support of a "rules-based order in Asia" at a time when China's actions have raised questions about this.

"A reminder in this exercise is that lots of other countries besides the United States have an interest in that international order," said Rapp-Hooper, who is a senior fellow with the center's Asia-Pacific Security Program.

Meanwhile, this week the top Republican and Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee wrote President Donald Trump to express concern that the U.S. hasn't conducted freedom of navigation operations since October.

The letter from Republican Sen. Bob Corker, Democrat Sen. Ben Cardin and five other senators supported a recent assessment by the commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific that China is militarizing the South China Sea and is continuing a "methodical strategy" to control it.

The letter, dated Wednesday and obtained by The Associated Press, urged the administration to "routinely exercise" freedom of navigation and overflight. The senators described the South China Sea as critical to U.S. national security interests and to peace in the Asia-Pacific.

The Guam exercises come amid modestly growing European interest in the South China Sea, said David Santoro, a senior fellow for nuclear policy at Pacific Forum CSIS, a Honolulu think tank.

"What I'm hearing from the French and to some degree the British, is an increased interest in what's going on in Asia and how they can help," Santoro said.

Japan, which sent 50 soldiers and 160 sailors and landing craft, has been investing in amphibious training so it can defend its own islands. Tokyo is particularly concerned China might attempt to take over rocky, uninhabited outcrops in the East China Sea that Japan controls but Beijing claims. Japan calls the islands Senkaku while China calls them Diaoyu. Japan has also expressed an interest in vessels being able to freely transit the South China Sea.

Guam and Tinian are about 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers) south of Tokyo. They're about the same distance to the east from Manila, Philippines.

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McAvoy reported from Honolulu. Associated Press writer Matthew Pennington contributed to this report from Washington.

## **Trump: I was going to fire that 'showboat' no matter what**

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — Contradicting previous White House explanations, President Donald Trump declared Thursday he had planned to fire FBI Director James Comey all along, regardless of whether top Justice Department officials recommended the stunning step. His assertions came as Comey's

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temporary replacement joined in, contradicting other administration statements on the snowballing controversy.

In an interview with NBC News, Trump also said he'd asked Comey point-blank if he was under investigation and was assured three times he was not. Trump showed no concern that the request might be viewed as interference in an active FBI probe into his 2016 campaign's possible ties to Russia's election meddling.

"I said, 'If it's possible, would you let me know am I under investigation?' He said you are not under investigation," Trump told NBC. He said the discussions happened in two phone calls and at a dinner in which Comey was asking to keep his job.

Comey has not confirmed Trump's account.

The New York Times late Thursday cited two unnamed Comey associates who recounted his tale of a January dinner with the president in which Trump asked for a pledge of loyalty. Comey declined, instead offering "honesty." When Trump then pressed for "honest loyalty," Comey told the president, "you will have that," said the associates, who told the newspaper they agreed to keep the story confidential while Comey was FBI director.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders disputed the report and said the president would "never even suggest the expectation of personal loyalty."

But the account echoed wording in a comment made a day earlier to The Associated Press by long-time Comey friend Daniel Richman, a former federal prosecutor, who said the president had removed "somebody unwilling to pledge absolute loyalty to him."

The White House initially cited a Justice Department memo criticizing Comey's handling of last year's investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails as the impetus for Trump's decision. But Trump on Thursday acknowledged for the first time that the Russia investigation — which he dismissed as a "made-up story" — was also on his mind as he ousted the man overseeing the probe.

The shifting accounts of the decision to fire Comey, whom Trump derided as a "showboat" and "grandstander," added to a mounting sense of uncertainty and chaos in the West Wing, as aides scrambled to get their stories straight and appease an angry president. Not even Vice President Mike Pence was spared the embarrassment of having told a version of events that was later discredited by Trump.

The White House's explanations continued to crumble throughout the day Thursday. On Capitol Hill, acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe strongly disputed the White House's assertion that Comey had been fired in part because he had lost the confidence of the FBI's rank-and-file.

"That is not accurate," McCabe said. "Director Comey enjoyed broad support within the FBI and still does to this day."

Unfazed, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders insisted she had heard from "countless" members of the FBI who welcomed the president's decision.

McCabe also pointed out the remarkable nature of Trump's version of his conversations with Comey. McCabe told a Senate panel it was not "standard practice" to tell an individual whether they are or are not under investigation.

Previous presidents have made a public show of staying out of legal matters, so as not to appear to be injecting politics. Trump's comments demonstrated his striking deviation from that practice.

The ousted director himself is said to be confident that his own version of events will come out, possibly in an appearance before Congress, according to an associate who has been in touch with him since his firing Tuesday.

Trump and Comey's relationship was strained early on, in part because of the president's explosive



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and unsubstantiated claims that Barack Obama wiretapped Trump Tower. Comey found the allegations confounding, according to his associate, and wondered what to make of what he described as strange thoughts coming from his new boss.

The president was no kinder to Comey Thursday, calling him names and saying he'd left the FBI in "virtual turmoil." He said that while he received a scathing assessment of Comey's performance from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on Monday, that memo was not a catalyst for his dramatic decision as the White House had said earlier.

"I was going to fire Comey," Trump said. "Regardless of recommendation I was going to fire Comey." That's far different than the White House's initial account in the hours after Comey's firing. Multiple officials, including Pence, said the president was acting at the behest of Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

But it quickly became clear that the president had been stewing for days over the Russia investigation and Comey's refusal to defend him in appearances before lawmakers. By Wednesday afternoon, the officials, like Trump, were saying he had in fact been considering ousting the FBI director for months because of a lack of confidence in his ability to lead the agency.

And the Russia investigation was still on his mind.

"In fact when I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said you know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story, it's an excuse by the Democrats for having lost an election that they should have won," he said.

Sanders attributed the disconnect in the week's explanations to the fact that she had not directly asked Trump when he'd made the decision to fire Comey until shortly before Thursday's press briefing.

The White House tried to move past the controversy, announcing that the president had signed an executive order creating a voter fraud commission and another on cybersecurity. Trump signed the orders privately and was not seen in public apart from his TV interview with NBC.

Trump had kept his decision to fire Comey from all but his closest advisers. Many in the White House were ill-prepared for the outraged response from Democrats and open concern from some Republicans.

"The challenge they have is that the president sometimes moves so rapidly that they don't get a team around that gets it organized," said Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker and a Trump ally. "They need to decide what they're going to say and they need to stick with it. Random change isn't helpful."

White House officials and others insisted on anonymity in order to disclose private conversations and internal deliberations.

The White House said Trump is weighing options for replacing Comey, a decision that could have broad implications for the future of the Russia investigation.

Some senior officials have discussed nominating Rep. Trey Gowdy, the South Carolina Republican who ran the House committee that investigated Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's actions in connection with the 2012 attack on a U.S. compound in Benghazi, Libya.

Trump's advisers have repeatedly tried to downplay the Russia-election matter, with Sanders saying Wednesday the FBI was "doing a whole lot more than the Russia investigation."

But McCabe characterized the investigation as "highly significant" and assured senators Comey's firing would not hinder it. He promised he would tolerate no interference from the White House and would not provide the administration with updates on its progress.

"You cannot stop the men and women of the FBI from doing the right thing," he declared. He said there has been no interference so far.

Days before he was fired, Comey requested more resources to pursue his investigation, U.S. officials have said. McCabe said he was not aware of any such request and said the Russia investigation is ad-

equately resourced.

It was unclear whether word of the Comey request, said to have been put to Rosenstein, ever made its way to Trump.

The chairman and top Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee abruptly left the hearing Thursday to meet with Rosenstein, who is McCabe's boss. The senators said later that the Russia investigations were discussed but Comey's firing was not.

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Pearson reported from New York. AP writers Darlene Superville, Deb Riechmann and Eric Tucker in Washington contributed to this report.

## **Tillerson says US won't be rushed on climate change policies**

**By MARK THIESSEN, Associated Press**

FAIRBANKS, Alaska (AP) — Arctic nations have renewed calls for the world to address climate warming, but U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson says the United States will not rush to make a decision on its policies.

Tillerson spoke Thursday in Fairbanks, Alaska, at a meeting of the Arctic Council, an advisory group made up of the eight Arctic nations and indigenous groups.

The council adopted a nine-page "Fairbanks Declaration 2017," which noted that the Arctic is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average. The document noted the importance of reducing soot and methane emissions and said climate change is the most serious threat to Arctic biodiversity.

Tillerson signed the document. But in opening remarks, he cautioned that the United States is reviewing several important policies, including how the Trump administration will approach the issue of climate change.

"We are appreciative that each of you has an important point of view, and you should know that we are taking the time to understand your concerns," Tillerson told other representatives on the council. "We're not going to rush to make a decision. We're going to work to make the right decision for the United States."

The Arctic Council, he said, will continue to be an important platform as the Trump administration deliberates.

Trump has said little about Arctic policy, but he has taken steps to put U.S. Arctic Ocean waters back in play for petroleum drilling.

The Arctic Council's goals are sustainable development and environmental protection of the Arctic. The council does not make policy or allocate resources, and its decisions must be unanimous. The United States, an Arctic country because of the state of Alaska, is joined on the council by Canada, Russia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallstrom said she walked away from a private conversation with Tillerson hopeful of the U.S.' intent in the region.

"He said, well, you know, we ought to first establish our climate policy and then decide on the Paris Agreement and how it relates," Wallstrom told The Associated Press. "And I think that sounds reasonable to do so."

The worst-case scenario feared by some would be that Tillerson used this gathering to announce the U.S. would withdraw from the Paris Agreement.

"Then that did not happen, and I think that bodes well for the future," Wallstrom said. "I believe that we will see a continued American engagement and commitment to the Arctic."

The United States chaired the council for the last two years. The U.S. highlighted three areas during

its two-year chairmanship — improved living conditions and economies for those living in the Arctic, stewardship of the Arctic Ocean and climate change.

David Balton, a deputy assistant secretary of State, said other accomplishments included an agreement for scientific cooperation among Arctic nations, an assessment of improvements needed for better telecommunications, and implementation of a database of ships passing through the Arctic.

Tillerson at the close of the meeting turned the gavel to Timo Soini, minister of foreign affairs for Finland, which will take over chairmanship until 2019. Soini said Arctic resources and transportation routes may attract interest.

“We should make sure that all human activity is sustainable, increasing opportunities to benefit the people who already live in the Arctic region, and certainly also the indigenous communities,” he said.

Two broad frameworks, Soini said, should be taken into account in all Arctic Council activities: Climate change, especially the Paris Climate Agreement, and sustainable development goals that the United Nations adopted two years ago.

Tillerson arrived late Wednesday afternoon in Fairbanks. Protesters gathered in a city park nearby to denounce the presence of Tillerson, who was president of Exxon Mobil Corp.

“My message for Rex Tillerson is: Alaska shouldn’t be for sale for what’s in our earth,” said Hannah Hill, 36, who works at a Fairbanks soup kitchen. “This place is beautiful, and this place is delicate, and what already is happening in the Arctic will affect the rest of the Earth. And that is science.”

Pat Lambert, a retired University of Alaska math professor, attended the rally because he believes climate change is a serious problem.

He suggested Tillerson “should get away from his cronies in the oil business and start listening to the people of Alaska, for instance, and the people of the world who are so interested in these issues.”

After the rally, the protesters marched behind a sign reading, “Welcome to the frontline of climate change,” to the building where the Arctic Council welcoming celebration was being held.

## Report paints harrowing picture of Central America migration

By PETER ORSI, Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Migrants from Central America’s violence-plagued Northern Triangle region endure harrowing abuses while trying to make their way through Mexico toward the United States, a report from an international medical group said Thursday.

Doctors Without Borders, or MSF for its initials in French, called the situation a “humanitarian crisis” that demands the U.S. and Mexican governments do more to process applications for asylum and humanitarian visas.

It said the study was based on surveys and medical data from the last two years and documents “a pattern of violent displacement, persecution, sexual violence and forced repatriation akin to the conditions found in the deadliest armed conflicts in the world today.”

Among its findings:

— Almost 40 percent of those interviewed said they left home due to attacks, threats, extortion or attempts at forced recruitment by gangs in Central America. About 44 percent of the migrants had a relative who had died in the last two years due to violence, and that rose to 56 percent for those from El Salvador.

— Nearly 70 percent of those entering Mexico reported suffering violence during transit toward the United States, and nearly a third of women reported being sexually abused. They said the perpetrators “included members of gangs and other criminal organizations, as well as members of the Mexican

security forces responsible for their protection.”

— Of the 166 female migrants treated by MSF for sexual violence, 60 percent had been raped and the rest were subjected to other kinds of assault such as forced nudity. Among 1,817 people treated for mental health issues, about 47 percent had experienced physical violence during transit.

El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala have some of the highest homicide rates in the world. Violent gangs reign over many parts of the countries and are often able to kill, extort and carry out other crimes with impunity.

“For millions of people from the (Northern Triangle) region, trauma, fear and horrific violence are dominant facets of daily life. Yet it is a reality that does not end with their forced flight to Mexico,” MSF said.

“Along the migration route ... migrants and refugees are preyed upon by criminal organizations, sometimes with the tacit approval or complicity of national authorities, and subjected to violence and other abuses — abduction, theft, extortion, torture, and rape — that can leave them injured and traumatized,” it continued.

A Honduran migrant said Thursday at a news conference in the Mexican capital that he had crossed into Mexico twice and was deported the first time.

“The first time I left (Honduras) because of the gangs. I was 12, about to turn 13, and I was deported from Coatzacoalcos, where I was in jail for two months, and afterward I was deported to San Pedro Sula,” said the man, whose full name was withheld for his safety. “They take you back to same place you left from because of problems with the gangs.”

The man has since been granted asylum by Mexico, the medical group said.

MSF said heightened immigration enforcement by the United States and Mexico threatens to make more refugees and migrants vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers, gangs and corrupt authorities.

It urged the countries to “expand access to medical, mental health and sexual violence care services for migrants and refugees.”

Marc Bosch, the group’s head of Latin American operations said, “The attempts of stopping migration through the reinforcement of borders, and the increase of detentions and deportations, as we have seen in Mexico and the United States have not ended human trafficking.”

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Peter Orsi on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/Peter\\_Orsi](http://www.twitter.com/Peter_Orsi)

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This story has been corrected to show that the Honduran migrant was deported once by Mexico.

## **Trump launches commission to investigate voter fraud**

**By KEN THOMAS, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump signed an executive order Thursday launching a commission to review alleged voter fraud and voter suppression, building upon his unsubstantiated claims that millions of people voted illegally in the 2016 election.

The White House said the president’s “Advisory Commission on Election Integrity” would examine allegations of improper voting and fraudulent voter registration in states and across the nation. Vice President Mike Pence will chair the panel and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach will be vice chair of the commission, which will report back to Trump by 2018.

“We can’t take for granted the integrity of the vote,” Pence said in a statement. He said the commission would “review ways to strengthen the integrity of elections in order to protect and preserve the



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principle of one person, one vote because the integrity of the vote is the foundation of our democracy.”

Trump has alleged, without evidence, that 3 million to 5 million people voted illegally in his 2016 election against Democrat Hillary Clinton. He has vowed since the start of his administration to investigate voter fraud, a process that has been delayed for months.

Last November, Kobach said he supported Trump’s assertions that he would have won the popular vote if “millions” of people hadn’t voted illegally.

Democrats and voting rights groups called the panel a sham, arguing there are few, if any, credible allegations of significant voter fraud. They warned that the panel would be used to lay the groundwork for stricter voting requirements that could make it more difficult for poor and minority voters to access the ballot box.

“The sole purpose of this commission is to propagate a myth and to give encouragement to Republican governors and state legislators to increase voter suppression,” said Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who challenged Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said it was a “clear front for constricting the access to vote to poor Americans, older Americans, and — above all — African-Americans and Latinos.”

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the commission would be bipartisan and composed of about a dozen members, including current and former state election officials and experts.

“The president is committed to the thorough review of registration and voting issues in federal elections and that’s exactly what this commission is tasked with doing,” Sanders said.

The panel will aim to ensure confidence in the integrity of federal elections while looking at vulnerabilities in the system and the possibility of improper voting and fraudulent voter registration and voting, officials said.

The commission will include two Republicans, former Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell and Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson, and two Democrats, New Hampshire Secretary of State Bill Gardner and Maine Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap.

Christy McCormick, a former Justice Department attorney and a member of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, will also be on the panel, and others will be named soon.

Trump repeatedly alleged that the election system was “rigged” during his campaign and later argued that massive, widespread fraud kept him from winning the popular vote. Trump won the presidency with an Electoral College victory even though Clinton received nearly 3 million more votes.

Voting experts and many lawmakers, including House Oversight Committee Chairman Jason Chafetz, have said they haven’t seen anything to suggest that millions of people voted illegally. The Utah Republican said his committee won’t be investigating voter fraud.

But in a lunch meeting with senators in February, Trump said he and former Republican Sen. Kelly Ayotte would have won in New Hampshire if not for voters bused in from out of state. New Hampshire officials have said there was no evidence of major voter fraud in the state.

Michael Waldman, president of the New York-based Brennan Center for Justice, said the commission was formed to “find proof of the president’s absurd claim” about millions of people voting illegally. He noted that it came in the aftermath of Trump’s firing of FBI Director James Comey on Tuesday.

“He fired the person investigating a real threat to election integrity, and set up a probe of an imaginary threat,” Waldman said.

Trump had previously identified Pence as the person to oversee the commission. Kobach advised Trump’s transition team and has been a leading GOP proponent of tighter voting regulations.

The secretary of state championed Kansas’ proof-of-citizenship requirement as an anti-fraud measure that keeps noncitizens from voting, including immigrants living in the U.S. illegally.

Critics contend it suppresses voter turnout, particularly among young and minority voters, and that there have been few cases of fraud.

After the announcement, the American Civil Liberties Union said it had filed a Freedom of Information Act request seeking information on what the Trump administration was using as the basis for its voter fraud claims.

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

## **Not just a new president, new faces for France's parliament**

**By ELAINE GANLEY and JOHN LEICESTER, Associated Press**

PARIS (AP) — A female fighter pilot, a farmer, a teacher, people out of work. They all applied for the job — and got it, among more than 19,000 people hoping to become candidates in June elections for the French parliament under the banner of President-elect Emmanuel Macron.

Renewing a political landscape long bogged down with out-of-touch parties and long-serving politicians was a central campaign promise and the eclectic mix of candidates speaks to Macron's desire to pull the plug on a system he deems broken.

On Thursday, his Republic on the Move party announced an initial slate of 428 candidates for France's 577-seat National Assembly. It was a potpourri of citizens, more than half of whom, like Macron, have never held elected office. Their shared goal: to deliver Macron the parliamentary majority he needs to govern effectively and pull France out of its economic doldrums and social funk.

The average age of the candidates who made the cut is 46 — compared to 60 for the outgoing assembly. Half are women and half are men. Only 5 percent — 24 — were lawmakers in the outgoing parliament, all Socialists.

"Our candidates signal the permanent return of the citizen to the heart of our political life," party secretary-general Richard Ferrand said in announcing the partial slate.

The candidates offer a taste of how Macron's grassroots, startup-style movement sought to recruit outside the circle of career politicians.

Among them is Jean-Michel Fauvergue, the commander of the elite RAID police unit that took down the Islamic State cell that carried out the Nov. 13, 2015, Paris attacks, including its ring leader Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who was killed in the operation.

Another is Claire Tassadit Houd, whose sister, Djamila, was among the 130 people killed in the attacks.

Would-be candidates were asked to sign up on the party's website and submit a resume and letter explaining their motivation. More than 19,000 applied and resumes are still coming in.

"I signed up right from the beginning," said Jean-Baptiste Moreau, a 40-year-old farmer who is contesting a seat in the Creuse region of central France where he lives.

Moreau said he was drawn by the profile of the 39-year-old Macron, who will be France's youngest president when he takes office Sunday, and by the party's efforts to make grassroots ideas part of its campaign platform.

"If I'm elected, I don't want to become a political professional. I'll serve one or two terms," he said.

Mireille Robert, who heads a primary school in a village of 1,000 people in the Aude region of southwestern France, will be up against a local Socialist Party heavyweight.

In a telephone interview, the 55-year-old Robert said one of her main motives for getting into politics under Macron's banner is fighting the rise of political extremism in France.

Macron, a centrist upstart, won Sunday's presidential election by a landslide, defeating far-right can-

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didate Marine Le Pen, who had hoped to ride the wave of rising nationalism in Europe. Despite her defeat, Le Pen achieved the highest-ever score for her National Front party, which has a history of anti-Semitism and racism. Far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon got nearly 20 percent of the vote in the first-round vote.

In the village of Pieusse where Robert lives, Le Pen received 271 votes in Sunday's runoff, five more than Macron's 266.

"That's really scary," Robert said. "I feel like we are in danger."

New to politics, she said she plans small gatherings to discuss local issues, rather than hold large rallies with prepared speeches. Her family is well-known in the area for its sparkling wine, which she believes will help her win support.

"Yes, we can," she said. "It's going to be a great experience."

The French political landscape was upended by Sunday's presidential race, which saw mainstream parties, including the Socialists who had governed for the past five years under outgoing President Francois Hollande, eliminated in favor of the untested Macron.

Macron himself parachuted into his first government position as economy minister in Hollande's Socialist government from a job as an investment banker, and won election by offering something new.

His party's parliamentary candidates' atypical profiles show "a need to renew faces" in a country that has traditionally recycled its politicians for decades, said Macron's spokesman, Benjamin Griveaux.

Among those who won't be on the party slate is former Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who resigned in December to make a failed bid to become the presidential candidate of his Socialist Party. He tried to join the ranks of Macron's legislative candidates but was turned down.

Valls has held three parliamentary terms and is not a member of Macron's party, making him ineligible under the strict terms the party has set out for candidates.

"We won't change our criteria, no special treatment," said Ferrand, the party secretary-general.

But, he added, the party won't put up a candidate to oppose Valls in his district of Evry, south of Paris. "We note the singularity of this prime minister in office in recent years," he said.

Jean Launay, a former lawmaker who was involved in the candidate selection process, said a dozen or so others who weren't selected also won't face an opponent from Macron's party. The full list of candidates must be submitted by May 19.

Launay, who spent 19 years as a Socialist lawmaker before joining forces with Macron's party, dismissed concerns over the lack of political experience of the novice candidates.

"You can't on the one hand call for political renewal and on the other say 'They know nothing! They won't be up to the job!' I too was a political baby when I got to the National Assembly in 1998. ... I had to learn everything," he said. "They'll learn."

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Associated Press writers Samuel Petrequin and Angela Charlton in Paris contributed to this report.

## **APNewsBreak: City pays Indiana congressman's wife \$20K/month**

**By BRIAN SLODYSKO, Associated Press**

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — A burgeoning Indianapolis suburb has paid the wife of an influential congressman \$580,000 since 2015 for legal consulting she largely does from the Washington area, an unusually large sum even in a state rife with highly paid government contractors, according to a review by The Associated Press.

Jennifer Messer, the wife of Republican Rep. Luke Messer, makes \$20,000 a month working as a con-

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tract attorney for Fishers, according to the AP's review of public documents. That's drastically more than either of the city's two staff attorneys are paid — or many other government lawyers in Indiana.

Legal experts say the agreement, which pays about \$240,000 a year, doesn't appear to break any rules because state law allows considerable leeway for governments to enter into professional service contracts. But it could create an awkward situation for her husband, who was elected to Congress in 2012 on a pledge to "stop the reckless spending" and has plans to challenge Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly next year.

Meanwhile, many of Fishers' daily legal needs are handled by salaried lawyers, or other local law firms. That leaves a limited work portfolio for Messer, a lawyer of 16 years, who is free to take on additional clients and whose contractual duties to the city include "providing legal advice and services" with an emphasis on economic development.

In recent years, Republican-dominated Indiana and local governments in the state have increasingly replaced government workers with contractors in a bid to drive down the headcount of public employees.

Former Gov. Mike Pence, now the vice president, employed trusted aide Josh Pitcock to be the state's federal lobbyist through a lucrative contract that paid \$23,000 a month, an arrangement his administration argued exempted Pitcock from ethics rules that applied to rank-and-file workers. Seema Verma, a Pence protege who is the current head of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, also had a lucrative contract, though her duties were similar to those of a high-level state administrator.

In a statement issued late Thursday, Luke Messer defended his wife's job, calling her "the brains of the Messer outfit" and pointing out that her work as a lawyer predated his political career.

Both Jennifer Messer and Fishers Mayor Scott Fadness, a rising Republican star in Indiana, say the arrangement has been beneficial to the city and helped usher in an era of "unprecedented" economic success in the growing suburb of about 85,000 people.

"It is not unusual for municipalities to seek specialized contracted legal services for such technical and nuanced legal documents," Fadness said in a statement. "The size of the City of Fishers, combined with the volume of economic development activity, merits her specialized legal services."

Messer pointed to an IKEA home furnishings store and a high-end driving range, which are both under construction, as examples of high-profile projects she helped the city land.

But not everyone is convinced Fishers' taxpayers are getting a good deal.

"I'm flabbergasted," said Indiana University public affairs Professor Paul Helmke, a former Republican mayor of Fort Wayne who also is a lawyer. "What does she do each month that can't be done by the other folks on staff — particularly when she's not there? Even if she were the only lawyer for a city, that would still be an extraordinary amount of money."

Jennifer Messer has worked for Fishers since 2010, primarily through a firm that handled the town's legal needs over three decades. But after a major restructuring in 2015, the city created its own legal department and the firm lost out.

Messer, however, did not and secured the contract despite living out of state in McLean, Virginia, records show.

Before moving away when her husband took office in 2013, Jennifer Messer regularly staffed Fishers meetings, attended planning groups and sat in on closed-door executive sessions, where sensitive legal matters are often discussed. But after her husband's election, Messer's attendance dropped sharply and she hasn't been present at a meeting since 2015, records show.

She now lists her mother-in-law's Greensburg, Indiana home as her in-state business address — the same address where her husband is registered to vote, after the family sold their home in nearby Shelbyville.



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In a recent podcast with a local resident, Fishers' lead staff attorney Chris Greisl described Messer's role as supplementary to the legal department's day-to-day work.

"I just get pulled in so many different directions," said Greisl, who makes about \$100,000 less a year than Messer. "I don't have the time to dedicate and to be in every single place at once."

Messer says her pay is commensurate with her level of experience and says she regularly submits detailed statements of the work she performs so the city can track her productivity.

Records furnished by the city which document her billable hours in April 2016 and April 2017 indicate she did not work full-time either of those months. The city did not provide a complete accounting of Messer's billable hours, as requested by The AP.

Through her contract, Messer earns more than Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb's top attorneys, who generally make between \$100,000 and \$150,000 a year, records show. Her pay also surpasses the head attorney for the city of Indianapolis, who tops out at \$118,999 a year, according to figures provided by the city.

"It sure seems to me like it's a sweetheart deal for the Messers, but the taxpayers in Fishers are being short changed," said Julia Vaughan of the left-leaning government watchdog group Common Cause Indiana.

But Messer and Fadness say it is not fair to compare the contract work she does for the city to salaried government attorneys around the state. And they say the arrangement has actually helped the city save money.

Documents provided by Fishers show the city initially saved money on core legal services under the current arrangement. But they are on track to spend more this year after hiring an additional staff attorney.

"We have a dynamic, successful team, and I am proud to be a part of it," Messer said.

## North Korea says it will seek extradition of plot culprits

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — Pyongyang will seek the extradition of anyone involved in what it says was a CIA-backed plot to kill leader Kim Jung Un last month with a biochemical poison, a top North Korean foreign ministry official said Thursday.

Han Song Ryol, the vice foreign minister, called a meeting of foreign diplomats in Pyongyang to outline the North's allegation that the CIA and South Korea's intelligence agency bribed and coerced a North Korean man into joining in the assassination plot, which the North's Ministry of State Security has suggested was thwarted last month.

North Korea's U.N. Mission late Thursday issued a statement calling the purported plot to kill Kim a "declaration of war."

It said the aim was to hurt "the mental mainstay that all the Korean people absolutely trust" and "eclipse the eternal sun" of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the country's official name.

The North's state media have been running stories about the plot since last week. The security ministry has vowed to "ferret out" anyone involved in the alleged plot, which it called "state-sponsored terrorism."

The U.N. Mission said the Ministry of State Security has declared that a "Korean-style anti-terrorist offensive will be commenced to mop up the intelligence and plot-breeding organizations of the U.S. and South Korea."

Han took that a step further with the extradition statement.

"According to our law, the Central Public Prosecutor's Office of the DPRK will use all available meth-

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ods to start to work to demand the handover of the criminals involved, so as to punish the organizers, conspirators and followers of this terrible state-sponsored terrorism," he said.

North Korea claims the primary suspect is a man it has identified only by the ubiquitous surname "Kim." It says he is a North Korean resident of Pyongyang who worked for a time in the Russian Far East. State media said he was involved in the timber industry in Khabarovsk, which is one of the primary places North Koreans can go overseas to work.

The North further said that a South Korean agent named Jo Ki Chol and a "secret agent" named Xu Guanghai, director general of the Qingdao NAZCA Trade Co. Ltd., met Kim in Dandong, on North Korea's border with China, to give him communications equipment and cash. The North also said "a guy surnamed Han" taught Kim how to enlist accomplices.

"These terrorists plotted and planned in detail for the use of biochemical substances including radioactive and poisonous substances as the means of assassination," Vice Minister Han said, reading from a prepared statement. "These biochemical substances were to be provided with the assistance of the CIA ... while the South Korean Intelligence Service was going to provide necessary support and funding for this attempt at assassination on our supreme leader."

North Korea's U.N. Mission said the organizers infiltrated "the terrorist" into the DPRK with several pieces of satellite communications equipment so he could be updated "with the operational code of terrorism against the supreme leadership, various terrorist methods of using biochemical substances, ways of bribing and hiring the one who would actually carry out the terrorist act and ways of entering the venue of the event."

The statement said the organizers also gave him instructions to report on the "creed" of the person who would carry out the attack "and the state of his 'brainwashing,'" and to make sure the preparations were perfect, as there could be a war if it was revealed that South Korea's intelligence agency backed the operation.

In statements for foreign distribution, North Korea often refers to its leader Kim Jong Un without naming him, instead using the phrase "supreme leadership" or "supreme dignity."

The last time that Han appeared to brief foreign diplomats in Pyongyang was last December, to present North Korea's response to the latest round of U.N. sanctions after the September 2016 nuclear test.

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Associated Press writer Edith M. Lederer contributed to this report from the United Nations

## Asian stocks mostly lower as Trump uncertainty weighs

By KELVIN CHAN, AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian stock markets were mostly lower Friday as investors remained cautious amid U.S. political uncertainty. Weak U.S. retail data added to worry over consumer spending.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 index lost 0.7 percent to 19,823.28 and South Korea's Kospi fell 0.4 percent to 2,288.39. Hong Kong's Hang Seng edged 0.1 percent higher to 25,141.13 and the Shanghai Composite Index in mainland China was 0.4 percent higher at 3,072.01. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 shed 0.7 percent to 5,836.90.

TRUMP'S TROUBLES: The continuing fallout over President Donald Trump's unprecedented firing of FBI Director James Comey is making investors wary of taking on more risk and raises questions about whether he can follow through on his business-friendly agenda, analysts said.

QUOTEWORTHY: "The political noise continues to escalate over Trump's firing of FBI Director Comey," said Stephen Innes, senior trader at OANDA. "This storyline has clearly rattled equity investors, given

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this political cloud could cripple the fragile support for Trump's tax policy."

**RETAIL ROUT:** Big U.S. department stores such as Macy's and Kohl's said in their quarterly earnings reports that sales fell according to a key gauge, signaling changing tastes and buyers shifting online. The latest numbers underscore worries about consumer spending in the world's No. 1 economy, with retail accounting for a big part of it.

**DATA DUMP:** Investors are awaiting reports that could provide fresh insight into the health of the global economy. The figures due out include U.S. inflation and retail sales numbers, a report on German quarterly economic growth, and Chinese money supply and credit data.

**GROUP OF SEVEN:** Finance ministers from seven of the world's advanced economies are set to gather in Italy this week. The officials from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States are expected to discuss how to promote global economic growth and prevent big companies from avoiding tax.

**WALL STREET:** Major U.S. benchmarks finished modestly lower. The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 0.2 percent to 2,394.44. The Dow Jones industrial average lost 0.1 percent to 20,919.42. The Nasdaq composite declined 0.2 percent to 6,115.96.

**ENERGY:** Benchmark U.S. crude oil futures extended gains, rising 7 cents to \$47.90 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose 50 cents, or 1.1 percent, to settle at \$47.83 per barrel Thursday. Brent crude, the international standard, added 6 cents to \$50.83 per barrel in London.

**CURRENCIES:** The dollar weakened to 113.70 yen from 113.86 yen in late Thursday trading. The euro strengthened to \$1.0874 from \$1.0862.

## Today in History By The Associated Press

Today is Friday, May 12, the 132nd day of 2017. There are 233 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On May 12, 1967, "Are You Experienced," the groundbreaking debut album of the Jimi Hendrix Experience, was released in Britain by Track Records (a version with a somewhat different playlist went on sale in the United States the following August on the Reprise label). Procol Harum's debut single "A Whiter Shade of Pale" was released in the United Kingdom on the Deram label. English poet laureate John Masefield ("And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by...") died in Abingdon at age 88.

On this date:

In 1780, during the Revolutionary War, the besieged city of Charleston, South Carolina, surrendered to British forces.

In 1870, an act creating the Canadian province of Manitoba was given royal assent, to take effect in July.

In 1932, the body of Charles Lindbergh Jr., the kidnapped son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh, was found in a wooded area near Hopewell, New Jersey.

In 1937, Britain's King George VI was crowned at Westminster Abbey; his wife, Elizabeth, was crowned as queen consort.

In 1949, the Soviet Union lifted the Berlin Blockade, which the Western powers had succeeded in circumventing with their Berlin Airlift.

In 1957, movie director-actor Erich von Stroheim, 71, died in Maurepas, France.

In 1963, Betty Miller became the first woman to fly solo across the Pacific Ocean as she landed her Piper Apache in Brisbane, Australia, having left Oakland, California, on April 30, making three stopovers

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along the way.

In 1975, the White House announced the new Cambodian government had seized an American merchant ship, the Mayaguez, in international waters. (U.S. Marines gained control of the ship three days after its seizure, not knowing the 39 civilian members of the crew had already been released by Cambodia.)

In 1982, in Fatima, Portugal, security guards overpowered a Spanish priest armed with a bayonet who attacked Pope John Paul II. (In 2008, the pope's longtime private secretary revealed that the pontiff was slightly wounded in the assault.)

In 1992, actor Robert Reed of TV's "The Brady Bunch" died in Pasadena, California, at age 59.

In 1997, Australian Susie Maroney became the first woman to swim from Cuba to Florida, covering the 118-mile distance in 24 1/2 hours.

In 2002, Jimmy Carter arrived in Cuba, becoming the first U.S. president in or out of office to visit since the 1959 revolution that put Fidel Castro in power.

Ten years ago: Virginia Tech held its first commencement ceremonies since the April 16 shooting rampage that claimed 32 victims and the shooter. Voters in the Dallas suburb of Farmers Branch became the first in the nation to back an ordinance prohibiting landlords from renting to most immigrants who were in the U.S. illegally. (In 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal from the city after a federal appeals court struck down the never-enforced ordinance as unconstitutional.) A U.S. patrol was attacked south of Baghdad; four Americans and an Iraqi interpreter were killed, three soldiers were kidnapped and later found dead. A U.S.-led coalition operation supported by NATO troops killed the Taliban's most prominent military commander, Mullah Dadullah.

Five years ago: At least 100,000 Spaniards angered by grim economic prospects and the political handling of the international financial crisis turned out for street demonstrations, marking the one-year anniversary of a spontaneous movement that inspired similar protests elsewhere. Miami's LeBron James became the eighth player in NBA history to receive the MVP award three times.

One year ago: A divided U.S. Supreme Court blocked the execution of an Alabama inmate so that a lower court could review claims that strokes and dementia had rendered him incompetent to understand his looming death sentence. (A federal appeals court ruled in March 2017 that Vernon Madison was incompetent, and could not be executed.) Susannah Mushatt Jones, recognized at the time as the world's oldest person, died in New York at age 116. Singer Julius La Rosa, 86, died in Crivitz, Wisconsin.

Today's Birthdays: Critic John Simon is 92. Composer Burt Bacharach is 89. Actress Millie Perkins is 79. Rhythm-and-blues singer Jayotis Washington is 76. Country singer Billy Swan is 75. Actress Linda Dano is 74. Actress Lindsay Crouse is 69. Singer-musician Steve Winwood is 69. Actor Gabriel Byrne is 67. Actor Bruce Boxleitner is 67. Singer Billy Squier is 67. Blues singer-musician Guy Davis is 65. Country singer Kix Brooks is 62. Actress Kim Greist is 59. Rock musician Eric Singer (KISS) is 59. Actor Ving Rhames is 58. Rock musician Billy Duffy is 56. Actor Emilio Estevez is 55. Actress April Grace is 55. Actress Vanessa A. Williams is 54. TV personality/chef Carla Hall is 53. Country musician Eddie Kilgallon is 52. Actor Stephen Baldwin is 51. Actor Scott Schwartz is 49. Actress Kim Fields is 48. Actress Samantha Mathis is 47. Actress Jamie Luner is 46. Actor Christian Campbell is 45. Actress Rhea Seehorn is 45. Actor Mackenzie Astin is 44. Country musician Matt Mangano (The Zac Brown Band) is 41. Actress Rebecca Herbst is 40. Actress Malin (MAH'-lin) Akerman is 39. Actor Jason Biggs is 39. Actor Rami Malek (RAH'-mee MA'-lihk) is 36. Actress-singer Clare Bowen is 33. Actress Emily VanCamp is 31. Actor Malcolm David Kelley is 25. Actor Sullivan Sweeten is 22.

Thought for Today: "Sometimes there is greater lack of communication in facile talking than in silence." — Faith Baldwin, American romance novelist (1893-1978).