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Friday, May 19

Faculty Inservice

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, tomato spoon salad, cookie, whole wheat bread.

Saturday, May 20

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court.

Sunday, May 21

Graduation at 2 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at 9 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at 9 a.m., Choir serving at Nursing Home at 3 p.m.

United Methodist Church: Conde worship, 9 a.m.; coffee fellowship time, 10 a.m., Groton worship, 11 a.m.

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.

Monday, May 22

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

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, coleslaw, baked beans, sherbet.

Tuesday, May 23

Girls Golf at Sioux Valley

United Methodist: Bible Study at 10 a.m.

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff noodles, mixed vegetables, cake with strawberries, whole wheat

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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Groton Area sends several to state track meet

Several Groton Area tracksters qualified for state at the regional meet held Thursday in Milbank.

Harleigh Stange placed first in the 200m dash, the girls 4x100m Relay team of Audrey Wanner, Katie Koehler, Harleigh Stange and Eliza Wanner took first, Payton Maine placed second in the 300m hurdles, the girls 4x200m Relay team of Audrey Wanner, Payton Maine, Katie Koehler, Harleigh Stange placed second, Audrey Wanner won the long jump, Taylor Holm took second in the discus, Jonathan Doeden placed second in both the 110m Hurdles and the 300m Hurdles, Lee Williams took second in the 400m dash, Treyton Diegel won the 800m run, the boys 4x800m relay team of Treyton Diegel, Brandon Keith, Isaac Smith and Sean Schuring placed second, the sprint medley relay team of Trevor Pray, Lucas Hinman, Bennett Shabazz and Sean Schuring placed second, Bennett Shabazz placed second in the long jump and won the triple jump and McClain Lone won both the discus and shot put event.

Others also qualified for state during the season. We'll get the complete list soon.

Girl's Division

100m Hurdles: 4, Payton Maine, 17.17.

300m Hurdles: 2, Payton Maine, 51.79; 6, Eliza Wanner, 56.90.

100m Dash: 5, Eliza Wanner, 13.56; 8, Heather Lone, 13.82.

200m Dash: 1, Harleigh Stange, 27.32; 10, Nicole Marzahn, 29.86; 11, Tadyn Glover, 30.07.

400m Dash: 4, Kenzie McInerney, 1:08.18; 9, Regan Leicht, 1:13.25.

800m Run: 7, Regan Leicht, 2:58.22; 11, Riley Gengerke, 3:13.85.

1600m Run: 5, Emily Thompson, 6:21.68; 7, Riley Gengerke, 6:49.98.

4x100m Relay: 1, Groton (Audrey Wanner, Katie Koehler, Harleigh Stange, Eliza Wanner), 53.76.

4x200m Relay: 2, Groton (Audrey Wanner, Payton Maine, Katie Koehler, Harleigh Stange), 1:54.90.

4x400m Relay: 4, Groton (Eliza Wanner, Nicole Marzahn, Regan Leicht, Kenzie McInerney), 4:50.24.

4x800m Relay: 4, Groton (Emily Thompson, Jodi Hinman, Riley Gengerke, Regan Leicht), 12:06.75.

1600m Sprint Medley: 5, Groton (Kaylin Kucker, Tadyn Glover, Jodi Hinman, Emily Thompson), 5:10.25.

High Jump: 7, Nicole Marzahn, 4-1.

Long Jump: 1, Audrey Wanner, 16-9; 3, Harleigh Stange, 14-9; 8, Nicole Marzahn, 14-2.75.

Triple Jump: 8, Katie Koehler, 30-5.25; 12, Tadyn Glover, 28-0.75.

Discus: 2, Taylor Holm, 104-3; 5, Nicole Fey, 92-7.

Shot Put: 3, Taylor Holm, 31-6; 4, Jennie Doeden, 31-5.5; 7, Madison Sippel, 29-9.

Pole Vault: 6, Emily Thompson, 6-6.

Boy's Division

110m Hurdles: 2, Jonathon Doeden, 15.70; (Prelims: Garret Schroeder, 19.73)

300m Hurdles: 2, Jonathan Doeden, 44.38; 4, Tylan Glover, 48.21.

100m Dash: 6, Trevor Pray, 11.33.

200m Dash: 4, Trevor Pray, 23.51; 10, Thomas Cranford, 24.45; 12, Jackson Oliver, 24.96.

400m Dash: 2, Lee Williams, 54.51; 7, Austin Jones, 58.33; 8, Thomas Cranford, 59.02.

800m Run: 1, Treyton Diegel, 2:15.70; 5, Brandon Keith, 2:21.20.

1600m Run: 7, Isaac Smith, 5:22.22.

4x100m Relay: 4, Groton (Trevor Pray, Lucas Hinman, Jackson Oliver, Lee Williams), 47.15.

4x200m Relay: 5, Groton (Jackson Oliver, Austin Jones, Darien Shabazz, Lee Williams), 1:40.70.

4x400m Relay: 3, Groton (Sean Schuring, Bennett Shabazz, Lucas Hinman, Lee Williams), 3:45.42.

4x800m Relay: 2, Groton (Treyton Diegel, Brandon Keith, Isaac Smith, Sean Schuring), 9:05.19.

1600m Sprint Medley: 2, Groton (Trevor Pray, Lucas Hinman, Bennett Shabazz, Sean Schuring), 3:55.34.

High Jump: 3, Austin Jones, 5-5.

Long Jump: 2, Bennett Shabazz, 19-8.5; 8, Lucas Hinman, 18-0.75.

Triple Jump: 1, Bennett Shabazz, 40-8.25.

Discus: 1, McClain Lone, 143-2; 4, Luke Thorson, 126-5; 9, Grady O'Neill, 95-7.

Shot Put: 1, McClain Lone, 47-6.25; 7, Luke Thorson, 37-7.5; 17, Grady O'Neill, 28-0.

New York Times spotlights state's vital arts scene

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

As we discuss the future of the National Endowment for the Arts and its impact on rural states like South Dakota, it's encouraging that the New York Times sent Michael Cooper to our state to interview arts organization leaders and citizens to assess that impact.

According to Cooper, "Mostly rural states like South Dakota could have outsize importance in deciding the fate of the endowment... South Dakota, which has fewer than a million people, received the fifth-highest amount of federal arts money per person in the nation last year, and the endowment's generally small grants can have a bigger impact here than they would at the Metropolitan Operas of the world."

The story talked about Shakespeare at the Matthews Opera House in Spearfish; discussed the appeal of the Rolling Rez Arts, an airport shuttle bus that has been transformed into a mobile art classroom and art gallery for Pine Ridge and other reservations, and recent exhibitions at the Dahl Arts Center, which logs 35,000 visitors each year. Cooper also visited with the music director of the Black Hills Symphony Orchestra, who pointed out that state arts council grants "supported concerts which drew some 5,700 people last year and school activities which reached more than 2,000 students." Spotlighting these South Dakota arts organizations, each of which receive funding from the National Endowment through grants from the South Dakota Arts Council, the story clearly illustrates that many arts experiences would not happen without the support of federal funding.

This kind of national attention for our creative scene is gratifying, and reminds us of the quality of the arts in South Dakota. It also underscores the value of the National Endowment for the Arts to our state. As the state which received the "fifth-highest amount of federal arts money per person in the nation last year," we get an incredible return on our investment here in South Dakota. In fact, we spend 47¢ per capita—and receive \$1.12 per capita back from Washington in the form of NEA grants. That's sound business—and a resource we can't afford to lose.

Your advocacy for this critical federal-state partnership that brings the arts and artists to young audiences across South Dakota is needed now! Let our leaders know that the NEA is vital to a creative South Dakota. To read the New York Times complete article, go to our Advocacy page at www.artsouthdakota.org/advocacy.html. To connect with our Congressional delegation or learn more about Arts South Dakota programs, join us online at www.ArtsSouthDakota.org.

Today in Weather History

May 19, 1982: With the ground in the Black Hills already saturated from heavy rains the previous week, developing thunderstorms were not a welcome sight. The thunderstorms produced additional heavy rains including 3.58 inches at Spearfish, 3.32 inches at Cheyenne Crossing, and 0.82 of an inch in twelve minutes at Hot Springs. With Flash Flood Warnings in effect for much of the area water came out of the banks of many streams causing widespread damage in the Hills. A diversion Dam broke at Spearfish causing a mudslide to cover some roads. In Deadwood, the main water line broke leaving the city temporarily without water. Homes were evacuated at Nisland, Hot Springs, and Bridger. Damage throughout the Black Hills included washed out bridges, flooded basements, several breached dams, and roads completely washed away.

1780: The infamous "dark day" in New England tradition. At noon, it was nearly as dark as night. Chickens went to roost, and many persons were fearful of divine wrath. The "dark day" was caused by forest fires to the west of New England.

1915: A spring storm came to an end after producing widespread snow. Total snowfall from the storm included: 17.6 inches in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, 8 inches at Cheyenne, Wyoming, 7 inches at Chadron and 3.9 inches in North Platte, Nebraska.

1955 - Lake Maloya NM received 11.28 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1975 - Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 110 mph in Minnesota, between Fridley and Hugo. Fifty persons were injured. The hail and high winds destroyed fifty mobile homes, and a dozen aircraft, and also destroyed a third of the Brighton Elementary School. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Texas produced thirteen inches of rain northwest of Lavernia. The heavy rain, along with golf ball size hail, destroyed eighty percent of the crops in the area, while high winds toppled trees. Golf ball size hail was also reported south of Dallas and around San Antonio. Up to eight inches of rain drenched Guadalupe County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)








1988 - Severe thunderstorms in southwest Texas produced hail as large as tennis balls around Midland, with the hail accumulating up to a foot deep. Showers and thunderstorms in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region produced 3.5 inches of rain near Schuylkill PA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front spawned ten tornadoes from Illinois to Tennessee during the afternoon and night. Snow, wind and cold prevailed in the Northern Plateau Region and the Northern Rockies. Dixie, ID, was blanketed with nine inches of snow, winds gusted to 87 mph at Choteau MT, and the temperature at Crater Lake, OR, dipped to 11 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

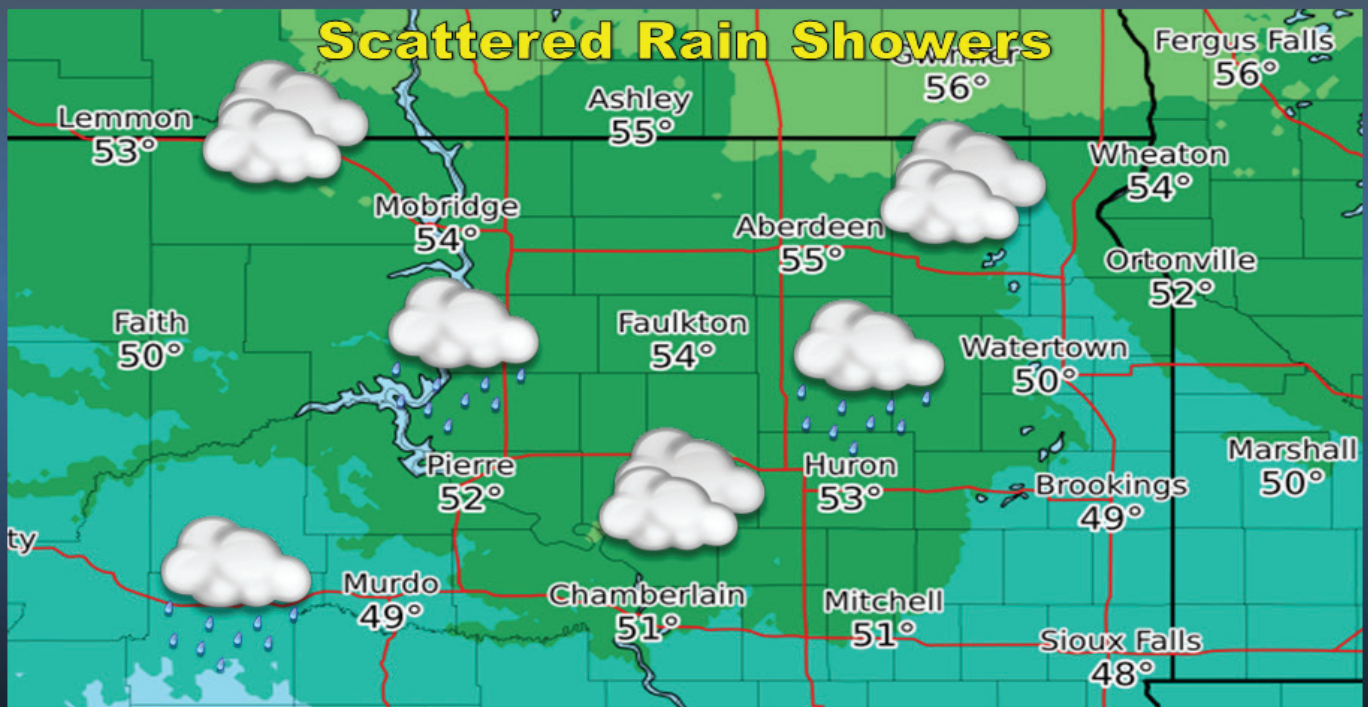
1990 - Thunderstorms deluged Hot Springs AR with thirteen inches of rain in nine hours resulting in a devastating flood. Two waves of water, four to six feet deep, swept down Central Avenue flooding stores and the famous bathhouses on Bathhouse Row. Water released from Lake Hamilton devastated the area between it and Rammel Dam. The 500 foot Carpenter Dam Bridge across Lake Catherine was completely washed away, as were cabins and mobile homes near the lake, many of which flowed right over the top of Rammel Dam. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
 20%	 30%	 70%	 60%	 20%		 40%
Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Showers Likely	Showers Likely	Slight Chance Showers	Partly Cloudy	Chance Showers
High: 55 °F	Low: 39 °F	High: 47 °F	Low: 38 °F	High: 68 °F	Low: 44 °F	High: 65 °F

High Temperatures About 15-20 Degrees Below Average



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 5/19/2017 5:29 AM Central

Published on: 05/19/2017 at 5:33AM

While not bringing a washout today, low pressure developing to the south will be responsible for widespread cloud cover and scattered light rain showers. More widespread rain is expected east river Saturday, with temperatures remaining in the 40s and 50s.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 61.2 F at 5:15 PM

Low Outside Temp: 41.9 F at 7:03 AM

High Gust: 31.0 Mph at 1:31 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 97° in 1932

Record Low: 28° in 2002

Average High: 70°F

Average Low: 45°F

Average Precip in May: 1.96

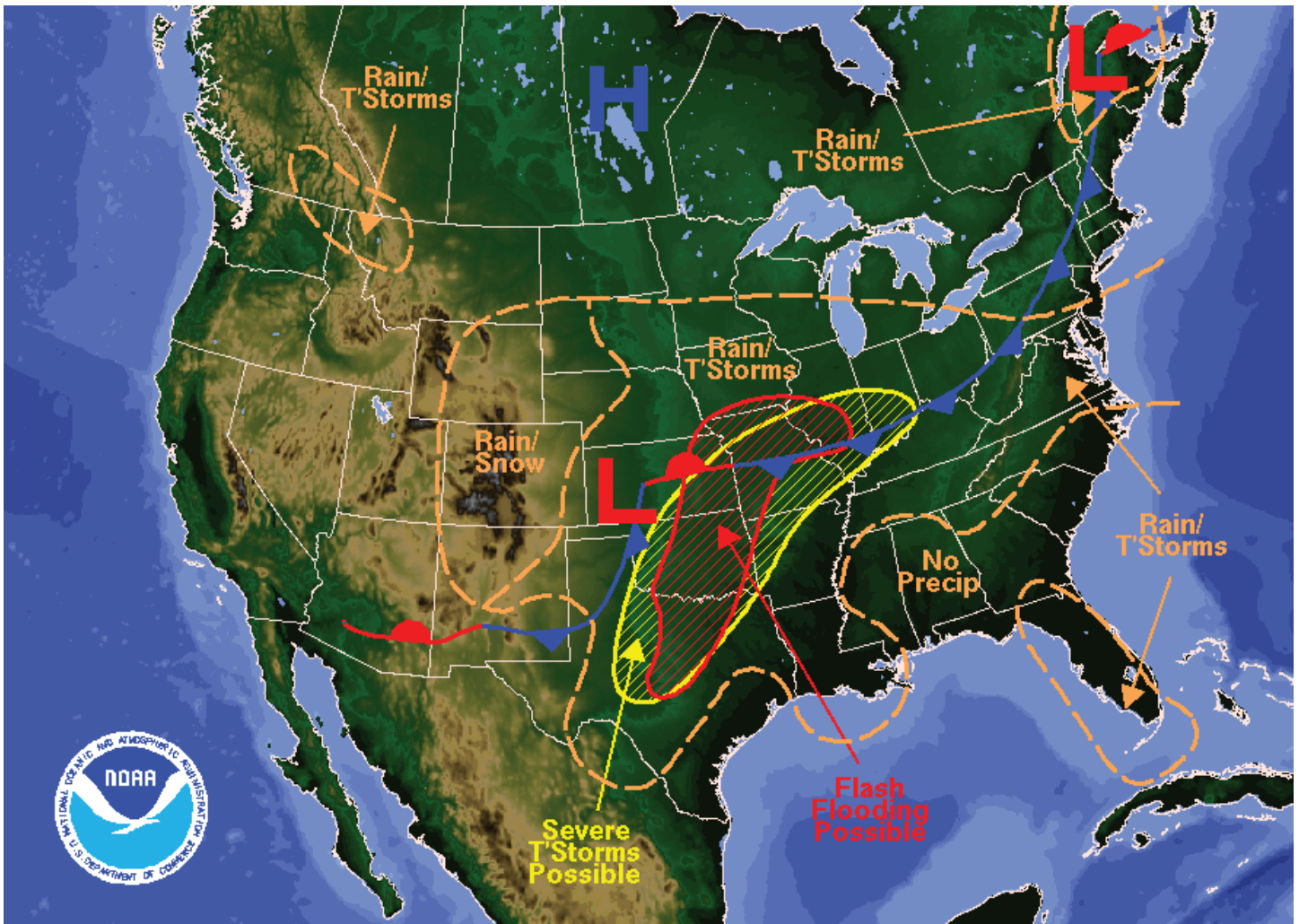
Precip to date in May: 0.78

Average Precip to date: 5.99

Precip Year to Date: 2.76

Sunset Tonight: 9:02 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:57 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Fri, May 19, 2017, issued 4:37 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Mcreynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

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WHAT GOD CAN DO

Has anyone ever looked at you and said, "You'll never change! You're hopeless! I can tell you are going no place in life." Painful words that many of us have heard at one time or another. And, no doubt, there were times when we might have thought the "charges" were accurate, based on the number of times we've started something in our lives that ended in disaster.

Imagine a king feeling like he was almost "unfit for duty." First he wrote, "Part Your heavens, O Lord, and come down...reach down Your hand from on high...deliver me and rescue me..." Imagine a king feeling so alone and abandoned - even by a God he worshiped - that he could not feel His presence at all. Things must have been about as bad as they could get.

But they didn't stay that way. God intervened - as He can and will - when our king or any one of us comes to the end of our strength and goes to Him for His!

God answered his cry and blessed him so mightily that he picked up a ten-stringed instrument and with it sang a "new song."

God wants to give us the desires of our hearts. Our every need is important to Him: large or small, significant or insignificant. They all matter to Him! He is our Father and a father who loves his children, as God loves us, does not want His children to go without.

When God answered his prayer, the first thing he did was to praise God and give Him His due recognition. Might God not bless us because we are so ungrateful?

Prayer: Father, it's so easy to live thankless and greedy lives. Make us aware of Your gifts. Give us grateful hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 144:9 I will sing a new song to you, my God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you,

News from the Associated Press

Rapid City police plan to have saturation patrols

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Rapid City Police Department is set to participate in saturation patrols during the nationwide “Click it or Ticket” campaign.

The campaign runs Monday until June 4. The department plans to add officers during its standard shifts to help with traffic enforcement and address seatbelt and child restraint violations. Officers will also be looking for speed violations and impaired drivers.

Rapid City police made 973 DUI arrests in 2016.

Former US marshal sentenced to 7 years for child pornography

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A former deputy U.S. marshal in North Dakota has been sentenced to seven years in prison on a child pornography charge.

Thirty-year-old Michael Rivera, of Bismarck, pleaded guilty in January to receipt of images depicting the sexual exploitation of minors. The case was handled by the U.S. attorney’s office from South Dakota after North Dakota prosecutors opted to stay out of it.

Authorities say the images were found on Rivera’s computer as police were investigating state allegations he had recorded 19 women in store dressing rooms around Bismarck. Rivera was convicted in state court in February of misdemeanors including surreptitious intrusion and creating and attempting to create sexually expressive images.

U.S. District Judge Ralph Erickson says Rivera must serve five years of supervised release when he gets out of prison.

Ag Secretary Perdue touts veterans’ programs in South Dakota

ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue will visit South Dakota to discuss his department’s initiatives for bringing veterans into agriculture.

Perdue will be joined at Ellsworth Air Force Base on Friday by U.S. Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds and U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem.

They’ll hold a listening session with veterans, transitioning service members and their families to discuss entrepreneurship, employment and educational opportunities in agriculture.

Perdue is a former governor of Georgia. Earlier this month he helped persuade President Donald Trump not to abandon the North American Free Trade Agreement. Perdue has also created a new undersecretary position to oversee trade and foreign agricultural affairs. His reorganization plan would also combine farm production and conservation agencies under one undersecretary and move rural development programs to report directly to the secretary.

Sheriff not allowed to use drug dog, county fears expenses

ONIDA, S.D. (AP) — Elected officials in one South Dakota county are at odds after the local sheriff was told he couldn’t use a drug-sniffing dog because the resulting arrests would prove too costly.

The Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2qVhPGm>) reported the highly-trained dog named Reggie has created a stir in Sully County in central South Dakota.

Sheriff Bill Stahl wants to welcome the black Labrador retriever to his two-deputy team, but county commissioners voted in February to block him. More recently, commissioners denied requests to amend the county’s insurance policy to cover the canine.

Commissioner Bill Floyd said a drug-sniffing dog would likely apprehend more people passing through the county as opposed to local drug dealers and prosecution would be expensive.

“We might put away a Chicago drug dealer once in a while, but that just helps Chicago at our expense,”

Floyd said.

Stahl said one methamphetamine arrest he made along with three other drug felonies cost the county \$8,500 last month in housing fees at Hughes County Jail in Pierre.

With South Dakota seeing a surge in felony drug arrests, Stahl said the vote sends the wrong message and that commissioners have taken away the deterrence effect the dog would've had on those who travel along Highway 83.

Sioux Falls resident Luke Senst said he doesn't understand the commission's decision.

"The resolution they have doesn't make sense to me. To me, it says 'we have a drug problem, but we don't want to pay to deal with it,'" Senst said.

Reggie and his owner, Deputy Jordan Anderson, recently finished 280 hours of training in Pierre.

There are 27 narcotics-sniffing dogs in South Dakota, according to Attorney General Marty Jackley's office.

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

Bankers: rural economy improving but little growth expected

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — More stable crop prices have improved the economic outlook for rural parts of 10 Plains and Western states, but bankers expect little growth in the next few months.

The overall economic index for the region crept into positive territory above 50 at 50.1 in May from April's 44.6. This is the first time the overall index was above neutral since August 2015.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss says the slightly better commodity prices helped improve the outlook, but the bankers surveyed remain concerned about farmers.

Bankers from Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming were surveyed.

US forecasters: Here comes another hotter than normal summer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. forecasters are predicting another warmer than normal summer for most of the country along with wetter weather in a swath of states stretching from Texas to Montana.

The National Weather Service's summer outlook issued Thursday predicts greater chances for hot weather in Alaska and pretty much everywhere else. The exceptions are Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and parts of Missouri and Colorado.

Forecaster Stephen Baxter said it may not be as hot as recent summers because rain-soaked soil from a wet spring may keep the heat down. Baxter forecasts a wetter than normal summer for Alaska and parts of the already soggy Great Plains.

Meteorologists also said last month was the second warmest April on record globally.

South Dakota hospital expansion focuses on mental health

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City hospital plans to expand its emergency room over the next two years with the goal of providing better care for people suffering a mental health crisis in western South Dakota.

Rapid City Region CEO Paulette Davidson said Wednesday that the expansion will include eight "safe rooms" where people can be cared for while their mental crisis is de-escalated, the Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2rhQXQQ>) reported.

The announcement comes after the second meeting of the West River Behavioral Health Alliance, a group formed in March to address the lack of mental health services in the Black Hills area. The alliance was founded by Davidson, Rapid City Police Chief Karl Jegeris and Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom.

Jegeris said those working to improve mental health care are lacking resources.

"We're kind of caught up in a cycle where we're waiting until there's a crisis or emergency, and in the end we're really being very inefficient in the way that we as an overall state are addressing mental health

and even substance abuse issues," he said.

The group also discussed the addition of a mobile crisis-care unit. The vehicle would be staffed by specialists who help de-escalate people in crisis and administer medication, Davidson said. The unit would be similar to a mobile crisis response team in Sioux Falls.

"What we need to do is learn from others that have this service in place," Davidson said.

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

Tribes fighting pipeline drop appeal but battle continues

By BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — American Indian tribes who are still fighting the Dakota Access oil pipeline in court have dropped an appeal of a federal judge's decision that allowed final construction to proceed on the project that is just two weeks from operating commercially.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg in early March refused to stop completion of the pipeline based on the claims of Sioux tribes that it threatens water they consider sacred. The Cheyenne River Sioux appealed the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, which refused to grant an emergency order stopping oil from flowing while the appeal was decided.

Developer Energy Transfer Partners finished construction on the pipeline and began filling it with oil in late March. Spokeswoman Vicki Granado confirmed this week that the line fill process has been completed.

"Our commercial operations begin June 1, whereby we will begin transporting crude per our contracts with shippers," she said.

With oil already in the line, Cheyenne River attorneys in late April submitted a motion to voluntarily dismiss their claim in the appeals court, and the motion was granted Monday.

The pipeline will move North Dakota oil 1,200 miles through South Dakota and Iowa to a distribution point in Illinois. ETP maintains the pipeline is safe, but the Cheyenne River, Standing Rock, Yankton and Oglala Sioux tribes in the Dakotas fear environmental harm. They're continuing to fight the project in federal court in Washington, D.C., hoping to convince Boasberg to shut down the pipeline.

Follow Blake Nicholson on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/NicholsonBlake>

South Dakota woman killed in Nebraska crash, authorities say

VALENTINE, Neb. (AP) — Authorities say a South Dakota woman has been killed in a northern Nebraska collision.

The accident occurred early Monday morning on U.S. Highway 83, about 5 miles (8 kilometers) north of Valentine. Cherry County Attorney Eric Scott says 68-year-old Philomene Redbull, of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, was killed when her pickup truck collided head-on with another vehicle driven by a Texas man.

Valentine radio station KVSH reports (<http://bit.ly/2qAWgbf>) that the other driver was identified as 35-year-old Jesus Rodriquez, of Houston. He was taken to Cherry County Hospital. A hospital spokesman said Thursday that there was no patient by that name at the hospital.

Information from: KVSH-AM.

Sioux Falls man accused of threats faces federal gun charge

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man accused of livestreaming himself brandishing weapons and making threats outside an anti-Islam event last month is now facing a federal gun charge.

Ehab Jaber of Sioux Falls was indicted last week for possession of a firearm by a prohibited person after he was found in April in possession of five firearms while being a drug user. Court records don't list an attorney for the 45-year-old Jaber.

Jaber also faces state charges of making terroristic threats and possessing meth. Authorities say he made the Facebook video after he was kicked out of an April 9 event called "Sabotaging America: Islam's March Toward Supremacy."

He was arrested again in April after testing positive for meth, a violation of his bond, and charged with felony ingestion of a controlled substance.

Fort Thompson woman sentenced for assaulting federal officer

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A Fort Thompson woman has been sentenced to four months in custody for assaulting a federal officer.

Authorities say 31-year-old Megan Azure struck a Bureau of Indian Affairs officer in the face with her head while in the Lower Brule jail on tribal charges in March 2015.

U.S. Attorney Randolph Seiler says Azure pleaded guilty in February and was sentenced this week. She'll be on supervised release for three years.

Vivian man indicted in death of infant daughter

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A grand jury in Lyman County has indicted a man in the death of his 7-week-old daughter.

Thirty-six-year-old Gerald Brink is accused of hitting and throwing the infant. An autopsy showed the baby suffered four skull fractures and blunt force trauma to the head and died at a hospital May 4.

KOTA-TV (<http://bit.ly/2pXaLF1>) reports that besides second-degree murder, the Vivian man was also indicted on two alternative counts of manslaughter in the first degree and a count of aggravated battery of an infant. Brink faces life in prison if convicted of either the murder or manslaughter charges.

Court documents say Brink admitted to state investigators that he struck the baby and that she hit her head on a dresser when he threw her toward her bassinet.

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

Why Trump's combative trade stance makes US farmers nervous

By PAUL WISEMAN, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A sizable majority of rural Americans backed Donald Trump's presidential bid, drawn to his calls to slash environmental rules, strengthen law enforcement and replace the federal health care law.

But last month, many of them struck a sour note after White House aides signaled that Trump would deliver on another signature vow by edging toward abandoning the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Farm Country suddenly went on red alert.

Trump's message that NAFTA was a job-killing disaster had never resonated much in rural America. NAFTA had widened access to Mexican and Canadian markets, boosting U.S. farm exports and benefiting many farmers.

"Mr. President, America's corn farmers helped elect you," Wesley Spurlock of the National Corn Growers Association warned in a statement. "Withdrawing from NAFTA would be disastrous for American agriculture."

Within hours, Trump softened his stance. He wouldn't actually dump NAFTA, he said. He'd first try to forge a more advantageous deal with Mexico and Canada — a move that formally began Thursday when his top trade negotiator, Robert Lighthizer, announced the administration's intent to renegotiate NAFTA.

Farmers have been relieved that NAFTA has survived so far. Yet many remain nervous about where Trump's trade policy will lead.

As a candidate, Trump defined his "America First" stance as a means to fight unfair foreign competition. He blamed unjust deals for swelling U.S. trade gaps and stealing factory jobs.

But NAFTA and other deals have been good for American farmers, who stand to lose if Trump ditches

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the pact or ignites a trade war. The United States has enjoyed a trade surplus in farm products since at least 1967, government data show. Last year, farm exports exceeded imports by \$20.5 billion.

"You don't start off trade negotiations ... by picking fights with your trade partners that are completely unnecessary," says Aaron Lehman, a fifth-generation Iowa farmer who produces corn, soybeans, oats and hay.

Many farmers worry that Trump's policies will jeopardize their exports just as they face weaker crop and livestock prices.

"It comes up pretty quickly in conversation," says Blake Hurst, a corn and soybean farmer in northwestern Missouri's Atchison County.

That county's voters backed Trump more than 3-to-1 in the election but now feel "it would be better if the rhetoric (on trade) was a little less strident," says Hurst, president of the Missouri Farm Bureau.

Trump's main argument against NAFTA and other pacts was that they exposed American workers to unequal competition with low-wage workers in countries like Mexico and China.

NAFTA did lead some American manufacturers to move factories and jobs to Mexico. But since it took effect in 1994 and eased tariffs, annual farm exports to Mexico have jumped nearly five-fold to about \$18 billion. Mexico is the No. 3 market for U.S. agriculture, notably corn, soybeans and pork.

"The trade agreements that we've had have been very beneficial," says Stephen Censky, CEO of the American Soybean Association. "We need to take care not to blow the significant gains that agriculture has won."

The U.S. has run a surplus in farm trade with Mexico for 20 of the 23 years since NAFTA took effect. Still, the surpluses with Mexico became deficits in 2015 and 2016 as global livestock and grain prices plummeted and shrank the value of American exports, notes Joseph Glauber of the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Mexico has begun to seek alternatives to U.S. food because, as its agriculture secretary, Jose Calzada Roviroso, said in March, Trump's remarks on trade "have injected uncertainty" into the agriculture business.

Once word had surfaced that Trump was considering pulling out of NAFTA, Sonny Perdue, two days into his job as the president's agriculture secretary, hastened to the White House with a map showing areas that would be hurt most by a pullout, overlapped with many that voted for Trump.

"I tried to demonstrate to him that in the agricultural market, sometimes words like 'withdraw' or 'terminate' can have a major impact on markets," Perdue said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I think the president made a very wise decision for the benefit of many agricultural producers across the country" by choosing to remain in NAFTA.

Trump delivered another disappointment for U.S. farm groups in January by fulfilling a pledge to abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which the Obama administration negotiated with 11 Asia-Pacific countries. Trump argued that the pact would cost Americans jobs by pitting them against low-wage Asian labor.

But the deal would have given U.S. farmers broader access to Japan's notoriously impregnable market and easier entry into fast-growing Vietnam. Philip Seng of the U.S. Meat Export Federation notes that the U.S. withdrawal from TPP left Australia with a competitive advantage because it had already negotiated lower tariffs in Japan.

Trump has also threatened to impose tariffs on Chinese and Mexican imports, thereby raising fears that those trading partners would retaliate with their own sanctions.

Farmers know they're frequently the first casualties of trade wars. Many recall a 2009 trade rift in which China responded to U.S. tire tariffs by imposing tariffs on U.S. chicken parts. And Mexico slapped tariffs on U.S. goods ranging from ham to onions to Christmas trees in 2009 to protest a ban on Mexican trucks crossing the border.

The White House declined to comment on farmers' fears that Trump's trade policy stands to hurt them. But officials say they've sought to ease concerns, by, for example, having Agriculture Secretary Perdue announce a new undersecretary to oversee trade and foreign agricultural affairs.

Many farmers are still hopeful about the Trump administration. Some, for example, applaud his plans to slash environmental rules that they say inflate the cost of running a farm. Some also hold out hope that

the author of "The Art of the Deal" will negotiate ways to improve NAFTA.

One such way might involve Canada. NAFTA let Canada shield its dairy farmers from foreign competition behind tariffs and regulations but left at least one exception — an American ultra-filtered milk used in cheese. When Canadian farmers complained about the cheaper imports, Canada changed its policy and effectively priced ultra-filtered American milk out of the market.

"Canada has made business for our dairy farmers in Wisconsin and other border states very difficult," Trump tweeted last month. "We will not stand for this. Watch!"

Some U.S. cattle producers would also like a renegotiated NAFTA to give them something the current version doesn't: The right to label their product "Made in America." In 2015, the World Trade Organization struck down the United States' country-of-origin labeling rules as unfair to Mexico and Canada.

Many still worry that Trump's planned overhaul of American trade policy is built to revive manufacturing and that farming remains an afterthought.

"So much of the conversation in the campaign had been in Detroit or in Indiana" and focused on manufacturing jobs," said Kathy Baylis, an economist at the University of Illinois. The importance of American farm exports "never made it into the rhetoric."

AP Writers David Pitt in Des Moines and Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Paul Wiseman on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/PaulWisemanAP>

Worldwide effort set to keep Trump happy on 1st trip abroad

By **JULIE PACE, AP White House Correspondent**

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Donald Trump sits down for dinner in Saudi Arabia, caterers have ensured that his favorite meal — steak with a side of ketchup — will be offered alongside the traditional local cuisine.

At NATO and the Group of 7 summits, foreign delegations have gotten word that the new U.S. president prefers short presentations and lots of visual aids. And at all of Trump's five stops on his first overseas trip, his team has spent weeks trying to build daily downtime into his otherwise jam-packed schedule.

It's all part of a worldwide effort to accommodate America's homebody president on a voyage with increasingly raised stakes given the ballooning controversy involving his campaign's possible ties to Russia. For a former international businessman, Trump simply doesn't have an affinity for much international.

Even before Trump's trip morphed from a quick jaunt to Europe into a nine-day behemoth, White House aides were on edge about how the president would take to grueling pressures of foreign travel: the time zone changes, the unfamiliar hotels, the local delicacies. Two officials said they feared that a difficult trip might even lead the president to hand off future traveling duties to Vice President Mike Pence.

Trump's final itinerary hardly eases him into the delicate world of international diplomacy on foreign soil. After departing Friday on an overnight flight on Air Force One, Trump will hopscotch from Saudi Arabia to Israel to the Vatican. He'll close his trip with a pair of summits in Brussels and Sicily, often-staid affairs that require leaders to be locked in lengthy plenary sessions.

"The chance of something going wrong — you insult the hosts, you get sick, your boss gets sick, you miscommunicate with your hosts, you make a scheduling error, you need to change the schedule just hours before a meeting, the motorcade get stuck in traffic, or the plane is stranded due to bad weather — is extremely high," said Julianne Smith, who served as a foreign policy adviser to Vice President Joe Biden and is now a senior fellow at the Center for New American Security.

"Personally, I think they should cut it back now before they regret it," she said of Trump's long jaunt.

The trip marks the first time since taking office that Trump has spent a night away from the White House at a property that doesn't bear his name. And it's not just the bragging rights Trump gets when he goes to his own properties: Staffers know his meal preferences and the exact temperature he likes a room set at. He's often surrounded by long-time friends and acquaintances who have memberships to the com-

mander in chief-owned retreats.

The one trip Trump took abroad as a candidate was to mark the opening of a new golf resort in Scotland. He led journalists on a roving tour of the course and said his property would benefit if Britain's currency tanked following its decision to leave the European Union.

The stakes will be far higher as President Trump makes his debut on the international stage. He's the first president since Jimmy Carter to not travel abroad during his first 100 days in office. And he'll depart under a cloud of controversy, much of it of his own making, including the White House's botched handling of FBI Director James Comey's firing.

Nearly all of Trump's senior White House officials are traveling with him. First lady Melania Trump will also be on the trip, headlining her own events on each stop.

The Slovenian-born Mrs. Trump is the more seasoned international traveler in the relationship. She lived and worked as a model in Paris and Milan before moving to New York, and speaks multiple languages.

Before the couple married, they flew to Slovenia so the New York real estate mogul could meet his bride-to-be's family. The day trip marked the only time Trump has set foot in his wife's home country.

"At least I can say that I went," Trump told The New York Times last year.

Foreign travel has never been high on Trump's list of priorities. During his first marriage, he usually stayed behind when wife Ivana took his children for visits to her home country, the former Czechoslovakia. He's made the occasional stops to meet business partners abroad, but most of his travel has been to his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, and other U.S. properties.

Trump's hosts on his upcoming trip are well-aware of his aversion to travel and are trying to make accommodations to keep him happy.

In Saudi Arabia, people with knowledge of the planning for Trump's trip say the caterers are planning to offer the president steak and ketchup alongside the lamb and hefty portions of rice on the menu. All the meat will have been butchered in a Shariah-compliant halal manner as per Islamic custom.

The people with knowledge of the Saudis' planning insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose the sensitive details.

AP writer Abdullah al-Shihri in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC>

Iran votes in first presidential election since nuclear deal

By ADAM SCHRECK and AMIR VAHDAT, Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranians voted Friday in the country's first presidential election since its nuclear deal with world powers, as incumbent Hassan Rouhani faced a staunch challenge from a hard-line opponent over his outreach to the West.

The election is largely viewed as a referendum on the 68-year-old cleric's more moderate policies, which paved the way for the nuclear accord despite opposition from hard-liners.

Economic issues also will be on the minds of Iran's over 56 million eligible voters as they head to more than 63,000 polling places across the country. The average Iranian has yet to see the benefits of the deal, which saw Iran limit its contested nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of some sanctions.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the most powerful man in Iran, symbolically cast the election's first vote and called on Iranians to turn out in huge numbers for the poll.

"Elections are very important and the fate of the country is in the hands of all people," he said.

Associated Press journalists in Tehran, whose liberal and affluent voters form the bedrock of support for Rouhani, found lines at some precincts much longer than those seen in his 2013 win. Analysts have suggested a high turnout will aid Rouhani in securing a second four-year term.

"I am happy I could vote for Rouhani," said Zohreh Amini, a 21-year-old woman studying painting at Tehran Azad University. "He kept the shadow of war far from our country."

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After casting his ballot, Rouhani said whomever the voters elect as president should receive all of the nation's support.

"Any candidate who is elected should be helped to accomplish this heavy responsibility," Rouhani said. "Anyone who is elected must be helped from tomorrow with unity, happiness and joy."

Rouhani has history on his side in the election. No incumbent president has failed to win re-election since 1981, when Khamenei became president himself.

That doesn't mean it will be easy, however. Rouhani faces three challengers, the strongest among them hard-line cleric Ebrahim Raisi, 56.

Raisi, a law professor and former prosecutor who heads an influential religious charitable foundation with vast business holdings, is seen by many as close to Khamenei. Raisi has even been discussed as a possible successor to him, though Khamenei has stopped short of endorsing anyone.

Raisi won the support of two major clerical bodies and promised to boost welfare payments to the poor. His populist posture, anti-corruption rhetoric and get-tough reputation — bolstered by his alleged role condemning inmates to death during Iran's 1988 mass execution of thousands of political prisoners — are likely to energize conservative rural and working-class voters.

"Rouhani has turned our foreign policies into a mess and damaged our religion," said Sedigheh Davoodabadi, a 59-year-old housewife in Iran's holy city of Qom who voted for Raisi. "Rouhani gave everything to the U.S. outright" in the nuclear deal.

After voting, Raisi told journalists that all should "completely surrender to the result of the election."

"If I, for instance, find the result undesirable, it should not lead to disruption of the election," he said.

Mostafa Hashemitaba, a pro-reform figure who previously ran for president in 2001, and Mostafa Mirsalim, a former culture minister, also remain in the race.

Iranians overseas also will vote in over 300 locations, including 55 in the U.S., where more than 1 million Iranians live.

Hard-liners remain suspicious of America, decades after the 1953 U.S.-engineered coup that toppled Iran's prime minister and the 1979 U.S. Embassy takeover and hostage crisis in Tehran. U.S. President Donald Trump's tougher stance on Iran has stoked concern as well, though his administration this week took a key step toward preserving the Obama-era nuclear deal.

Iran's political system combines conservative clerical oversight and state control over large parts of the economy with tightly regulated but still hotly contested elections for key government posts. All candidates for elected office must be vetted, a process that excludes anyone calling for radical change, along with most reformists. No woman has been approved to run for president.

The president of the Islamic Republic oversees a vast state bureaucracy, is charged with naming Cabinet members and other officials to key posts, and plays a significant role in shaping both domestic and foreign policy. But he remains subordinate to the supreme leader, who is chosen by a clerical panel and has the ultimate say over all matters of state.

The race has heated emotions and pushed public discourse in Iran into areas typically untouched in the tightly controlled state media. That includes Rouhani openly criticizing hard-liners and Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard, a paramilitary force now involved in the war in Syria and the fight against Islamic State militants in neighboring Iraq. Rouhani also found himself surrounded by angry coal miners who beat and threw rocks at his armored SUV during a visit to a northern mine struck by an explosion earlier this month that killed at least 42 people.

But authorities worry about tempers rising too high, especially after the 2009 disputed re-election of former hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that saw unrest, mass arrests and killings. Authorities barred Ahmadinejad from running in Friday's election, and Khamenei days ago warned anyone fomenting unrest "will definitely be slapped in the face."

That hasn't stopped those at Rouhani rallies from shouting for the house-arrested leaders of the 2009's Green Movement. Opposition websites have said Green Movement leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mahdi Karroubi both have endorsed Rouhani against Raisi. Rouhani promised in his 2013 campaign to free the men, but that pledge so far remains unfulfilled.

Mohammad Khatami, another reformist who served as Iran's president from 1997 to 2005, also has endorsed Rouhani.

Supporters of the two leading candidates honked, blared music and held pictures of the hopefuls out of car windows on the traffic-clogged and heavily policed streets of Tehran late into the night Thursday, ignoring a ban on campaigning in the final 24 hours before the vote.

Voting is scheduled to run until 6 p.m., though Iran routinely extends voting for several hours in elections. Iranian authorities say they believe the vote will exceed a 70-percent turnout.

Associated Press writers Nasser Karimi in Tehran and Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

Trump heads overseas, turmoil in his wake

By ERICA WERNER and DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — If President Donald Trump was hoping to head out on his first big foreign trip with turmoil calmed at home, he's going to have a disappointing Air Force One departure on Friday.

Combative and complaining, Trump fell short Thursday in trying to resolve investigations into his campaign and his first four months in office. He's departing having fervently denied that his campaign had collaborated with Russia or that he'd tried to kill an FBI probe of the issue — and claiming to be the most hounded president in history. Even his enemies, Trump declared, recognize his innocence.

Asked point-blank if he'd done anything that might merit prosecution or even impeachment, Trump said no — and then added of the lingering allegations and questions: "I think it's totally ridiculous. Everybody thinks so."

Not quite everybody.

While Trump tweeted and voiced his indignation at the White House, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed a special counsel to lead an independent federal Trump-Russia investigation, briefed the entire Senate in private. By several senators' accounts, he contradicted Trump's statements that Rosenstein's written criticism of FBI Director James Comey had been a factor in Comey's recent firing by the president.

Rosenstein was returning to the Capitol on Friday for another closed-door session, this time with all members of the House.

Trump is leaving Friday for his first foreign trip, to the Mideast and beyond, and aides had hoped the disarray at home would have been calmed if not resolved by take-off time. Republicans on Capitol Hill hoped the same, reasoning that the appointment of a special counsel could free them to work on a major tax overhaul — and other matters — without constant distractions.

Trump said he was about to name a replacement for Comey, another effort to settle the waters. Former Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman was seen as the front-runner.

But calmness seemed far off.

Trump clearly knew what he wanted to say as he took a few questions at a news briefing with visiting Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos.

Did he urge Comey at a February meeting to drop his probe of the Russia connections of Trump's national security adviser, Michael Flynn?

"No. No. Next question."

Did he collude with Russia in his campaign to defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton?

"Everybody, even my enemies, have said there is no collusion," he replied.

Another answer on that subject seemed both more specific and perhaps ambiguous.

"There is no collusion between certainly myself and my campaign — but I can only speak for myself — and the Russians. Zero."

"The entire thing has been a witch hunt," he declared, echoing one of the tweets he'd sent out just after dawn: "This is the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!"

He said he respected the special counsel appointment but also said it "hurts our country terribly." Across town, Rosenstein was briefing the Senate about his decision to appoint former FBI Director Robert Mueller to lead the independent Trump-Russia probe.

Senators said that Rosenstein steered clear of specifics while making clear that Mueller has wide latitude to pursue the investigation wherever it leads, potentially including criminal charges. Despite the president's furious reaction, some fellow Republicans welcomed Mueller's appointment and expressed hopes it would restore some composure to a capital plunged in chaos.

"We'll get rid of the smoke and see where the actual issues lie," said Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C. "I do think that the special prosecutor provides a sense of calm and confidence perhaps for the American people, which is incredibly important."

One striking piece of news emerged from Rosenstein's briefing: He told senators that he had already known Comey was getting fired even as he wrote the memo that Trump cited as a significant justification for the FBI director's dismissal. Trump himself had already contradicted that explanation, telling interviewers earlier that he had already decided to dismiss Comey.

He offered new justifications for his decision Thursday, even while referring to the Rosenstein memo as "a very, very strong recommendation."

Trump referred to Comey's testimony at a recent Capitol Hill hearing, after which the Justice Department ended up having to amend part of his testimony regarding last year's probe of Hillary Clinton's email practices.

"That was a poor, poor performance," Trump said. "And then on top of that, after the Wednesday performance by Director Comey, you had a person come and have to readjust the record, which many people have never seen before, because there were misstatements made."

The Justice Department says Mueller, the new special counsel, has been given sweeping power to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign, including potential links between Moscow and Trump associates.

Despite initially opposing appointment of an independent counsel, Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan said Thursday that the development "helps assure people and the Justice Department that they're going to go do their jobs independently and thoroughly, which is what we've called for all along."

Associated Press writers Deb Riechmann, Eileen Sullivan, Matthew Daly, Richard Lardner and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Suspect in deadly Times Square mayhem charged with murder

By COLLEEN LONG and TOM HAYS, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Times Square motorist accused of steering his car onto one of the busiest sidewalks in the U.S. and mowing down pedestrians has been charged with murder and 20 counts of attempted murder, police say.

The New York Police Department said 26-year-old Richard Rojas, of the Bronx, was charged late Thursday also with five counts of aggravated vehicular homicide.

Rojas was arrested Thursday afternoon after he drove his car for three blocks in Times Square, hitting nearly two dozen people before steel security barriers finally stopped him. An 18-year-old tourist from Michigan was killed. Her 13-year-old sister was among the 22 injured, four of them critically.

Rojas is to be arraigned Friday. It wasn't clear if he a lawyer.

Officials say he had served in the U.S. Navy but was discharged following disciplinary problems. After his arrest, he told police he was "hearing voices" and expected to die, two law enforcement officials said.

After the wreck he emerged from his vehicle running, yelling and jumping before being subdued by police and bystanders in a chaotic scene.

"He began screaming, no particular words but just utter screaming. He was swinging his arms at the same time, said Ken Bradix, a security supervisor at a nearby Planet Hollywood restaurant who tackled Rojas.

Rojas initially tested negative for alcohol, but more detailed drug tests were pending, according to two

law enforcement officials who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity. The officials said Rojas told officers he had been hearing voices.

The carnage happened in a part of the city that has long been considered a possible terrorist target because of its large crowds, a concern that became elevated after the Sept. 11 attacks and compounded by recent attacks in England, France and Germany in which vehicles plowed through crowds of pedestrians.

Rojas' motivation was unclear, but Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio said there was "no indication that this was an act of terrorism."

The picture that quickly emerged of Rojas from neighbors and authorities was of a man with problems. A week ago he was arrested and charged with pointing a knife at a notary, whom he accused of stealing his identity. He pleaded guilty to a harassment violation. In previous arrests, he told authorities he believed he was being harassed and followed, one of the law enforcement officials said.

Rojas was arrested on charges of driving while intoxicated in 2008 and 2015, police Commissioner James O'Neill said, losing his license for 90 days.

A neighborhood friend in the Bronx, Harrison Ramos, said Rojas wasn't the same when he came back from the Navy in 2014.

"He's been going through a real tough time," he said.

Rojas enlisted in 2011 and was an electrician's mate fireman apprentice. In 2012 he served aboard the U.S.S. Carney, a destroyer.

Navy records show that in 2013 he spent two months at a naval brig in Charleston, South Carolina. They don't indicate why.

Rojas spent his final months in the Navy at the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida, before being discharged in 2014 as the result of a special court martial, a Navy official said. Details were not immediately available.

Thursday's mayhem began at noon on a hot, clear day that brought large crowds of people into the streets to enjoy the good weather.

"People just got stunned," said Bruno Carvalho, a student at SUNY Albany. "I don't think there was actually time for screaming."

Police identified the woman killed by the car as Alyssa Elsmann, of Portage, Michigan.

Elsmann graduated last year from Portage Central High School.

"If you didn't know her, you might think she's reserved or shy," school principal Eric Alburtus said. "But if you could talk to her for a minute, you'd realize she was engaging. She was bright. She was funny."

Elsmann's 13-year-old sister was also struck by the car, but survived, police said.

The apartment building where Rojas lives was cordoned off by police Thursday. It was unclear when Rojas, who was in custody, would get a lawyer or be arraigned.

Associated Press writers Libby Quaid in Washington, Ed White in Detroit and Jennifer Peltz and Jake Pearson in New York contributed to this report.

Thailand's chunky monkey on diet after gorging on junk food

By KAWEEWIT KAEWJINDA, Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A morbidly obese wild monkey who gorged himself on junk food and soda left behind by tourists has been rescued and placed on a strict diet of lean protein, fruits and vegetables.

Wildlife officials caught the chunky monkey — nicknamed "Uncle Fat" by locals — after photos of the animal started circulating on social media last month.

Wild monkeys roam free in many parts of Thailand, attracting tourists who feed and play with the animals. Most of the monkeys are macaques like Uncle Fat, and they typically weigh around 9 kilograms (20 pounds).

Uncle Fat weighs three times that, tipping the scales at around 26 kilograms (60 pounds).

"It was not easy to catch him," said Kacha Phukem, the wildlife official who conducted the capture and rescue on April 27. "He was the leader of his pack, and when I tried to go in, I had to fight off a flock of

them with sticks.”

The subordinate monkeys fed into Uncle Fat’s bad habits.

“He had minions and other monkeys bringing food for him but he would also re-distribute it to younger monkeys,” said Supakarn Kaewchot, a veterinarian in charge of the monkey’s diet. “He is now in a critical condition where there is a high-risk of heart disease and diabetes.”

Uncle Fat is believed to be between 10 and 15 years old. To help him lose weight, his new diet is limited to 400 grams worth of lean protein, fruits and vegetables twice a day. Supakarn said she hopes that within a few months they can consider releasing him to the wild.

She said Uncle Fat is an example of why people shouldn’t feed wild monkeys unhealthy food.

“I understand that people feel sorry for the monkeys and want to feed them when they see them,” Supakarn said. “But please don’t feed them food that people like to eat like snacks and soda. It is very bad for their health and the problem is entirely man-made.”

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. WHO TRUMP COULD NAME AS FBI CHIEF

President Donald Trump says he is “very close” to naming a new FBI director, and that former Sen. Joe Lieberman is among his top candidates.

2. HOW THE WORLD IS TRYING TO KEEP TRUMP HAPPY

As President Trump heads off on his first foreign trip, a five-stop journey across the Middle East and Europe, a worldwide effort is under way to accommodate America’s homebody-in-chief.

3. IRANIANS VOTE IN FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SINCE NUCLEAR DEAL

Hassan Rouhani faces a staunch challenge from a hard-line opponent over his outreach to the West in Iran’s elections .

4. RAPE CHARGES DROPPED AGAINST ASSANGE

Sweden dropped its rape investigation of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. British police say he will face arrest if he leaves Ecuadorean embassy in London.

5. NORTH KOREA MIGHT, OR MIGHT NOT, BE BEHIND CYBERATTACK

Experts are questioning whether North Korea is to blame for the WannaCry ransomware attack, saying it doesn’t fit the pattern of previous hacks blamed on Pyongyang.

6. WHERE FRANCE’S NEW PRESIDENT IS HEADING FOR HIS FIRST OVERSEAS TRIP

Emmanuel Macron has chosen the West African nation of Mali for his first official visit outside Europe. France’s largest overseas military operation is in a country where extremist groups pose a growing danger.

7. WHAT THE DEATH OF AILES MEANS FOR FOX NEWS

The network Ailes founded faces some troubling questions under the surface of its success, and what it will face next in a changing media world.

8. HOW MUCH A BASQUIAT PAINTING WAS SOLD FOR

“Untitled” by Jean-Michel Basquiat sold for a record \$110.5 million at auction in New York, to a noted Japanese collector and entrepreneur after a 10-minute bidding war.

9. FAMILY OF SINGER CHRIS CORNELL QUESTIONS HOW HE DIED

A medical examiner says the Soundgarden and Audioslave singer died by hanging in a Detroit hotel room, but Cornell’s family attorney refutes “inferences that Chris knowingly and intentionally” killed himself.

10. WHY A RESCUED MONKEY IS KNOWN AS ‘UNCLE FAT’

A morbidly obese wild monkey who gorged himself on junk food and soda left behind by tourists in Thailand has been rescued and placed on a strict diet.

Young or old, Saudi women live under male relatives' control

By AYA BATRAWY, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — First she's in the hands of her father, then she moves to her husband. Often, she ends up under the power of her son.

From childhood through adulthood into old age, every Saudi woman passes from the control of one legal guardian to another, a male relative whose decisions or whims can determine the course of her life.

Under Saudi law, the guardian's permission is required for a woman to get a passport, to travel abroad or to marry. It is also often demanded whenever a woman tries to do any number of things, including rent an apartment, buy a car, undergo a medical procedure or take a job. As a result, women are consigned to the legal status of minors.

Saudi Arabia's ban on women driving is what often grabs the most attention, but rights advocates say guardianship laws are the factor that most powerfully enshrines inequality for women. President Donald Trump heads to Saudi Arabia this weekend to cement ties with the deeply conservative kingdom.

Guardianship was a major reason for the outrage when Saudi Arabia last month was elected to a U.N. commission tasked with promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The kingdom was nominated to the post by the Asia-Pacific region, and normally nominees are rubber-stamped automatically. In this case, the U.S. requested a secret ballot vote, a move seen as a symbolic objection, though the kingdom won with 47 out of 54 votes.

The Geneva-based rights group UN Watch denounced the acceptance of Saudi Arabia on the commission, calling it the "world's leading oppressor of women."

Saudi law is based on one of the most conservative interpretations of Islamic Shariah, and no other Muslim countries enforce such strict guardianship measures. There have been some marginal improvements in women's rights in the kingdom in recent years. In a rare step to partially rein in guardianship, King Salman last week ordered government agencies to stop demanding guardians' permission beyond the areas where the law actually requires it.

Rights activists say the system should be ended completely.

The Associated Press spoke with three generations of women from a single family about its impact on their lives:

THE GRANDMOTHER:

Naila Mohammed Saleh Nasief, an outspoken 96-year-old, finds it frustrating and humorous that her son has been her guardian for the past three decades.

"I need his permission for everything," she said. "My son, who I gave birth to and raised and made a man. Does this make sense?"

Her father, who worked in the Finance Ministry, and her husband, a doctor who at one time served as health minister, were both open-minded men and gave her freedom of choice, she said. She raised her sons and daughters as equals. Breaking with another cultural norm, Nasief has never worn the black face veil, known as the niqab, which most Saudi women don.

Since her father and husband's deaths, her eldest son has also been accommodating.

But that doesn't mean things are easy.

In one case, in her 60s, she went to the airport to fly to the United States. But she had forgotten the piece of paper from her son granting her permission to travel. Her brother, his children, and her son-in-law and grandchildren were all flying with her — but not her son.

So airport officials barred her from boarding the plane. She and her 18 relatives had to wait for five hours for someone to bring the document to the airport. Nowadays, guardians can give travel permissions electronically.

"I felt I am not human," she said of the experience.

The system leaves women dependent on the goodwill of their male relatives — fathers, husbands or sons, or in some cases a brother or uncle. Guardians are free to refuse permission. Women have complained of being abused, forced to hand over salaries to their guardians, barred from marriage or forced

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into unwanted marriages. Women who flee abusive homes can be imprisoned or put in a shelter, requiring the consent of her guardian to leave.

Nasief said the rules aim to keep women at home and quiet. She lamented that some women support the system, seeing it as protecting them.

"I don't think these laws will change, not even in 50 years, because people's minds are closed," she said. "If you hear people talking, they say it's better for men to rule us than to be out in the wild."

"Religion doesn't say to do this," she said. "There isn't anything in the Quran that says a man rules over women."

THE MOTHER:

Sahar Nasief, Naila's daughter, was 53 when her son became her guardian.

When she divorced her husband, her guardianship was transferred back to her father, Hassan Nasief. After he died, her three sons joked over who would be responsible for their mother, she says. In the end, she picked her middle son, then 32.

She had to get his consent when she rented an apartment and when she bought a car. The dealer even demanded he co-sign on the car, even though Nasief, a now 63-year-old retired university professor, bought the car with her money.

In 2013, when she defied the ban on women driving and got behind the wheel of a car as part of a nationwide movement to push for women's rights, she was pulled over by police, who wouldn't release her until her son signed a pledge vowing his mother would never drive again.

When raising her three daughters, she taught them never "to take any nonsense from anyone" and made sure not to teach them "this nonsense about 'you have to obey your husband for life'."

"My daughters and sons were raised like this, as equals sharing and exchanging roles," Nasief said.

Nasief says guardianship translates into "ownership" of women.

"I want my right without any reason. It's a right," she said.

THE DAUGHTER:

Lubna Jamjoom, Sahar's daughter, is a 40-year-old interior designer with three children. But she needed her husband to accompany her to the bank in order for her to open an account for her children and she needed him to get her children passports.

"It doesn't make sense that he can decide these things for me as an adult and the mother of his children," she said.

Unlike many Saudi women, Jamjoom knew her husband before marrying him. That was important for her, knowing how much sway he would have over her life. "Even if the guy is kind or good, he can make a woman's life difficult," she said.

She has access to the family's identity book, an official document listing the parents' and children's names. It is issued only to the father, and women whose husbands keep hold on it have no way to prove their relationship with their children and so, for example, can't enroll them in school without the father's consent. It was only last year that widowed and divorced women could receive the book.

Jamjoom said she wants her daughter to grow up and be able to make their own decisions instead of relying on a man for nearly everything.

"This is the right God gave us," she said. "We are born free."

Follow Aya Batrawy on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ayaelb>

Amid White House crisis, Pence tries to avoid political fray

By KEN THOMAS and CATHERINE LUCEY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Mike Pence has tiptoed gingerly through the chaos engulfing the White House — offering loyalty to his boss, while trying to avoid the spreading stain of scandal.

It hasn't been easy, and it's getting harder by the day.

While some conservatives view Pence as a calming force in an administration mired in turmoil, Democrats

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are eager to tie him to President Donald Trump's vulnerabilities. The appointment of a special counsel to probe ties between Russia and Trump's campaign and associates has turned up the heat for everyone in Trump's orbit.

And there are fresh questions about how much Pence knew as head of Trump's transition team. The vice president was under new scrutiny Thursday after reports that former National Security Adviser Mike Flynn in January alerted the transition team about a Justice Department inquiry into whether he was secretly working as a foreign lobbyist for Turkish interests. The White House has said Flynn was fired in February for lying to Pence about his contacts with Russia's ambassador.

An administration official said Thursday that Pence knew nothing about Flynn's activities at the time and referred to the vice president's comments in a Fox News interview in March in which Pence said, "Hearing that story today was the first I heard of it." Democrats said that strained credibility.

"Pence was the head of the transition team that tapped Flynn for national security adviser. That is not good," said Stephanie Schriock, the president of EMILY's List, a Democratic group that backs female candidates who support abortion rights.

Unlike his boss, who has raged in tweets and speeches, Pence has been careful in his comments about the multiple probes into the campaign's contacts with Russia.

In the wake of Trump's abrupt dismissal of FBI Director James Comey, Pence has been circumspect. He has not publicly commented on the naming of former FBI Director Robert Mueller to serve as the special counsel investigating the allegations, and he only obliquely referred to the tumult surrounding the administration in a speech to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on Thursday.

"Whatever Washington, D.C., may be focused on at any given time, rest assured, President Donald Trump will never stop fighting for the issues that matter most to the American people," he said.

But the Comey episode has revived questions about whether Pence is out of the loop at the White House, or less than truthful in his public statements.

When Trump ousted Comey, administration officials said the president only did so after receiving a memo from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Pence reiterated those claims to reporters, saying again and again that the decision came only after Trump decided to "accept" and "support" Rosenstein's recommendations.

Two days later, Trump said in an interview with NBC News that he was planning to fire Comey anyway and had considered it since the start of his administration.

Matt Schlapp, a veteran Republican consultant who leads the American Conservative Union, said Trump's candor and authenticity, attributes that helped get him elected, make it more difficult for Pence and other members of his team to stay in step.

"There are going to be these moments that, for the vice president and for everybody in the White House staff and the Trump orbit, when they explain something one way but that's not where the president's head is on that. It will always be awkward," Schlapp said. "My guess is this was an honest mistake and there is still deep respect between the president and the vice president."

Asked how Pence advised the president on Comey, an administration official would not detail the conversations between the pair but stressed that the vice president supported the decision to fire the FBI head.

The official — who was not authorized to speak about Pence's activities publicly, and agreed to be interviewed only on condition of anonymity — also said Pence was not part of the president's meeting last week with Russian diplomats, noting that he was on Capitol Hill for Senate business.

The Comey firing represents a second rough patch for Pence. At the start of the administration, the vice president publicly defended Flynn against allegations that he had discussed sanctions with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. before Trump's inauguration. Flynn had denied those conversations to Pence and other top officials; he was forced out after it was discovered that he had misled the vice president.

Throughout the upheavals, Pence has maintained political life as usual. He has carved out a role as the administration's top lobbyist on Capitol Hill and was instrumental in helping Republicans pass a health care plan in the House. While Trump is away on his first foreign trip, Pence will be addressing graduates at a

Pennsylvania Christian college and at Notre Dame while working on budget and policy issues in Washington. And political life never strays far from money. Pence this week registered a fundraising committee that enables him to cultivate donors outside of the president's mostly low-dollar money network. The vice president is a far more traditional politician when it comes to raising money, and this group — called the Great America Committee — can collect up to \$5,000 per donor and parcel out funds to candidates supportive of White House policies.

Associated Press writer Julie Bykowicz contributed to this report.

AP Explains: Voting, governance and clerical power in Iran

By JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iranians vote Friday for the next president of the Islamic Republic, but how does that elected leader fit into the country's clerically managed government that approves candidates ultimately overseen by its supreme leader?

THE SUPREME LEADER'S POWER

At the heart of Iran's complex power-sharing government created after its 1979 Islamic Revolution is the supreme leader, a position now held by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The supreme leader also serves as the country's commander in chief over its military and the powerful Revolutionary Guard, a paramilitary force involved in the war in Syria and the battle against the Islamic State group militants in Iraq that also has vast economic holdings across Iran. An 88-member elected clerical panel called the Assembly of Experts appoints the supreme leader and can remove one as well, though that's never happened.

THE PRESIDENT'S POWERS

Iranian presidents serve four-year terms. Iran's president is subordinate to the supreme leader but still powerful with considerable influence over both domestic policy and foreign affairs. In Rouhani's case, his administration negotiated the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Iran limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. That accord was done with Khamenei's blessing.

NARROWING THE FIELD OF CANDIDATES

An initial field of over 1,600 hopefuls registered to run in the election. Iran's Guardian Council, a 12-member panel half selected by the supreme leader and half nominated by the judiciary and approved by parliament, vetted the candidates and narrowed the field to six, including Rouhani. The council has never allowed a woman to run for president and routinely rejects candidates calling for dramatic reform, stifling change while ensuring the continuation of Iran's Shiite Islamic governance. Of the six candidates approved, two have since dropped out.

ROUHANI'S CAMPAIGN

Rouhani, a cleric, says his moderate administration needs to continue its work to implement the nuclear deal. In campaign stops and debates, he's struck an increasingly more-forceful line against the Revolutionary Guard and hard-liners for ballistic missile launches and arbitrary arrests, something he largely avoided doing so far in his time in office. Rouhani remains the favorite of analysts as every Iranian president since Khamenei himself took the presidency in 1981 has won re-election. However, Iran's sluggish economy and poverty remain the top issues for average Iranians who have yet to see the benefits of the atomic accord.

ROUHANI'S MAIN OPPONENT

Hard-line cleric and former judge Ebrahim Raisi appears to be Rouhani's main challenger. Raisi is perceived to be close to Khamenei as the supreme leader put him in charge of Astan Quds Razavi, a vast charitable foundation encompassing businesses and endowments that oversees the holy Shiite shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad. He also has received the endorsement of two major clerical organizations that declined to endorse Rouhani in his 2013 campaign. Raisi has said he won't seek to tear up the nuclear deal. Raisi also has offered populist promises, including monthly cash payments to Iran's poor. However, his candidacy has revived the controversy surrounding the 1988 mass execution of thousands in Iran. Raisi allegedly served on a panel involved in sentencing the prisoners to death.

WHAT SUBJECT LARGELY HASN'T BEEN DISCUSSED IN THE RACE?

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Surprisingly, Islam. "Candidates have seemingly concluded that Islamic ideology has lost its power as a driving factor among voters and is therefore not worth addressing," wrote Mehdi Khalaji, an analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who is Shiite theologian by training. Those opposing Rouhani also all said they accepted the nuclear deal, once blasted by hard-liners, making the accord largely a non-issue.

HOW IRANIANS VOTE

Any Iranian 18 or older can vote in Friday's election. To cast a ballot, they must go to one of 63,500 polling centers set up around the country in mosques, schools and other public buildings. A voter must show their national ID card and fill out a form. They dip one of their index fingers in ink, making a print on the form, while officials stamp their ID so they can't vote twice. The voter then writes down the name and the numerical code of the candidate they want to elect on the secret ballot and drop it into a ballot box. Voting lasts from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., though authorities routinely keep polls open at least several hours later.

A LOOK AT ELECTION OVERSIGHT

Iranian elections are run by the country's Interior Ministry, which oversees the nation's police forces. The Guardian Council must sign off any final election results. Iran bars domestic and international observers from the elections, bucking a widely accepted principle around the world that international watchdogs warn can allow for fraud. Allegations of voter fraud marred the country's 2009 election, which saw hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad secure a second term amid widespread unrest. The Guardian Council rejected Ahmadinejad's bid to run again in Friday's election, likely to avoid any similar conflict.

SO IS IRAN A DEMOCRACY?

Iran describes itself as an Islamic Republic. It holds elections and has elected representatives passing laws and governing on behalf of its people. However, the supreme leader has the final say on all state matters and the Guardian Council must approve all laws passed by the parliament. Those who led Iran's Green Movement after Ahmadinejad's disputed 2009 re-election remain under house arrest. Security forces answering only to the supreme leader also routinely arrest dual nationals and foreigners, using them as pawns in international negotiations.

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

Trump, dogged by questions at home, makes first trip abroad

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's maiden international trip, a five-stop marathon across the Middle East and Europe, has long loomed as a crucial first test abroad for the chaos-courting president.

That was before he fired his FBI director — and the chain reaction of scandal that followed.

Now, with the eyes of the world upon him, the president will embark on his big trip carrying the baggage of dire troubles at home. As he tries to calm allies worried about his "America First" message, he'll be followed by fallout from his firing of FBI Director James Comey and the appointment of a special counsel to probe the president's campaign ties with Russia.

"There has never been a president taking his first international trip being dogged by scandal like this," said Larry Sabato, head of the University of Virginia Center for Politics. "He's already a president viewed skeptically by much of the world. And while the pictures from the trip may be great, the White House can't change the headlines that will follow him wherever he goes."

Trump's trip was always going to be dramatic. U.S. allies have been rattled by his warnings about pulling back from the world. He is tasked with urging a united front against terror by appealing to some of the same corners of the Muslim world he has tried to keep out of the United States with his travel ban. Last week, he added new layers of complication by disclosing classified intelligence to a longtime adversary.

Still, the White House once hoped the trip, wrapped in the pomp and circumstance of diplomatic protocol, could offer a chance at a reset after a tumultuous first four months in office. Trump's advisers saw it as an opportunity for the United States to boldly reassert itself on the world stage and resume a leadership role that the administration believes was abdicated by President Barack Obama. Trump's powerful senior adviser,

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his son-in-law Jared Kushner, led a West Wing team to craft the agenda, laden with religious symbolism. Still, Trump hasn't been eager to seize the opportunity. It's been more than a half-century since any president waited as long to take his first foreign trip. The itinerary, which begins Saturday in Saudi Arabia, is a startlingly ambitious excursion for a president who dislikes travel and has displayed a shaky grasp of foreign affairs.

Each stop comes with high stakes.

In Saudi Arabia, the president — whose campaign was marked by heated anti-Muslim rhetoric and whose administration has tried to enact a travel ban from several Muslim-majority countries — will deliver a speech to the Islamic world meant to be a clear contrast with the vision Obama laid out in his first trip to the region.

In Israel, Trump will meet with Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, looking to smooth over fresh tensions. Israel was in an uproar earlier this week after U.S. officials confirmed Trump shared highly classified intelligence about the Islamic State group with senior Russian officials visiting the White House. The information, about an IS threat related to the use of laptops on aircraft, came from Israel and there were concerns a valuable Israeli asset could be in danger, a U.S. official said, requesting anonymity to discuss the sensitive material.

National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster added to the alarm by refusing to declare the Western Wall a part of Israel. U.S. policy holds that ownership of the holiest site where Jews can pray, as with the rest of Jerusalem, is subject to Israeli-Palestinian negotiation.

In Rome, the president will call upon Pope Francis, the popular, liberal-minded pontiff. Trump denounced Francis during the campaign, calling the holiest man in the Catholic faith "disgraceful" for questioning his faith.

In Brussels, Trump will attend a meeting of NATO, the World War II-era alliance which Trump has repeatedly mused about abandoning because member states weren't paying their fair share. He recently has shifted to reassure wary allies that he remains committed to the pact.

And in Sicily, the president will meet with the other leaders of the G7, a gathering of Western economic powers. Key parts of the group are unsettled by Trump's unpredictability and his willingness to cheer on nationalist sentiment.

Trump's itinerary is heavy with religious symbolism. He'll visit the birthplace of Islam, the Jewish homeland and the Vatican. Officials say the message is "unity."

"He strongly believes that it is the strength of the faith of people in these religions that will stand up and ultimately be victorious over these forces of terrorism," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said.

Administration officials believe the unexpected move of going to Saudi Arabia first was meant to underscore the seriousness of the United States' commitment to fighting extremist groups like the Islamic State. Trump, whose denunciations of Iran have been welcomed by the Saudis, wants to frame the conflict not as one between the West and Islam, but simply between good and evil, according to his aides.

While some Middle East leaders will likely greet Trump warmly, he could receive a far cooler reception in Europe. Though Pope Francis has said he'd "never make a judgment about a person without hearing him out," others on the continent have sharply criticized Trump. That includes France's newly elected President Emmanuel Macron, who denounced Trump's musings on abandoning the Paris climate treaty, a likely point of contention in Sicily.

Trump's inauguration sparked thousands of protesters to fill the streets of several European capitals, chaotic scenes that could be repeated during his stops in Rome, Brussels and Sicily.

"Welcome to the White House abroad," said Ari Fleischer, President George W. Bush's former press secretary. "This is a great opportunity for the president to change the subject, to make real news. But the downside is that it could be dominated by domestic-style questions. ... Every first trip is over-scrutinized. The whole world is watching."

Amid cancer recurrence, Holly Rowe gets extension at ESPN

By DOUG FEINBERG, AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Between dashing for interviews with coaches and chatting with NBA commissioner Adam Silver, Holly Rowe was back in her element Thursday night. It was a welcome respite for ESPN's veteran sideline reporter nearly two years after her initial cancer diagnosis.

ESPN has ensured Rowe a spot on those sidelines for years to come with a contract extension — fortunate timing for Rowe, whose cancer has recently recurred and spread.

Rowe told The Associated Press on Thursday that she is again battling cancer, sharing the news hours after ESPN announced it had extended her deal.

"I don't think about having cancer when I'm out here," Rowe told The Associated Press before tipoff of a WNBA game between Minnesota and New York, her first this season.

"Monday, I have a CAT scan and have treatment. I'll be a cancer patient on Monday. I'm not thinking about it today."

Rowe was worried she'd be among those laid off by the network last month. Instead, she'll remain on the sidelines for college football, basketball, volleyball, softball and WNBA games. She'll also keep her health insurance, which has been a vital tool in her fight against melanoma.

"I was really grateful because my contract was up in April," she said. "It would have been so easy for me to be one of those people. For me to have health insurance right now will save my life financially. This is helping me in my recovery. If this had been taken away, it would have been really hard for me."

Rowe has been with the network for two decades, and ESPN ran on Thursday a first-person piece about her experience working through her diagnosis. ESPN senior coordinating producer Lee Fitting said the network was lucky to have Rowe sticking around.

"Holly's energy and yearlong dedication to ESPN is a testament to her strength and resiliency all while courageously battling cancer over the last 16 months," Fitting said. "She is beloved by her peers, coaches and athletes that she interacts with daily and her creativity and professionalism on everything she touches shines through on our coverage."

Rowe has remained among the network's most recognizable faces, and even since getting sick, she's been on-air for some of its biggest broadcasts. She was there when Morgan William hit the shot to end UConn's winning streak at the Final Four. She also interviewed Clemson receiver Hunter Renfow moments after his last-second TD catch to win the national championship.

"She is a genuine person and has a natural curiosity about people which leads to her being great at her job," said ESPN announcer Rebecca Lobo, who has worked with Rowe for years at the women's Final Four. "And she keeps me laughing constantly with her fashion advice and dancing tips."

Rowe was honored last month by the Cancer Support Community with their Founders Award for Empowerment. She was presented the award by former Vice President Joe Biden.

"It was a total surprise and such an honor to meet him," Rowe said.

With her most recent diagnosis, Rowe is due for treatment every 21 days while trying a new amino therapy. She'll continue to hit the sidelines, though, and wouldn't have it any other way.

"I recently had five days in a row off," Rowe said. "That's a long stretch. I was a mess, I was sitting around thinking about having cancer. It's ridiculous. I've got to stay busy or I'll go crazy. This is the world's best therapy. Every single day I'm working, I'm absorbed in other people. Somebody wins. I need to see people winning and fighting through adversity. That helps me so much."

Rowe was first diagnosed with cancer nearly two years ago after noticing a small spot on her chest. It turned out to be a big tumor under her skin.

May is melanoma awareness month, and Rowe wanted to let people know that they should get checked regularly.

"When in doubt, check it out and cover up. There's no suntan in the world worth what I'm going through right now," she said. "Wear long sleeves and cover up."

To learn more about melanoma: <http://www.curemelanoma.org/about-melanoma/melanoma-awareness/>

Follow Doug on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/dougfeinberg>

Basquiat painting fetches record \$110.5M at New York auction

NEW YORK (AP) — A 1982 artwork by Jean-Michel Basquiat sold for a record \$110.5 million at Sotheby's auction of contemporary art Thursday night.

Sotheby's said the sale of "Untitled" was an auction record for the artist. It also set a record price for an American artist at auction. The painting's graffiti-like typography depicts a face in the shape of a skull.

"Tonight, Jean-Michel Basquiat entered the pantheon of artists whose works have commanded prices over \$100 million, including Picasso, Giacometti, Bacon, and Warhol," said Gregoire Billault, head of Sotheby's Contemporary Art Department in New York.

The piece was purchased by noted Japanese collector and e-commerce entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa after a 10-minute bidding war that was watched by thousands live on Instagram.

"When I saw this painting, I was struck with so much excitement and gratitude for my love of art," said Maezawa, who plans to display it in his museum in Chiba, Japan after loaning it to institutions and exhibitions around the world.

Maezawa said he hopes the piece "brings as much joy to others as it does to me."

"Untitled" was virtually unknown before it was unveiled at Sotheby's weeks ago. The auction house said it remained in the same private collection since it was bought at auction in 1984 for \$19,000.

"We are thrilled that it was purchased by Yusaku Maezawa for his planned museum so others will have a chance to experience its magic firsthand," said Billault.

The previous auction record for a Basquiat work was set last May when "Untitled, 1982" sold for \$57.3 million, also to Maezawa.

Basquiat died of a drug overdose in 1988 at the age of 27.

Birthplace of grunge mourns 'Seattle's son' Chris Cornell

By CHRIS GRYGIEL, Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Grief-stricken Chris Cornell fans left flowers at memorials across Seattle for the musician whose forceful, somber songs helped cement the city's place in rock history.

One of the locations where people gathered was the Sound Garden art sculpture at a Seattle park, for which Cornell's band Soundgarden was named.

"It's really sad that he could never find peace in his life," said Chad White, who came to the art display with his young son Ignatius to honor Cornell.

A bench near the center of the sculpture was covered with flower arrangements, one of which included a note, "Say 'hello' to Heaven," a reference to a song written by Cornell for a musician friend who died decades ago.

KEXP, Seattle's popular independent radio station, paid tribute to Cornell all day. The station played non-stop songs from Soundgarden, Cornell's other bands and his solo work, as well as artists who covered Cornell's material and those who were influenced by him.

"Seattle's son, Chris Cornell, has passed away," DJ John Richards told listeners.

The city's Space Needle went dark at 9 p.m. for an hour in tribute to Cornell.

Cornell was born and raised in the city and was part of a close-knit group of artists who formed the foundation of what would become the grunge scene that exploded in the early 1990s by combining the bombast of early 1970s heavy metal with the aggression and attitude of punk rock.

"He was a huge influence, one of the greatest singers ever to come out of Seattle, maybe the greatest single voice," said Charles R. Cross, a Seattle-based music journalist and author who knew Cornell personally.

"I don't even know what to say. I'm just shocked," he said. "We don't know the full story. The darkness I knew. But it's a devastating loss."

Authorities say Cornell hanged himself in a Detroit hotel room Wednesday following a Soundgarden concert. The band had reunited in 2010 after years on hiatus.

The group formed in Seattle in the 1980s at a time when the city was far off the beaten path of the musical mainstream and there were few venues for smaller artists to play original material.

Cornell was roommates with Andrew Wood, lead singer of the Mother Love Bone, who died of a heroin overdose in 1990. Two members of Mother Love Bone went on to form Pearl Jam and they joined Cornell on a tribute project to Wood — Temple of the Dog — which helped introduce Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder to the world.

Soundgarden, Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains and Mudhoney were among the most high-profile bands to come out of Seattle and dominated the pop culture landscape of the early and mid-1990s.

"In some ways, they (Soundgarden) were the last band in Seattle to become famous in the grunge era but they were the ones who worked the hardest and the longest," Cross said. "There's no doubt that Soundgarden's music is very dark and melancholy at times. There are also parts of it that are very celebratory."

Associated Press reporter Phuong Le and photographer Elaine Thompson contributed to this report.

Amtrak engineer arraigned on charges in crash that killed 8

By ERRIN HAINES WHACK, Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — An Amtrak engineer involved in a train derailment that killed eight passengers was arraigned late Thursday on charges including causing a catastrophe and involuntary manslaughter, in a case brought only after a victim's family got a judge to order that charges be filed.

Brandon Bostian was released on \$81,000 sign on bond, which means he does not have to pay anything as long as he shows up for his court dates. If he fails to appear, he would have to pay the full amount.

Bostian, 34, turned himself in to police earlier Thursday, in a case brought only after a victim's family got a judge to order that charges be filed.

He was put in handcuffs as he arrived at the Philadelphia police station with his attorney.

Just minutes after leaving Philadelphia on May 12, 2015, on a Washington-to-New York run, Bostian accelerated to 106 mph on a 50 mph curve, sending his train careening off the tracks, an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board found. In addition to the eight dead, about 200 passengers and crew were injured.

The agency found that Bostian essentially forgot where he was when he sped up.

Bostian, who has been on unpaid administrative leave from Amtrak, did not respond to reporters' questions as he entered the police station.

He told NTSB investigators he could only remember speeding up for an 80 mph straightaway and then hitting the brakes a few minutes later as he felt his body lurch and the locomotive starting to tip over.

Just days before a two-year statute of limitations was to expire, Philadelphia prosecutors announced last week that there was insufficient evidence to prove that Bostian acted with intent or "conscious disregard" for the passengers' safety.

Victim lawyers said that should be an issue for a jury to decide, and a judge acting on a private criminal complaint from one victim's family ordered misdemeanor charges filed.

City prosecutors then referred the case to Pennsylvania's top prosecutor, the state attorney general, who added a felony count of causing a catastrophe on top of eight misdemeanor counts of involuntary manslaughter and other charges.

The citizen complaint against Bostian was brought by attorneys for the family of Rachel Jacobs, a 39-year-old chief executive of a Philadelphia-based technology startup who was killed returning home to her husband and 2-year-old son in New York.

Thomas Kline, an attorney for the family, said Thursday the state's prosecution of Bostian "ratifies the

fact that there are important circumstances where citizens who are aggrieved and who follow the legal process can achieve justice.”

“The district attorney’s office was 100 percent wrong and the attorney general’s office is on a track to being 100 percent correct,” he said.

Amtrak has taken responsibility for the crash and agreed to pay \$265 million to settle claims filed by victims and their families.

The NTSB found no evidence that Bostian was impaired or using a cellphone. The agency also called Amtrak’s long failure to implement automatic speed control throughout the busy Northeast Corridor a contributing factor.

Bostian has a personal injury suit pending against Amtrak. He said he was left disoriented or unconscious when something struck his train before it derailed. He had heard through radio traffic that a nearby commuter train had been struck by a rock. However, the NTSB concluded that nothing struck his locomotive.

“The best we could come up with was that he was distracted from this radio conversation about the damaged train and forgot where he was,” NTSB chairman Christopher Hart said at a May 2016 hearing.

The train’s data recorder showed that at about 55 seconds and a mile-and-a-half before the derailment, Bostian applied full throttle and held it there for about 30 seconds. The train reached a speed of about 95 mph.

The NTSB said he then slightly lowered the throttle for 2 seconds before returning to full throttle and holding it there for another 20 seconds. Three seconds before the derailment, at a speed of 106 mph, Bostian applied the emergency brake, which reduced the speed to 102 mph.

Car mows down Times Square pedestrians for blocks, killing 1

By COLLEEN LONG and TOM HAYS, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man steered his car onto a sidewalk running through Times Square and mowed down pedestrians for three blocks Thursday, killing a teenager, then emerged from his wrecked vehicle wild-eyed and screaming before he was subdued by police and bystanders.

The driver, a 26-year-old U.S. Navy veteran, told officers he was hearing voices and expected to die, two law enforcement officials said.

Helpless pedestrians had little time to react as the car barreled down the sidewalk and through intersections before smashing into a row of steel security barriers installed to prevent vehicle attacks on the square where massive crowds gather every New Year’s Eve. The car came to rest with its two right wheels in the air.

Police said 23 people were struck, including an 18-year-old tourist from Michigan who died. The woman’s 13-year-old sister was among the injured.

The carnage raised immediate fears of terrorism, fueled by recent attacks in England, France and Germany in which vehicles plowed through crowds of pedestrians. But investigators quickly turned their focus to the sobriety and mental health of the driver, identified as Bronx resident Richard Rojas.

“There is no indication that this was an act of terrorism,” Mayor Bill de Blasio said.

Photographers snapped pictures of Rojas after he climbed from the wrecked car and ran through the street before he was tackled by a group that included a muscular security supervisor at a nearby Planet Hollywood restaurant.

“He began screaming, no particular words but just utter screaming. He was swinging his arms at the same time, said the bouncer, Ken Bradix. “There was something wrong with him.”

Rojas initially tested negative for alcohol, but more detailed drug tests were pending, according to two law enforcement officials who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

The officials said Rojas told officers he had been hearing voices.

A week ago, Rojas was arrested and charged with pointing a knife at a notary, whom he accused of stealing his identity. He pleaded guilty to a harassment violation.

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He was arrested on charges of driving while intoxicated in 2008 and 2015, police Commissioner James O'Neill said. He pleaded guilty to an infraction in 2015 and was ordered to complete a drunken-driving program and lost his license for 90 days.

In previous arrests, he told authorities he believed he was being harassed and followed, one of the law enforcement officials said.

Police identified the woman killed by the car as Alyssa Elsman, of Portage, Michigan.

Elsman graduated last year from Portage Central High School.

"If you didn't know her, you might think she's reserved or shy," school principal Eric Alburtus said. "But if you could talk to her for a minute, you'd realize she was engaging. She was bright. She was funny."

In the Bronx, neighborhood acquaintances said Rojas was a friendly man who had been having problems. Harrison Ramos said Rojas wasn't the same when he came back from active duty in 2014.

"He's been going through a real tough time," he said.

Rojas enlisted in the Navy in 2011 and was an electrician's mate fireman apprentice. In 2012 he served aboard the U.S.S. Carney, a destroyer.

Navy records show that in 2013 he spent two months at a naval brig in Charleston, South Carolina. They don't indicate why.

Rojas spent his final months in the Navy at the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida, before being discharged in 2014 as the result of a special court martial, a Navy official said. Details were not immediately available.

Thursday's mayhem began at noon on a hot, clear day that brought large crowds of people into the streets to enjoy the good weather.

Police said Rojas had been driving south on Seventh Avenue when he made a quick U-turn at 42nd Street and drove up the sidewalk for three blocks, passing tourist draws like the Hard Rock Cafe and the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. restaurant.

Security camera video showed people being flung in bunches over the car's hood.

"People just got stunned," said Bruno Carvalho, a student at SUNY Albany. "I don't think there was actually time for screaming."

"He didn't stop," said Asa Lowe, of Brooklyn, who was standing outside a store when he saw people scatter. "He just kept going."

The White House said President Donald Trump was briefed about the situation.

The apartment building where Rojas lives was cordoned off by police Thursday. It was unclear when Rojas, who was in custody, would get a lawyer or be arraigned.

The sidewalks in many parts of Times Square are lined with metal posts designed to prevent cars from getting onto the sidewalks and other public areas. That network of barricades, though, is far from a complete defense. There are many areas where vehicles could be driven onto packed sidewalks or public plazas.

Sunita Prasad and her family, visiting from Guyana, were marveling at the sights when the car came toward them.

She pushed her children, 3 and 6, out of its path. But an uncle was struck on the head by a pole dislodged by the vehicle, relatives said as they left the hospital where he was being treated.

"We were just touring, seeing how beautiful Times Square was," Prasad said. "And this came."

Associated Press writers Libby Quaid in Washington, Ed White in Detroit and Jennifer Peltz and Jake Pearson in New York contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that Elsman graduated from Portage Central High School, not Portage Northern High School.

Trump says he's 'very close' to naming a new FBI director

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that he is "very close" to naming a new FBI director to replace the one he fired more than a week ago and that former Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman was among his top choices for the job.

Lieberman was among four candidates Trump interviewed at the White House on Wednesday.

"We're very close to an FBI director," Trump said when asked about the search during an Oval Office appearance with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. Trump said "soon" when asked how close he is to making an announcement.

Trump leaves Friday afternoon on his first overseas trip as president, a four-country, five-stop tour that will keep him out of Washington for more than a week. He has said he could name a director before he departs.

The president also replied "he is" when asked whether Lieberman is a top candidate for the position.

Lieberman gave reporters a thumbs-up as he left the White House on Wednesday and said he and Trump had a "good meeting." Trump interviewed three other potential FBI director candidates the same day: former Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating, former top FBI official Richard McFeely and Andrew McCabe. McCabe was tapped to become acting director after Trump dismissed Comey on May 9.

The firing was sharply criticized because it came amid the bureau's investigation into Russia's meddling in last year's presidential election.

"I cherish the FBI. It's special," Trump said later Thursday at a joint news conference with Santos. "All over the world, no matter where you go, the FBI is special." He said the bureau hasn't enjoyed "that special reputation" since during the presidential campaign.

Trump also criticized Comey for his performance during a recent appearance before Congress, and said Comey's replacement is "going to be outstanding."

The Senate must confirm Trump's candidate for the job.

Senate Republicans praised Lieberman, a Democrat turned independent, while Democrats were less effusive about their former colleague.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., called Lieberman a "pillar of credibility." Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, said Lieberman "may be the only potential nominee that could get 100 votes that I know of. Everybody likes and respects Joe Lieberman."

But several Democratic senators said during a caucus lunch Thursday that they would not support Lieberman, according to a person familiar with the meeting who declined to be identified because the lunch was private.

Among their concerns was Lieberman's past praise of Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security adviser, who was fired in February after misleading officials about his conversations with Russian officials. Flynn has figured prominently in the FBI investigation into Russian interference into the election.

A Nov. 25 news release from Trump's transition team quoted Lieberman praising Trump's selection of K.T. McFarland as deputy national security adviser. Lieberman added that McFarland "and General Mike Flynn will form a very strong leadership team at the National Security Council."

Neera Tanden, president of the Center for American Progress, a Democratic think tank, also opposes Lieberman, saying he lacks law enforcement experience and is close to Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a former U.S. senator. Lieberman testified in support of Sessions at his January confirmation hearing.

Lieberman served in the Senate for more than two decades and was the Democratic vice presidential nominee in 2000 with Al Gore, then the sitting vice president. Lieberman lost his 2006 Democratic primary bid but won Senate re-election as a third-party candidate.

Lieberman spoke at the 2008 Republican National Convention on behalf of his friend, Arizona Sen. John McCain, and did not seek re-election in 2012. He has served as co-chairman of No Labels, a centrist group that promotes bipartisanship.

Keating, a Republican, was a two-term governor of Oklahoma and led the state during the deadly 1995

bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City. A former FBI agent, Keating served in the administrations of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

Keating told The Oklahoman he does not expect to be chosen.

"If they wanted me, I certainly would be honored, but I really don't think that's going to happen," he told the newspaper after his interview.

McCabe, a veteran FBI official, made headlines for congressional testimony last week that rejected White House claims that Comey had lost the support of rank-and-file agents. He also disputed the administration's characterization of the investigation into potential coordination between Russia and Trump associates.

Several candidates have withdrawn from consideration: Republican Rep. Trey Gowdy of South Carolina; Cornyn; Alice Fisher, the former head of the Justice Department's criminal division; and Michael Garcia, a former U.S. attorney from Manhattan.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick and Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

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Man freed from prison faces possible deportation to Cuba

By P. SOLOMON BANDA, ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and COLLEEN SLEVIN, Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The detention of a Cuban immigrant set to rejoin his family after he was mistakenly released from prison, then put back, has raised questions about whether more people from the island nation will be deported from the United States now that relations between the two countries have thawed.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement took custody of Rene Lima-Marin, 38, Wednesday after a judge ordered him to be released from state prison in an armed robbery case.

The agency said Thursday it is working to deport him to the country he left as a toddler along with thousands of other Cubans in 1980 in what became known as the Mariel boat lift.

It's not clear whether Lima-Marin, who was ordered deported while in prison, will be returned there since Cuba would still need to agree with the U.S. government on him being included on a list of people to be deported.

Under a 1984 agreement, Cuba agreed to take back 2,746 of their citizens who came to the United States as part of the boat lift. About 2,000 Cubans have been sent back since then, and the rest have either died or are too old or sick to be deported.

Cubans convicted after that agreement, such as Lima-Marin, are not automatically accepted by Cuba because of that deal. But when President Barack Obama ended the "wet foot, dry foot" policy in January that granted immigration privileges to Cubans since 1995, an overlooked policy change established that other Cuban refugees who also arrived from Mariel in 1980 may replace the names of the older or dead candidates from the original 1984 list as long as both countries agree on the cases.

"It's all policy, memorandum and agreement," said John Gihon, an immigration lawyer who was attorney adviser for ICE. "I have a ton of Cuban clients who are petrified, and they probably should be. The U.S. government may decide to just add them to the list."

Officials say more than 36,000 Cubans are facing orders of deportation for conviction of crimes or immigration violations. People who cannot be deported have been allowed to remain and live freely in the United States but check in regularly with immigration officials. About 600 are in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, according to statistics by the agency.

Seventeen Cubans have been deported since October 2016, and 123 have been deported since October 2014, less than three months before Obama announced the beginning of normalization of relations with Cuba.

Obama ended "wet foot, dry foot" in his last days in office, doing away with a Clinton policy that allowed Cubans who reached the U.S. to remain in the country.

President Donald Trump has been critical of Obama's efforts to improve relations with Cuba. He has

promised to re-evaluate the agreements with Cuba although proceeding on the path set by Obama could possibly make it easier to eventually deport immigrants from Cuba.

Lima-Marin was convicted in 2000 of multiple robbery, kidnapping and burglary counts after he and another man robbed two video stores at gunpoint. He was mistakenly released on parole in 2008. He then held a steady job installing glass, got married and has a stepson, Justus, 10, and son JoJo, 7, who was born while he was out of prison.

Authorities realized the mistake in 2014 and returned him to prison.

A judge on Tuesday ordered Lima-Marin's release, saying it would be "draconian" to keep him in prison and that he had paid his debt to society. But ICE can request that an inmate suspected of an immigration violation be held after their release from jail or prison under a form referred to as a hold or a detainer.

Two Colorado lawmakers signed a letter asking Gov. John Hickenlooper to pardon Lima-Marin in order to remove the legal basis for ICE to detain him.

Jacque Montgomery, the governor's spokeswoman, said an application for Lima-Marin's clemency is under review.

Lima-Marin's wife, Jasmine, said she remains hopeful the family will be reunited "sooner rather than later."

She said Lima-Marin checked in with immigration officials every few months after he was mistakenly released from prison in 2008 but deportation was not a concern then.

"If all these things hadn't changed under Trump I could think that it's a misunderstanding that would be cleared up. But now we don't know what's about to happen," she said.

Gomez Licon reported from Miami.

Official: Boy found dead in car that was stolen, 3 arrests

By JEFF AMY, Associated Press

GLUCKSTADT, Miss. (AP) — Three young Mississippi men were arrested hours after a 6-year-old boy was found shot dead Thursday in his mother's stolen car and the suspects will be charged with capital murder, authorities said.

Madison County District Attorney Michael Guest announced at a news conference that authorities plan to charge Byron McBride, D'Allen Washington and Dwan Wakefield in the death of the child.

Authorities found Kingston Frazier shot at least once in the back seat of his mother's stolen car, which Jackson Police Cmdr. Tyree Jones said was abandoned in a muddy ditch about 15 miles (20 kilometers) north of the capital.

Frazier had gone missing after 1 a.m. Thursday when a man was seen on video taking the car from the parking lot of a supermarket in Jackson, the state capital, according to authorities. About nine hours later, following a child-abduction alert and widespread publicity, a man reported the missing Toyota Camry was beside a dead-end road in the northern suburb of Gluckstadt.

Authorities publicly disclosed the boy's death Thursday morning while surrounded by grieving family members.

"A 6-year-old is gone," said Kingston's cousin, Kolby Irby. "His mother has to deal with this. That's her baby."

The three suspects were arrested within hours of the child's body being found, authorities said, adding video and a witness helped identify them.

Authorities said Washington and Wakefield are both 17. McBride's age was not immediately released.

In Mississippi, 17-year-olds accused of capital murder are tried as adults. The capital murder charge means prosecutors could seek the death penalty if the three are convicted, Guest said.

The district attorney also said it was possible the charges might change, adding the three are expected to make initial court appearances on Monday.

One lawyer said he is not yet officially representing one of them and declined requests for comment. Guest said the other two do not yet have lawyers.

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Authorities did not answer questions at the news conference with reporters, and it's unclear what role each of the three suspects is alleged to have played.

Wakefield was a quarterback last year at a high school in Madison County, north of Jackson, county Superintendent Ronnie McGehee told The Clarion-Ledger. McGehee also said Wakefield had been dismissed from the team but didn't elaborate.

The mother, Ebony Archie, left the boy in the car, its engine running, while she went inside the supermarket early Thursday, sheriff's deputies have said. The store's parking lot is patrolled by sheriff's deputies, including one in a golf cart.

Security video shows that after Archie left, another car drove up and a man got out and then drove off in the Camry.

A child abduction alert was played repeatedly Thursday on local newscasts and police and family members issued public appeals for help.

"We've been looking for him for nine hours in every neighborhood in Jackson," said Deanna Moore, the boy's aunt. Addressing those who took the car, she added, "You could have just dropped him off."

The child's body was taken for an autopsy at the state crime lab and the car was towed away by police as they continue to investigate.

Special counsel pick could boost faith in Justice Dept.

By ERIC TUCKER and SADIE GURMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There could be a side benefit for Rod Rosenstein in appointing a special counsel to head an investigation into possible Russian coordination with the Trump campaign: reviving his own reputation, heavily battered for his role in the firing of James Comey, who had been leading the probe.

The Wednesday decision to name former FBI Director Robert Mueller, an apolitical outsider, to oversee the case seemed intended to restore public faith in an independent Justice Department following a series of headache-inducing headlines. But Rosenstein's own professional standing could start to recover as well.

"He appointed Mueller because he was cognizant enough to understand whether or not he thought he could be fair in the investigation was irrelevant," said Steven Silverman, a Baltimore attorney who has known Rosenstein for years. "The important part is the public perception of the Russia investigation."

"Kudos for him for recognizing that appearances are equally important as a fair and just process and investigation," Silverman added.

At his March confirmation hearing for the deputy attorney general job, Rosenstein refused to commit to the appointment of a special counsel to oversee the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, saying he was aware of no requirement to recuse himself and had no first-hand knowledge of the probe anyway.

Much has changed since then.

There have been growing questions from Democrats about the ability of Justice Department leaders to carry out the probe independent of the White House.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself in March after acknowledging undisclosed contacts with the Russian ambassador during the campaign, leaving the matter in Rosenstein's hands.

Rosenstein himself in the last week has come under intense criticism as the author of a memo that chastised Comey for his handling of the Hillary Clinton email case, which the White House initially cited as justification for the firing.

President Donald Trump later acknowledged that he had already thought about dismissing Comey and had been perturbed by "this Russia thing," fueling criticism that Rosenstein's memo merely served as a pretext so the president could fire Comey amid an aggressive investigation into his campaign.

The timeline was further muddled Thursday when Democrats emerged from a closed-door meeting with Rosenstein saying he knew Comey would be removed prior to writing the memo, even as Trump insisted again that he had gotten a "very, very strong recommendation" from Rosenstein.

No matter the reason for the firing, public outcry mounted for Rosenstein to appoint an outsider to

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oversee the probe. It was an unusual spot for the veteran prosecutor, who cultivated a reputation as an apolitical law enforcement official.

Rosenstein has publicly denied being conscious of his reputation, telling a Baltimore business group this week: "I took an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. There is nothing in that oath about my reputation."

"After my 10th day on my new job in Washington, D.C., a friend sent me a text message that said, "You need to get out of there!" Rosenstein said. "I said, "There's no place I'd rather be."

Yet there's no question that Comey's firing at least temporarily hobbled Rosenstein's public standing. Friends and former colleagues say it's been tough to see him in such a difficult spot, especially when they consider him upright, impartial and an unlikely political pawn.

"It is difficult to see a friend of yours being in the middle of that," said Jan Paul Miller, a St. Louis attorney who worked with Rosenstein when both were assistant U.S. attorneys in Maryland. "You've got the talking heads pontificating about someone I know well, when they don't know him at all and they don't have all the facts. They have no problem slamming him. ... That's hard to watch."

Rosenstein, who was appointed U.S. attorney by President George W. Bush and held the job for the entire Obama administration, didn't immediately embrace the idea of a special counsel while facing persistent questions from Democratic senators at his confirmation hearing.

Yet the appointment increasingly seemed the only viable option, particularly following this week's revelation that Comey took notes on a February meeting with Trump in which he said the president had asked him to shut down an investigation into Michael Flynn, the former national security adviser.

Rosenstein acknowledged as much, saying in a statement Wednesday that the "public interest requires me to place this investigation under the authority of a person who exercises a degree of independence from the normal chain of command."

The selection of Mueller, a taciturn former federal prosecutor who led the FBI through the Sept. 11 attacks, received bipartisan embrace. He has served presidents of both political parties and, after taking the director job days before the Sept. 11 attacks, oversaw the FBI's terrorism-fighting efforts over the next decade.

But anyone hoping a special counsel appointment means the public will ultimately hear a full accounting of the investigation might be disappointed.

Unlike his unusually candid predecessor Comey, Mueller is a notoriously tight-lipped investigator.

He was appointed under a rarely used statute that requires him to report the findings of his investigation to Rosenstein in a confidential report. It's up to Rosenstein to decide whether to make details public. He is required to tell Congress when the probe concludes, but publicly revealing anything beyond that is up to Rosenstein's discretion.

Details may come out in court in the event of an indictment, but that may be less likely if the probe closes without criminal charges.

Rosenstein already made known how he feels about investigators discussing closed cases, in his memo blasting Comey for publicly discussing the closed Clinton email investigation even when it did not yield charges.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump claims unearned exoneration on Russia

By JIM DRINKARD AND CALVIN WOODWARD, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump persists in suggesting that his 2016 campaign has been exonerated on the question of whether it colluded with Russians, even as a powerful investigation forms to look into that matter and multiple other inquiries press on.

The president joined Colombian counterpart Juan Manuel Santos in a news conference Thursday. He misstated the record on jobs and a violent national gang as well as on the matter that prompted the Justice Department a day earlier to appoint a special counsel with wide-ranging powers to investigate the Trump campaign and Russia.

A look at some of his assertions:

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—“Even my enemies have said there is no collusion.”

THE FACTS: Democrats have not absolved Trump on whether his campaign and Russian officials coordinated efforts last year to disadvantage his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton. Several have said they have not seen evidence of collusion, but that’s not to say they are satisfied it did not happen.

Trump has cited James Clapper, the director of national intelligence until Trump took office Jan. 20, among others, as being “convinced” there was no collusion.

Clapper said this week that while a report he issued in January did not uncover collusion, he did not know at the time that the FBI was digging deeply into “potential political collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russians” and he was unaware of what the bureau might have found. The FBI inquiry continues, as do congressional investigations and, now, one by the special counsel.

—On his decision to fire FBI Director James Comey: “I actually thought when I made that decision — and I also got a very, very strong recommendation, as you know, from the deputy attorney general, Rod Rosenstein.”

THE FACTS: The recommendation Trump cites behind his decision was written after he’d already made up his mind, according to Rosenstein and to Trump’s own previous statement.

In an interview with NBC two days after the May 9 Comey dismissal, Trump said he had been planning to fire Comey for months, and linked it with the FBI’s Russia probe, saying, “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.”

On Thursday, Rosenstein told senators in a closed-door briefing that he had been informed of Trump’s decision to fire Comey before he wrote his memo providing a rationale for that act, said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

—Speaking of the MS-13 gang presence in the U.S.: “A horrible, horrible large group of gangs that have been let into our country over a fairly short period of time. ... They’ve literally taken over towns and cities of the United States.”

THE FACTS: His depiction of the gang as a foreign one “let into” the U.S. is not accurate.

The gang actually began in Los Angeles, according to a fact sheet from Trump’s own Justice Department, and “spread quickly across the country.” And it started not recently, but in the 1980s according to that same fact sheet.

The department indirectly credits the Obama administration, in its early years, with helping to rein in the group, largely made up of first-generation Salvadoran-Americans and Salvadoran nationals. It said: “Through the combined efforts of federal, state and local law enforcement, great progress was made diminishing or severely (disrupting) the gang within certain targeted areas of the U.S. by 2009 and 2010.”

The U.S. carried out record deportations during the Obama administration and, on MS-13 specifically, took the unprecedented action of labelling the street gang a transnational criminal organization and announcing a freeze on its U.S. assets. Such actions were not enough to bring down the group and the Trump administration says it will do more.

—“You look at the tremendous number of jobs that are being announced.” — Thursday news conference

— “Jobs are pouring back into our country.” — speech Wednesday to the Coast Guard Academy

—“I inherited a mess. ... Jobs are pouring out of the country.” — February news conference

— “Car companies coming back to U.S. JOBS! JOBS! JOBS!” — on Twitter, after Ford took steps to add about 800 jobs in the U.S. in January and March

THE FACTS: Trump’s rhetoric about jobs has changed, but the actual data about hiring haven’t. Job gains have been solid since Trump was inaugurated, averaging 185,000 a month from January through April, according to government figures. But that is the same pace of hiring as occurred in 2016, when Barack Obama was president, and slower than in 2014 and 2015, when more than 225,000 jobs a month were added, on average.

As for Ford, context is everything. After hailing the addition of some 800 jobs, Trump was silent after Ford announced Wednesday it plans to cut 1,400 non-factory jobs in North America and Asia. That will most likely outweigh the jobs added earlier.

Overall, presidents typically get far more credit or blame for the state of the economy than they deserve, economists say. And it is particularly unlikely that any president would have an impact after just four months on the job. But that hasn't stopped Trump from taking credit.

"Great jobs report today — it is all beginning to work!" he tweeted May 5, after the government reported that solid hiring in April had pushed the unemployment rate to a 10-year low. A spokesman said on the same day that "the president's economic agenda of serious tax reform, slashing burdensome regulations, rebuilding our infrastructure and negotiating fairer trade deals is adding jobs."

While Trump, with the help of the GOP Congress, has taken some minor steps on deregulation, little progress has been made on taxes, infrastructure or trade.

Associated Press writer Christopher S. Rugaber contributed to this report.

Find all AP Fact Checks at <http://apne.ws/2kbx8bd>

Black leaders to Tulsa: Act on pledges of racial harmony

By JUSTIN JUOZAPAVICIUS, Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Tulsa community leaders say the acquittal of a white Oklahoma police officer who killed an unarmed black man ripped open a long-festering wound.

From the mayor's office to schools and churches, race relations have been terrible in Oklahoma's second-largest city for well over a century.

So black community leaders on Thursday welcomed Mayor G.T. Bynum's mention of racial disparities on the day after a jury of Tulsans found officer Betty Jo Shelby not guilty of manslaughter. In September, she fatally shot 40-year-old Terence Crutcher in the middle of a city street after observing his disabled SUV.

"This verdict does not alter the course on which we are adamantly set," said Bynum, who took office in December. "It does not change our recognition of the racial disparities that have afflicted Tulsa historically."

But Bynum wasn't specific enough with details of how he would heal Tulsa's racial wounds, and words will ring hollow without measurable change, Crutcher's family and supporters said.

Bynum, who is white, won his campaign in 2016 in part on a platform of racial reconciliation. He's worked closely with Police Chief Chuck Jordan, also white, who won praise for the quick release of video of the Crutcher shooting from police dashboard and helicopter cameras.

But the Shelby verdict is a setback, Crutcher's family said, because it shows a larger failure of the legal system — and by extension society — to recognize the value of a black man's life. Their heartbreak echoed that of families across the U.S. following a spate of killings of black people that has fueled a national debate over race and policing.

"We're not making this a race issue; it is a race issue," said Rodney Goss, pastor of Morning Star Baptist Church in north Tulsa, where a Thursday news conference turned into an impromptu rally, with dozens of cheering and praying residents sitting in the pews.

At that rally, Crutcher's family called for one concrete change: For city leadership to block Shelby from returning to her job.

She's been on unpaid leave since she was charged Sept. 22. The police chief will review an internal affairs investigation that will determine whether she again patrols Tulsa streets. Shelby's attorney, Shannon McMurray, told The Associated Press Thursday that her client is unsure she'd even want to come back.

"I don't know what she's going to do," McMurray said. "In my personal opinion, she can't be back in law enforcement; it's going to be too dangerous.

"She's going to self-guess herself and get herself killed or somebody else," she said.

Protests over Crutcher's death and Shelby's verdict have been peaceful. Jurors didn't decide the officer's

fate until after 9 p.m. Wednesday. Afterward, about 100 people marched and blocked an intersection, but no one was arrested.

Jordan said Thursday his department would continue to uphold the public's right to protest. He said his officers are trained to de-escalate tensions and that he expects demonstrations to continue to be peaceful.

It was Jordan's decision to release video of the Crutcher shooting, and in January he canceled the Tulsa police contract with real-time arrest show "Live PD," which critics say shows incidents of racial profiling and caters to viewers' worst fears and biases.

"It made my city look bad; it made my police department look bad," Jordan said during a recent interview. "Why would I continue that?"

While Tulsa may get little national attention, racial disparities in mostly black north Tulsa are obvious: Neighborhoods without a real grocery store and a ZIP code where a black baby has 10 years less life expectancy than a white baby.

But the deepest scar of all is a swath that has yet to recover economically from a 1921 race riot where hundreds of black residents were killed — their homes and businesses burned to the ground.

Tulsa's population of 400,000 is about 16 percent black and one of nine city council members is African-American.

Marq Lewis, organizer of the local civil rights group We The People Oklahoma, said the verdict erased many of the inroads that had been made to repair a breach between law enforcement and black residents.

"Going forward, the relationship between the police department and the community is torn," Lewis told the AP. "I don't have high hopes for future relations."

Brazil's Temer: 'I won't resign' amid corruption allegations

By PETER PRENGAMAN, MAURICIO SAVARESE and SARAH DiLORENZO, Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazilian President Michel Temer on Thursday rejected calls for his resignation, saying he will fight allegations that he endorsed the paying of hush money to a former lawmaker jailed for corruption.

Even in this country weary from the constant drip of revelations of a wide-ranging corruption investigation, the incendiary accusation set off a firestorm and Brazil's highest court opened an investigation. Stocks and the currency plunged and rumors circulated that Temer would step down.

Instead, the embattled leader remained defiant in a national address to respond to allegations he was recorded endorsing payments to former lower House Speaker Eduardo Cunha. The existence and the contents of the recording were reported Wednesday night by the Globo newspaper.

"At no time did I authorize the paying of anyone," Temer said emphatically, raising his voice and pounding his index finger against the podium. "I did not buy anybody's silence."

"I will not resign," he said.

The Supreme Federal Tribunal opened an investigation into the accusations and lifted the seal on the recording. Globo then posted the nearly 39-minute recording, which is scratchy and often inaudible.

In it, two men can be heard talking about Cunha, who is now serving a sentence on corruption charges but many believe could still provide damaging testimony about dozens of other politicians. Globo's report said they are Temer and JBS meat-packing company executive Joesley Batista.

One man, who is apparently Temer, complains that Cunha could potentially embarrass him.

"Within my limits, I did the most I could there. I settled everything," responds the other man, apparently Batista. "He came and collected, etc., etc., etc. I am good with Eduardo, OK?"

The first man then says: "You have to keep that up, see?" To which the second man responds: "Every month."

Even before the audio was released, Thursday began in a panic after Globo's report.

Within 90 minutes of the opening, Brazil's main Ibovespa stock index dropped 10 percent and trading was stopped for 30 minutes. Brazil's currency, the real, lost 8 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar, according to the Central Bank's closing figure. Congress cancelled its sessions, including suspending work

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on legislation that Temer's administration hopes will pull Latin America's largest economy out of its worst recession in decades.

The pressure built against Temer throughout the day. There was talk that Cabinet ministers were considering quitting their posts, and the culture minister did step down by day's end. Opposition politicians called for his impeachment. Two small allied parties pulled their support for Temer in Congress.

"There are parties leaving his base, ministers leaving the Cabinet. Even if the recordings don't show something that terrible, you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube," said Claudio Couto, a political science professor at Fundacao Getulio Vargas, a Sao Paulo-based university and think tank. "If Temer doesn't fall, he will lead a walking dead administration."

In the evening, a protest of several thousand people in Rio de Janeiro was broken up when men in masks threw objects at police, who responded with tear gas. In Sao Paulo, the nation's largest city, hundreds of protesters gathered on a main avenue to demand Temer go.

"After the contents of the tape became public, there's no other way out for Temer than to leave," said Augusto Tadeki, a 23-year-old unemployed computer technician. "He either has to resign or he'll be impeached. We will stay here; we will demonstrate every day until he leaves."

Five of the top 10 trending topics in Brazil on Twitter were related to the scandal, including the subject "Temer will resign." Many Brazilians expressed shock on social media when Temer finally spoke Thursday night and said he would stay in power.

"Michel Temer is like that boyfriend who doesn't know it's over," one Twitter user said.

Since its start three years ago, the "Car Wash" investigation into a kickback scheme at oil giant Petrobras has revealed a scale of corruption that has shocked even the most cynical Brazilians and put several top businessmen and politicians in jail. In recent months, the probe has moved closer to the president and his circle.

Globo also reported that Sen. Aecio Neves had been recorded asking Batista for \$700,000 to pay for his defense in the "Car Wash" corruption probe.

On Thursday, police searched Neves' Rio de Janeiro home and Brasilia office, and Brazil's highest court suspended him from office. Neves, who nearly won the presidency in 2014 and planned to run again next year, has denied wrongdoing.

According to the Globo report, Batista secretly recorded the conversations with Temer and Neves and gave them to justice officials as part of plea bargain negotiations. Globo did not say how it obtained the recording.

In a statement Thursday, Batista acknowledged his company had made a mistake and apologized. He promised not to tolerate corruption going forward.

If confirmed, the allegations could prove devastating for Temer, whose administration has lurched from one crisis to another since he took office just over a year ago after Dilma Rousseff was impeached and removed as president. Temer's approval ratings are hovering around 10 percent.

In April, it came to light that eight of his Cabinet ministers were being investigated in cases related to bribery or accepting campaign donations from Brazilian construction company Odebrecht, one of the central businesses implicated in the kickback scheme at Petrobras.

"I can't see how Temer survives this," said David Fleischer, a political science professor at the University of Brasilia. "There are just too many people against him now."

Associated Press writer Peter Prengaman reported this story in Rio de Janeiro and AP writers Mauricio Savarese and Sarah DiLorenzo reported from Sao Paulo. AP writer Stan Lehman in Sao Paulo contributed to this report.

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Senate chairman: Flynn has not responded to subpoena

By **CHAD DAY, STEPHEN BRAUN and MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chairman of the Senate intelligence committee said Thursday that ousted National Security Adviser Michael Flynn hasn't responded to a subpoena from the panel in its probe of Russia's meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Republican Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina had to retract a statement made hours earlier that Flynn's lawyer had told the committee he would not comply with the subpoena.

Legal experts say it's unlikely Flynn would agree to turn over the personal documents because he would be waiving his constitutional protection against self-incrimination by doing so. Flynn, though his lawyer, had earlier asked for immunity from "unfair prosecution" in exchange for agreeing to cooperate with the committee.

Flynn's attorney Robert Kelner did not respond to phone messages and emails seeking comment.

The Senate committee is one of several on Capitol Hill investigating possible collusion between Russia and President Donald Trump's 2016 campaign. Flynn is also the target of other congressional investigations as well as an ongoing FBI counterintelligence probe and a separate federal investigation in Virginia.

Flynn, a retired Army lieutenant general, was fired from his position as Trump's national security adviser in February. At the time, Trump said he fired Flynn because he misled senior administration officials, including the vice president, about his contacts with Russian officials.

The Senate committee issued the subpoena for Flynn's records on May 10 after he declined to cooperate with an April 28 request for documents. That request was similar to ones received by other Trump associates, including former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, Trump associate Roger Stone and former Trump foreign policy adviser Carter Page, a person familiar with the Senate investigation said. That person spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential details of the committee's investigation.

Page and Stone shared copies of their request letters with The Associated Press. Those letters sought a wide array of electronic and paper records related to any contacts made between people affiliated with the Trump campaign and Russian officials and businesses. Emails, text messages, letters, phone records and information about financial and real estate holdings associated with Russia were among the information requested by the committee.

Nina Ginsberg, a veteran Washington defense attorney with extensive experience in national security cases, said that without an ironclad immunity deal from the committee, Flynn would be exposed to questioning from investigators about any personal documents he gave up.

Providing those records to the committee would provide authorities with "a lot more information and the legal basis for questioning him about them," she said.

Opening himself up to questioning from Senate investigations would be risky for Flynn given his current legal troubles.

Flynn has been under scrutiny from the Justice Department since at least Nov. 30, when the department's Foreign Agent Registration Act unit sent him a letter questioning whether he needed to register as a foreign agent for lobbying work he performed for a Turkish businessman. The letter and initial stories on Flynn's lobbying were first reported by The Daily Caller.

Flynn signed a \$600,000 contract last August with a Turkish businessman, Ekim Alptekin. The contract called for Flynn's company, Flynn Intel Group, to gather information on a Turkish cleric living in the United States with the aim of getting a criminal referral against him. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has blamed the cleric, Fethullah Gulen, who lives in Pennsylvania, for a failed coup attempt last summer and has pressured the U.S. to extradite him. The U.S. has rebuffed those calls.

Flynn Intel was paid only \$530,000 for the work, which ended in November after Trump's election victory. The day of the election, Flynn published a pro-Turkish op-ed, which railed against Gulen, in The Hill newspaper. Flynn has denied the op-ed was related to his Turkish work.

The op-ed prompted scrutiny by the Justice Department, and now a full-fledged federal investigation. According to a U.S. official, authorities in the Eastern District of Virginia are examining Flynn's paid foreign

consulting work last year for the Turkish-owned company while he was advising Trump's presidential campaign. The official was not authorized to discuss the probe and requested anonymity.

The existence of the investigation was first confirmed by CNN, which reported that federal prosecutors recently sent grand jury subpoenas to Flynn associates and contractors who worked with his firm. Alptekin told the AP in an email that he is not a target of the investigation and has not been contacted by authorities.

Amid Justice interest, Trump formally chose Flynn as his national security adviser. As the AP reported in March, an attorney for Flynn told Trump's presidential transition team— including now-White House counsel Don McGahn — that Flynn might have to register as a foreign agent.

After Trump's inauguration, Flynn's representatives told the White House counsel that Flynn, who was already serving as national security adviser, would be registering with the Justice Department. Flynn finally registered in March, acknowledging his work could have benefited the government of Turkey.

The White House has confirmed Flynn's attorney contacted the transition and the counsel's office about his possible foreign agent registration. But a White House official has said McGahn and others were not aware of the full details of Flynn's Turkish work.

Flynn is separately being investigated by the Defense Department's inspector general. That inquiry is looking into whether Flynn was fully forthcoming about his foreign contacts and earnings from organizations linked to the governments of Russia and Turkey.

The top Democrat and Republican on a House oversight committee have said Flynn likely broke federal law by failing to get approval from the U.S. government to accept foreign payments, including \$33,000 in 2015 from RT, Russia's state-sponsored television network. RT has been branded a propaganda outlet by U.S. intelligence officials.

Oregon governor forgives boy for swiping hazelnut, pen

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — The governor of Oregon has pardoned a fourth-grade boy who swiped a hazelnut and a pen during a recent tour of the state Capitol.

Gov. Kate Brown on Thursday tweeted out a photo of the boy's apology letter along with the hashtag #cutestmailever and the caption, 'I think we can forgive Samuel, don't you think, Oregonians?' The tweet immediately got many likes and retweets.

In the pencil-written letter, Samuel explains that he visited the Capitol Building on a classroom tour on April 19 and took the items.

"These things were not mine and it was wrong for me to take them. I'm very sorry," he wrote. "I hope you and the people of Oregon can forgive me."

Included with the letter were the pen and \$1 to cover the cost of the stolen hazelnut.

In a return letter, Brown said she accepted his apology and forgave him on behalf of all Oregonians.

"Oregon is a special place. I hope we can work together to keep it that way," the governor wrote.

As a final gesture of goodwill, she enclosed a new pen for Samuel to "remember this event."

Trump claims witch hunt, says he's most hounded leader ever

By ERICA WERNER and DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Brimming with resentment, President Donald Trump fervently denied on Thursday that his campaign had collaborated with Russia or that he'd tried to kill an FBI probe of the issue, contending that "even my enemies" recognize his innocence and declaring himself the most unfairly hounded president in history.

Asked point-blank if he'd done anything that might merit prosecution or even impeachment, he said no and then added concerning the allegations and questions that have mounted as he nears the four-month mark of his presidency: "I think it's totally ridiculous. Everybody thinks so."

Not quite everybody. While Trump tweeted and voiced his indignation at the White House, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed an independent special counsel to lead a heightened federal Trump-Russia investigation the day before, briefed the entire Senate behind closed doors at the Capitol.

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By several senators' accounts, he contradicted Trump's statements that Rosenstein's written criticism of FBI Director James Comey had been a factor in Comey's recent firing by the president.

Trump is leaving Friday for his first foreign trip, to the Mideast and beyond, and aides had hoped the disarray at home would have been calmed if not resolved, allowing the White House to refocus and move ahead. Republicans on Capitol Hill hoped the same, reasoning that the appointment of a special counsel could free them to work on a major tax overhaul and other matters without constant distractions.

Trump said he was about to name a replacement for Comey, another move to settle the waters. Former Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman was seen as the front-runner.

But calmness seemed far off.

Trump clearly knew what he wanted to say as he took a few questions at a news briefing with visiting Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos.

Did he urge Comey at a February meeting to drop his probe of the Russia connections of Trump's national security adviser, Michael Flynn?

"No. No. Next question."

Did he in fact collude with Russia in his campaign to defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton?

"Everybody, even my enemies, have said there is no collusion," he maintained.

However another answer on that subject seemed both more specific and perhaps ambiguous.

"There is no collusion between certainly myself and my campaign -- but I can only speak for myself -- and the Russians. Zero."

"The entire thing has been a witch hunt," he declared, echoing one of the tweets he'd sent out just after dawn: "This is the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!"

He said he respected the special counsel appointment but also said it "hurts our country terribly."

At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, Rosenstein was briefing the Senate about his decision to appoint former FBI Director Robert Mueller to lead the independent Trump-Russia probe.

Senators said that Rosenstein steered clear of specifics while making clear that Mueller has wide latitude to pursue the investigation wherever it leads, including potentially criminal charges. Despite the president's furious reaction, some fellow Republicans welcomed Mueller's appointment and expressed hopes it would restore some composure to a capital plunged in chaos.

"We'll get rid of the smoke and see where the actual issues lie," said Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C. "I do think that the special prosecutor provides a sense of calm and confidence perhaps for the American people, which is incredibly important."

One striking piece of news emerged from Rosenstein's briefing: He told senators that he had already known Comey was getting fired even as he wrote the memo that Trump cited as a significant justification for the FBI director's dismissal. Trump himself had already contradicted that explanation, telling interviewers earlier that he had already decided to dismiss Comey.

He offered new justifications for his decision Thursday, even while referring to the Rosenstein memo as "a very, very strong recommendation."

Trump referred to Comey's testimony at a recent Capitol Hill hearing after which the Justice Department ended up having to amend part of his testimony regarding last year's probe of Hillary Clinton's email practices.

"That was a poor, poor performance," Trump said. "And then on top of that, after the Wednesday performance by Director Comey, you had a person come and have to readjust the record, which many people have never seen before, because there were misstatements made."

The Justice Department says Mueller, the new special counsel, has been given sweeping power to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign, including potential links between Moscow and Trump associates.

Despite initially opposing appointment of an independent counsel, Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan said Thursday that the development "helps assure people and the Justice Department that they're going to go do their jobs independently and thoroughly, which is what we've called for all along."

At the same time, congressional committees are continuing their own investigations, leading to some turf warfare and sniping as the Senate Intelligence Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee both sought to lay claim to testimony from Comey, while the House Oversight Committee also hoped to hear from the former director.

The House intelligence committee announced that it had asked for documents from the FBI and the Justice Department.

The No. 2 Senate Republican, John Cornyn of Texas, said he was supportive of investigations in Congress but expressed concern about the "proliferation" of hearings. "I hope that we don't inadvertently trip up or damage the independent investigation of the special counsel," he said.

The president's tweets drew little reaction from fellow Republicans, who instead joined Democrats in heaping praise on Mueller, a longtime respected lawman who served under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, preceding Comey as head of the FBI.

Associated Press writers Deb Riechmann, Eileen Sullivan, Matthew Daly and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Trump supporters blame leaks, conspiracy for his woes

By JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — To the White House and its supporters, the big story in Washington isn't the investigation into possible Trump campaign ties to Russia. It's about leakers working to undermine the president.

"SABOTAGE," read the subject line of emails sent out by President Donald Trump's re-election campaign and the Republican Party, which pointed to "people within our own unelected bureaucracy that want to sabotage President Trump and our entire America First movement." Trump tweeted Thursday that he's facing "the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!"

The language reveals much about how Trump and his backers are explaining the seemingly never-ending blitz of bad news rocking the White House. As Democrats talk about possible obstruction of justice and dream of removing Trump from office, the president and his allies reject that he bears responsibility for his woes. They see a plot to undermine him at every turn, as evidenced by the anonymous sources disclosing the embarrassing and damaging information — some of it classified.

All administrations have to deal with leaks, from the release of the Pentagon Papers on Vietnam policy to Edward Snowden's dump of national security files. But the scope and frequency experienced by the Trump White House is remarkable.

In addition to an endless stream of gossip and internal squabbling, news outlets have been privy to everything from details of draft documents to the president's private phone conversations with foreign leaders. This week came reports that the president had shared highly classified information with Russian officials during an Oval Office meeting, revealed by those with knowledge of the conversation.

"This has all the markings of a coordinated, silent coup," said Michael Caputo, who worked on Trump's campaign and keeps in touch with administration officials.

Leaks are hardly the only cause of Trump's problems — the uproar over FBI Director James Comey's dismissal wasn't the result of a leak. But Trump-friendly talking heads see something that stretches the realms of believability. Far-right radio host Alex Jones warns of a plot by "deep-state" globalists to impeach Trump. On Fox News, Sean Hannity warned Wednesday of a "destroy Trump alliance" that is now "aligning to take down President Trump."

But even if some claims go too far, Trump clearly does face opposition from within his own government. Running on a pledge to tear apart Washington, Trump still depends on Obama administration holdovers and career government employees, many of whom oppose him.

Clashes among Trump aides also create an environment in which staff leak to undercut rivals.

Ari Fleischer, who served as press secretary to President George W. Bush, blamed Trump for creating an environment that promotes leaks, saying that starts at the top.

"I do think there is a serious problem with leakers inside the administration and holdovers who can't stand the president and will do anything they can to hurt him. Leaks are a real problem," he said. "But Donald Trump created many of these problems for himself."

A sense of fatigue and despondence has set in as White House officials wait for new balls to drop. Again and again, they have tried to push forward with their agenda, only to see news reports dominated by near-daily leaks.

"Somebody is selectively leaking information and facts. And there's a reason it's selective," said White House press secretary Sean Spicer, who once demanded that staffers turn over their cell phones so he could inspect them for unauthorized communication. "It's because they're trying to create ... at least it appears as though somebody is trying to create a narrative or a problem."

"It's extremely troubling," he said.

The focus on leaks has also been embraced by Republicans in Congress, who have urged reporters to pay more attention to the source of their stories — a familiar strategy to deflect the conversation away from bad news.

In many cases, Trump aides have leaked gossip to cement their public standings or tried to communicate with the president through news stories, which he devours.

Erick Erickson, a conservative activist who has been critical of the president, recently wrote that because the notoriously thin-skinned president doesn't like internal criticism, some aides "are left with no other option but to go to the media, leak the story, and hope that the intense blowback gives the president a swift kick in the butt."

White House officials have not said whether there is a leak investigation going on. But they're not the first to rail against leaks and leakers — or try to root them out.

In 2013, for instance, the Obama Justice Department secretly obtained two months of phone records for reporters and editors of The Associated Press, which appeared to be linked to a criminal investigation into leaks about a foiled terrorist plot to bomb an airliner.

Follow Colvin on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/colvinj>

Fox News founder Roger Ailes died of complications from fall

By FRAZIER MOORE, AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Roger Ailes, the communications maestro who transformed television news and America's political conversation by creating and ruling Fox News Channel for two decades before being ousted last year for alleged sexual harassment, died Thursday, according to his wife, Elizabeth Ailes. He was 77.

Ailes died after a fall at his Palm Beach home on May 10 caused bleeding on the brain, the Palm Beach County Medical Examiner's Office said. Ailes fell in his bathroom, hit his head and was bleeding profusely. He was taken to a hospital by attending paramedics, the Palm Beach (Florida) Police Department said.

A former GOP operative to candidates including Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and a one-time adviser to President Donald Trump, Ailes displayed a mastery of modern messaging early in his career. Then he changed the face of 24-hour news when, in 1996, he accepted a challenge from media titan Rupert Murdoch to build a news network from scratch to compete with CNN and other TV outlets they deemed left-leaning.

That October, Ailes flipped the switch on Fox News Channel, which within a few years became the audience leader in cable news. Ailes branded the network "Fair and Balanced" and declared he had left the political world behind, but conservative viewers found a home and lifted prime-time commentators Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity to the top of the news ratings.

"He has dramatically and forever changed the political and the media landscape singlehandedly for the better," Hannity tweeted on Thursday.

Fox News and 21st Century Fox executive chairman Rupert Murdoch called Ailes "a brilliant broadcaster

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(who) played a huge role in shaping America's media over the last thirty years" in a statement.

"He will be remembered by the many people on both sides of the camera that he discovered, nurtured and promoted," Murdoch said. "Roger and I shared a big idea which he executed in a way no one else could have. In addition, Roger was a great patriot who never ceased fighting for his beliefs."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich recalled Ailes' influence on the nation's politics from the late 1960s to now.

"Roger Ailes was a genius at politics and the news media. His advice to Presidents Nixon and Reagan was historic and helped elect both," Gingrich tweeted.

"The history of cable television will have a very big chapter on Roger Ailes. Without his success at Fox News Trump could never have won."

Others laid the nation's political dysfunction and inability to find common ground at his feet, creating the atmosphere for Trump to succeed.

"It's a very complicated story," said Gabriel Sherman, author of the Ailes biography, "The Loudest Voice in the Room." "He is in some ways a genius and in some ways tragic. His quest for power consumed him."

By mid-2016 Ailes still ruled supreme as he prepared to celebrate Fox News' 20th anniversary.

But in little more than two weeks, both his legacy and job unraveled following allegations by a former anchor that he had forced her out of Fox News after she spurned his sexual advances. The lawsuit filed on July 6 by Gretchen Carlson quickly triggered accounts from more than 20 women with similar stories of alleged harassment by Ailes either against themselves or someone they knew.

Reportedly, a key witness was Megyn Kelly, the network's superstar personality, whose voice was conspicuously missing in the chorus of women and men at Fox News who spoke up on behalf of Ailes. Their defense did little to staunch the widening scandal. Despite Ailes' staunch denials, 21st Century Fox corporate head Rupert Murdoch and his sons, James and Lachlan, determined that Ailes had to go. The announcement was made on July 21.

The allegations went beyond just Ailes: In April, reports that the network had settled lawsuits with five women who alleged sexual harassment against network star Bill O'Reilly led to his firing. Three other executives also lost their jobs.

Rumors of sexual improprieties at Fox News and by Ailes in particular weren't new. Sherman's 2014 biography reported numerous unflattering anecdotes, including an allegation (denied by Ailes) that he offered one female employee extra money if she would have sex with him.

Before Carlson's bombshell legal action, Fox's roaring success and enormous earnings (with some estimates that it accounted for nearly a quarter of the parent company's profits) insulated Ailes from any suspicion as well as from his past scrapes with the Murdoch sons over who he would report to.

His dismissal was a headspinning downfall and a breathtaking defeat for Ailes, a man who all his life seemed to be spoiling for a fight and was used to winning them.

Ailes was a brawler. And even when he was on the winning side of a battle, he positioned himself as the defiant outsider going toe-to-toe with his bullying nemeses. Brash, heavyset and bombastic, he was renowned for never giving in, for being ever confrontational with a chip on his shoulder and a blistering outburst at the ready.

When he founded Fox News Network, Ailes' stated mission was to correct for the sins of a media universe that was overwhelmingly liberal. Pledging fairness from his employees shortly before the network launched, he was typically tough talking: "Will they hit it every time? Hell, no. Will they try? Hell, yes. Will we be criticized? Hell, yes. Do I care? Hell, no."

As usual, he had defined the enemy (in this case, his media critics and other presumed foes) before they could define themselves. It was his crowning principle.

This attack-dog style served him well when, at 27, Ailes wrangled a job with Nixon, then vying for a political comeback in the 1968 presidential race.

"Mr. Nixon, you need a media adviser," Ailes declared (according to Sherman's biography).

"What's a media adviser?" asked Nixon.

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"I am," replied Ailes, having fashioned the job on the spot.

Nixon, whose run for the White House had been dealt a blow eight years earlier in a televised debate against his camera-ready rival John F. Kennedy, was a challenge Ailes eagerly accepted at a moment when, as he realized better than most, TV could make or break a candidate. Concluding that viewers would never warm to Nixon, nor would the media establishment, Ailes struck a winning formula by packaging him in comfortably staged TV town-hall meetings as a man whose intelligence the audience would respect.

The remainder of Ailes' career would draw on various blends of showmanship, ruthless politics and an unmatched skill for recognizing TV's raw communication power before his opponents did, and harnessing it better.

Born in Warren, Ohio, on May 15, 1940, Roger Eugene Ailes described his working-class upbringing with three words: "God, country, family."

Afflicted with hemophilia, he spent much of his early years housebound in front of, and fascinated with, television, and after graduation from Ohio University landed an entry-level position at a TV station in Cleveland that had just started a local talk and entertainment program starring a has-been former big-band singer named Mike Douglas.

Ailes went to work as a production assistant on "The Mike Douglas Show" and rose in its ranks (at 26, he was named its executive producer) along with its rising fortunes as it went into national syndication and moved to Philadelphia.

It was there in 1967 that he and Nixon crossed paths in a meeting that changed both their lives.

After jumping ship from the "Douglas" show to help steer Nixon to the White House, Ailes spent more than a decade as a communications consultant to corporations and Republican candidates. And as a sign of his versatility, he also became a theater producer, with a hit off-Broadway musical, "The Hot L Baltimore," in the early 1970s, and a network boss, helping start Television News Incorporated, a short-lived right-wing TV service funded by conservative brewing magnate Joseph Coors, that seemed to presage Fox News by a quarter-century.

Ailes returned to presidential politics in 1984 by helping President Reagan recover from his disastrous opening debate with Democratic opponent Walter Mondale.

And in 1988, he orchestrated the media campaign for Vice President George H.W. Bush's presidential bid. It was a campaign widely seen as being no less nasty than it was successful.

One indelibly comic image that led to Bush's victory was a commercial that appropriated footage of opponent Michael Dukakis riding in a military tank looking foolish in a bulbous helmet. Even more explosive anti-Dukakis commercials featured a black felon, Willie Horton. Designed to play on voter fears of Democrats' supposedly soft-on-crime policies, those commercials, while effective, were widely condemned as racist. Ailes denied responsibility for them, though many of his critics were loath to believe him.

Within a few more years, he claimed he had sworn off politics.

In 1993, he joined NBC to run its cable business network, CNBC. He was credited with boosting CNBC's ratings and putting that troubled NBC subsidiary in the black. Meanwhile, he created another network, the talk-and-advice-oriented America's Talking.

"I've gotten over all the cynicism of politics," Ailes told The Associated Press in 1995, although, during that same period, Ailes moonlighted as executive producer of the syndicated TV show that starred right-wing radio sensation Rush Limbaugh.

Then, in January 1996, Ailes resigned from NBC after America's Talking was sacrificed to free up channel capacity for the company's cable-news venture, MSNBC.

Within weeks, Ailes had jumped to what was then known as News Corp., and by fall he launched Fox News Channel against a pair of seemingly indomitable rivals: three-month-old MSNBC, the network with which his former employers replaced his America's Talking channel, and cable-news pioneer CNN.

Even so, by 2002, Fox News had sealed the deal as ratings leader, dominating cable-news competition and tying his rivals in knots in both daytime as well as prime time, where he deployed a murderers' row of hosts led by Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity.

Ailes helped make a hot property out of Glenn Beck, and signed a virtual salon of former-and-future

GOP big names who found a welcoming platform for party talking points.

Other hires included Gretchen Carlson, who came to Fox News from CBS News in 2005 and was dismissed when her contract expired on June 23, 2016, and Megyn Kelly, an attorney-turned-TV-journalist who joined the network in 2004 and a decade later was arguably the network's biggest marquee name.

From the start, Ailes steadfastly denied any political bias or agenda on the part of his network, whether in its message or its personnel. Politics, schmoltitics: "I hired Sarah Palin because she was hot and got ratings," he told The AP in 2011.

Propelled by Ailes' "fair and balanced" branding, Fox News successfully targeted viewers who believed the other cable-news networks, and maybe the media overall, displayed a liberal tilt from which Fox News and Fox Business Channel (which he launched in 2006 against his former business network, CNBC) delivered its audience with unvarnished truth. Thus did he leverage the public's distrust for the media while positioning his networks as the anti-media news-media alternative — and he their upright overlord.

"My first qualification is I didn't go to Columbia Journalism School," he boasted to The New York Times in January 2010, and added, "There are no parties in this town that I want to go to."

Though ratings continued to soar, in later years Ailes' power was challenged. He seemed incapable of stopping Donald Trump's rise as the GOP's top contender for the 2016 election. In an early televised debate, Fox network moderators, notably Kelly, besieged Trump with sharp interrogation about his experience, his policies and past comments about women. But the real estate mogul's candidacy was undamaged as he lobbed insults at Kelly and her network for what he labeled unfair treatment.

By summer 2016, Ailes and Trump had seemingly reached detente, with Fox News climbing on the Trump bandwagon and vice versa. It was ironic, then, that Ailes was ousted only hours before Trump accepted the GOP nomination for which Fox had helped pave the way.

With Ailes' sacking, Rupert Murdoch, the parent company's executive chairman, became interim boss of Fox News and Fox Business Network until a successor could be found. But Ailes had been so identified with the brand since its inception that many, both insiders and audience members, were left hard-pressed to envision Fox News without him.

In the meantime, the network's talent lineup took a hit as Kelly left for NBC News and O'Reilly was fired.

Ailes is survived by his third wife, Elizabeth, who had worked for him at CNBC as vice president of programming, and their son, Zachary.

Associated Press writer Terry Spencer in West Palm Beach, Florida, contributed to this report.

Harvard student submits rap album as his senior thesis

By COLLIN BINKLEY, Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — While other Harvard University students were writing papers for their senior theses, Obasi Shaw was busy rapping his.

Shaw is the first student in Harvard's history to submit a rap album as a senior thesis in the English Department, the university said. The album, called "Liminal Minds," has earned the equivalent of an A-minus grade, good enough to guarantee that Shaw will graduate with honors next week.

Count Shaw among those most surprised by the success.

"I never thought it would be accepted by Harvard," said Shaw, a 20-year-old from Stone Mountain, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. "I didn't think they would respect rap as an art form enough for me to do it."

Shaw describes the 10-track album as a dark and moody take on what it means to be black in America. Each song is told from a different character's perspective, an idea inspired by Geoffrey Chaucer's 14th-century classic "The Canterbury Tales." Shaw, who's black, also draws on the works of writer James Baldwin while tackling topics ranging from police violence to slavery.

Shaw's thesis adviser, Harvard English lecturer Josh Bell, said Shaw is a "serious artist and he's an amazing guy."

"He was able to turn around an album that people in the English Department would like very much but

also that people who like rap music might like," Bell said.

Harvard undergraduates aren't obligated to submit senior theses, but most departments require it to graduate with honors. Often it takes the form of a research paper, but students can apply to turn in an artistic work as a creative thesis. Some submit screenplays, novels or poetry collections.

Shaw was at home for winter break in 2015, struggling to find a topic for a written thesis, when he told his mother, Michelle Shaw, about the creative thesis option. He had recently started writing his own raps and performing them at open-microphone nights on campus. His mother connected the dots and suggested he record an album for his thesis.

It took Shaw more than a year to write the songs and record them at a studio on Harvard's campus. His friends supplied many of the beats, while he taught himself how to mix the tracks into a polished product.

"I'm still not satisfied with the quality of the production just yet, but I'm constantly learning and growing," Shaw said.

Rap and hip-hop have drawn growing interest from academia in recent years. Harvard established a fellowship for scholars of hip-hop in 2013, and other schools including the University of Arizona have started to offer minors in hip-hop studies.

Clemson University announced in February that a doctoral student submitted a 34-track rap album as his dissertation, a first for the South Carolina university.

Shaw plans to circulate the album online for free and hopes it opens doors to the music industry. In the meantime, he's headed to Seattle to work as a software engineer at Google.

Find Collin Binkley on Twitter: @cbinkley.

US airstrike hits pro-Syria government forces for first time

By SARAH EL DEEB and LOLITA C. BALDOR, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A U.S. airstrike struck pro-Syrian government forces that the coalition said posed a threat to American troops and allied rebels operating near the border with Jordan on Thursday, the first such close confrontation between U.S. forces and fighters backing President Bashar Assad.

The coalition said "apparent" Russian attempts to stop pro-Assad forces from moving toward Tanf, as well as warning shots and a show of force, had failed.

American officials and Syrian activists said the strike hit in the desert near the border with Jordan, though it was unclear if it struck the Syrian army or just militias allied with the government.

The region around Tanf, where the borders of Jordan, Syria and Iraq meet, has been considered a de-conflicted zone, under an agreement between the U.S. and Russia.

Speaking to reporters, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said the U.S. will defend its troops in case of "aggressive" steps against them. He was asked if the airstrike increases the U.S. role in the Syrian war.

"We are not increasing our role in the Syrian civil war, but we will defend our troops," Mattis said. "And that is a coalition element made up of more than just U.S. troops, and so we will defend ourselves (if) people take aggressive steps against us."

The "defensive" strike was also an apparent signal to Assad to keep his forces out of a zone where U.S.-backed rebels are fighting the Islamic State group.

"This action was taken after apparent Russian attempts to dissuade Syrian pro-regime movement south ... were unsuccessful, a coalition aircraft show of force, and the firing of warning shots," the U.S.-led coalition said. It said coalition forces have been operating in the area "for many months training and advising vetted partner forces" in the battle against IS.

The U.S. strike marks a new approach in what has become an intensely crowded and complicated war zone. Thursday's strike was the coalition's first on pro-Assad forces in the battlefield. The coalition had so far kept its military operations focused on Islamic State militants and al-Qaida-linked groups.

Last month, the U.S. fired 59 missiles at a government air base in central Syria as punishment for a chemical attack blamed on Assad's forces that killed nearly 90 people.

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An increasingly visible U.S. role in Syria has also raised the possibilities of friction with the various forces on the ground. The U.S. is backing Syrian Kurdish forces who are also fighting IS to the country's east. US troops have sent patrols in the area to act as a buffer between Turkish troops and the Kurdish fighters. Turkey views the U.S-backed Kurdish fighters as an extension of its own insurgent group.

In recent days, near the border with Jordan, another set of U.S-backed rebel fighters have been on a collision course with government troops in the area of Tanf.

The government launched a new offensive in recent days in the area, and activists say pro-government militiamen, mainly from Iran and the Lebanese Shiite militant Hezbollah group, have deployed there aiming to secure the main highway that runs from Damascus to Baghdad and beyond, to Tehran.

Tensions have been building as part of a race for control of territory stretching from the provincial capital of Deir el-Zour in northeastern Syria to the Iraq border. The area gained attention as the battle for the Iraqi city of Mosul escalated in recent weeks. An estimated 10,000 IS fighters uprooted from Mosul are believed to be massing in the border area.

The U.S. officials said the American airstrike hit the pro-Syrian government forces as they were setting up fighting positions in a protected area near Tanf. They said a tank and a bulldozer were also hit.

One official said the pro-regime forces had entered a so-called "de-confliction" zone without authorization and were perceived as a threat to U.S.-allied troops there. The officials weren't authorized to speak publicly on the matter and demanded anonymity.

A Syrian opposition media group, the Palmyra News Network, said the attack occurred at the Zarka juncture, about 27 kilometers (17 miles) from the border, destroyed a number of vehicles and caused casualties. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also said the strike destroyed vehicles and killed eight militiamen. There was no immediate comment from the pro-government side.

In September 2016, the coalition erroneously struck at Syrian government troops in Deir el-Zour, killing over 90 soldiers. The U.S. at the time said it was a mistake, as it was targeting IS positions.

Further to the north, IS militants on Thursday attacked several government-held villages in central Syria, capturing at least one and killing 52 people. The dead included more than two dozen women and children, some of whom were beheaded, as well as Syrian troops, according to state media, medical officials and an opposition monitoring group.

The U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish-rebels are closing in on Raqqa, the de facto capital of IS in Syria. That battle has already caused clashes between government forces and Syrian rebels and raised concern of pro-government militias making a bid for controlling the border with Iraq.

The IS attack in the central Hama province, meanwhile, targeted villages where most residents belong to the Ismaili branch of Shiite Islam, raising fears of massacres such as those the Islamic State group carried out in other minority communities in Syria and Iraq.

The villages are located near the town of Salamiyeh and the highway that links the capital, Damascus, to the northern city of Aleppo, but state media said traffic was not affected. Media reports and doctors in the area said some of the killed, which included women and children, were beheaded and others dismembered. IS extremists are notorious for mutilating bodies of their adversaries, particularly members of other sects than Sunni Islam.

The militants stormed homes in the southern part of Aqareb al-Safi village before government forces pushed them back into the desert, the state news agency SANA reported.

The head of the National Hospital in Salamiyeh, Dr. Noufal Safar, said it received 52 bodies, including 11 women and 17 children.

Some of the bodies were badly mutilated, beheaded or had their limbs severed but "most appear to have died as a result of gunfire," Safar told The Associated Press by telephone.

Rami Razzouk, a coroner at the hospital who inspected the bodies, said those of children were brought in mostly dismembered while the men had died from shelling or heavy machine-gun fire. He said at least nine children were beaten on the head with heavy objects such as bricks or stones.

The Observatory also said that 52 people were killed in the fighting, with the dead including 15 civilians, 27 Syrian soldiers and 10 unidentified people.

Razzouk said 120 people were wounded; SANA said 40 were wounded.

The IS-linked Aamaq news agency said the militants captured villages of Aqareb al-Safi and Mabouja. It identified residents as members of Assad's Alawite sect, an off-shoot of Shiite Islam. The Sunni extremists view Shiites as apostates deserving of death.

IS has massacred thousands of Shiites and other opponents in Syria and Iraq, often boasting about the killings and circulating photos and videos of them online. Aamaq claimed that 100 Syrian troops and pro-government gunmen were killed in the fighting.

"Dozens of people are missing but it is not clear if they were kidnapped" by IS, the Observatory's chief Rami Abdurrahman said.

Baldor reported from Washington. Associated Press Writers Robert Burns in Washington and Bassem Mroue and Hashem Osseiran in Beirut contributed to this report.

Lauded rocker Chris Cornell killed himself by hanging

By MESFIN FEKADU and COREY WILLIAMS, Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Chris Cornell, one of the most lauded and respected contemporary lead singers in rock music with his bands Soundgarden and Audioslave, hanged himself Wednesday in a Detroit hotel room, according to the city's medical examiner. He was 52.

The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office said Thursday it completed the preliminary autopsy on Cornell, but that "a full autopsy report has not yet been completed." A police spokesman told two Detroit newspapers that the singer was found with a band around his neck.

Cornell's death stunned his family and his die-hard fans, who Cornell just performed for hours earlier at a show in Detroit. Soundgarden's current tour kicked off in late April and was planned to run through May 27. He was found dead at the MGM Grand Detroit hotel by a family friend who went to his room after Cornell's wife asked him to check on the singer, police said.

Cornell was a leader of the grunge movement with Seattle-based Soundgarden — with whom he gained critical and commercial acclaim — but also found success outside the band with other projects, including Audioslave, Temple of the Dog as well as solo albums. He was widely respected in the music industry: He reached success in every band lineup he was part of it, his voice was memorable and powerful, and he was a skilled songwriter, even collaborating on a number of film soundtracks, including the James Bond theme song for 2006's "Casino Royale" and "The Keeper" from the film "Machine Gun Preacher," which earned Cornell a Golden Globe nomination.

"To create the intimacy of an acoustic performance there needed to be real stories. They need to be kind of real and they need to have a beginning, middle and an end," Cornell said of songwriting in a 2015 interview with The Associated Press. "That's always a challenge in three in a half or four minutes — to be able to do that, to be able to do it directly."

Cornell, who grew up in Seattle, said he started using drugs at age 13 and was kicked out of school at 15.

"I went from being a daily drug user at 13 to having bad drug experiences and quitting drugs by the time I was 14 and then not having any friends until the time I was 16," he told Rolling Stone in 1994. "There was about two years where I was more or less agoraphobic and didn't deal with anybody, didn't talk to anybody, didn't have any friends at all. All the friends that I had were still (messed) up with drugs and were people that I didn't really have anything in common with."

But at 16 he grew serious about music, learning to play the drums while also working as a busboy and dishwasher.

"That was the toughest time in my life," he told Rolling Stone.

He eventually became a Grammy winner with Soundgarden, formed in 1984 and coming out of the rapidly growing Seattle music scene, which included Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Alice in Chains.

"There's something about Seattle, it's always been a hard rock town, too. I didn't realize growing up as kid that Seattle had much more of a hard rock focus and a guitar rock focus than other cities did," Cornell told the AP in 2011. "It was like a Detroit, only northwest kind of. There's no reason that I would think I

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know how to define it, but it's always been there."

The band, which had released hit songs and found success, marked a mainstream breakthrough with "Superunknown," its 1994 album that won them two Grammys, sold more than five million units in the U.S., and launched five hits, including "Black Hole Sun," one of the most popular alternative rock songs from the 1990s.

The group, formed with guitarist Kim Thayil and bassist Hiro Yamamoto, broke up in 1997.

In 2001, Cornell joined Audioslave, a supergroup that included former Rage Against the Machine members Tom Morello, Brad Wilk and Tim Commerford. The band released three albums in six years and also performed at a concert billed as Cuba's first outdoor rock concert by an American band, though some Cuban artists have disputed that claim.

Audioslave disbanded in 2007, but Cornell and Soundgarden reunited in 2010 and released the band's sixth studio album, "King Animal" in 2012.

Cornell also collaborated with members of what would become Pearl Jam to form Temple of the Dog, which produced a self-titled album in 1991 in tribute to friend Andrew Wood, former frontman of Mother Love Bone. In 2011, Cornell was ranked ninth on Rolling Stone list of the best lead singers of all-time, selected by its readers.

He also released solo albums, and Nielsen Music said as a band member and solo act, the singer sold almost 15 million albums and 8.8 million digital songs in the U.S.

His first solo album, 1999's "Euphoria Morning," was a dark album that was initially supposed to be titled "Euphoria Mourning."

"It was a pretty dark album lyrically and pretty depressing, and I was going through a really difficult time in my life — my band wasn't together anymore, my marriage was falling apart and I was dealing with it by drinking way too much, and that has its own problems, particularly with depression," he told Rolling Stone in 2015.

Cornell referenced death — and suicide — in 2007 interview with the AP when discussing his single, "No Such Thing." It appeared on his second solo album, "Carry On."

"The 'no such thing as nothing' line comes from the concepts that humans don't really have a flat line until we're dead. If we are not leading a happy productive life, we are leading probably an unhappy non-productive life. If a person doesn't have enough food, they actually are hungry. If they don't have enough money it's not that they have no money, they actually have something and it's called poverty. There's no just kind of flat lining coasting. You're either going in one direction or in another direction. All that came out of me trying to imagine why somebody would be, for example, a suicide bomber."

The music industry mourned his sudden death online. Elton John tweeted, "Shocked and saddened by the sudden death of @chriscornell. A great singer, songwriter and the loveliest man."

KEXP, Seattle's popular independent radio station, paid tribute to Cornell throughout Thursday morning. The station played non-stop songs from Soundgarden and Cornell's other bands and solo work, as well as artists who covered Cornell's material and those who were influenced by him.

"Seattle's son, Chris Cornell, has passed away," DJ John Richards told listeners.

Fekadu reported from New York. AP Entertainment Writer Nekesa Mumbi Moody and Associated Press writers Dennis Waszak in New York and David Runk in Detroit contributed to this report.

French President Macron talks to Putin, faces media uproar

By SYLVIE CORBET, Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron held a special security meeting, spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin and convened his Cabinet for the first time Thursday — all under a growing cloud of concern that his office is trying to control the press.

The government, appointed Wednesday, is a carefully calibrated balance of 22 prominent and unknown figures from the left and the right, half of them women. They arrived for their first meeting Thursday with smiles, posing for photographs on the front porch of the presidential Elysee Palace.

After the meeting, Macron talked by phone with Putin about possible cooperation on international issues,

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including the fight against terrorism. The Kremlin said in a statement that the two voiced readiness to develop "traditionally friendly" economic, political and cultural ties.

Macron held a defense council including the defense minister and the military chiefs to focus on security issues. The country remains under a state of emergency, and under threat from Islamic extremists, since deadly November 2015 attacks.

During the Cabinet meeting, Macron called on his ministers to have the "necessary discipline" and "solidarity" despite their sometimes stark political differences, government spokesman Christophe Castaner said.

In keeping with Macron's independent centrist line and goal of reshaping French politics, his ministers include both Socialists and conservatives.

Castaner, a Socialist who joined Macron's movement last year, said "our political background will not prevent us to work smartly for France."

Meanwhile, tensions have arisen over Macron's policies on media access, recalling similar conflicts over coverage of Donald Trump's presidency in the U.S.

Some French political reporters said that Macron's office called their media organization to designate specific journalists who will be able to cover Macron's first trip outside Europe, scheduled in Mali on Friday.

In the past, French media would decide themselves who to send on presidential trips.

The president's staff told some media organizations they were trying to give access to journalists with backgrounds covering the topic or theme of a visit, rather than only to political correspondents.

Castaner answered that he wasn't aware of this specific issue but tried to reassure reporters, explaining there's a need to limit the number of journalists during certain visits.

"As you've seen during the campaign, the presence of 50 journalists and a dozen (television) cameras can affect direct dialogue and discussions that the president has with the French," he said. "It's not about controlling. It's not about imposing anything."

Castaner said he and the president are committed to letting journalists do their jobs.

"I'm taking note of your concerns and I will pass them on," he said.

Press freedom group Reporters Without Borders said the actions of Macron's young presidency were a "concerning signal to the press" and "could be used as a way of putting pressure on the media."

Christophe Deloire, the secretary general of the organization, said, "it's not the Elysee's job to select journalists during official trips."

"To limit the number of journalists at an event doesn't mean you get to pick who is allowed to cover the president's trips. If that were to happen, it would be unwarranted political interference," Deloire said.

France is ranked 39th in the 2017 world press freedom index by the group.

More than 20 French media organizations signed an open letter to Macron on Thursday night to express their concerns.

"In no case the Elysee must decide those of us who are entitled or not to cover a visit, whatever the theme is," the letter stated.

"It is not the president of the Republic or his services who decide...the internal functioning of the media organizations, their coverage choices and their approach," it said.

Also Thursday, for the first time in years, the Elysee courtyard was closed to media following the Cabinet meeting. Castaner said the closure wasn't aimed at controlling the government's image but rather was a one-time event because the ministers needed to take an official photograph.

He said the press would be allowed to attend the end of future Cabinet meetings and question ministers in the Elysee courtyard starting next week.

Thursday's meeting was largely about getting to know each other. The government is led by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, a conservative. The most senior Cabinet job, interior minister, went to Gerard Collomb, 69, the long-time Socialist mayor of Lyon who played a key role in Macron's presidential bid.

The armed forces are now led by centrist, pro-European Sylvie Goulard, 52. Jean-Yves Le Drian, 69, the former defense minister, stays on in Macron's new government as foreign minister and Europe minister.

Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

Ailes' political legacy: GOP control in divided America

By STEVE PEOPLES, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Roger Ailes is gone, but the world he created is not.

In the wake of the Fox News Channel founder's death Thursday at 77, leaders in both parties said his TV network's influence in shaping American politics cannot be overstated.

The former Nixon aide played an essential role in shifting the political debate sharply to the right in less than a generation, employing polarizing and, some say, destructive tactics. Yet without him, friends and foes agree, the GOP's current control of Washington and statehouses nationwide may not have been possible.

"More than anyone, Roger knew how to frame the message and communicate it to the masses," said former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a former Fox News host and Ailes friend. "The GOP has long had a problem speaking to people beyond the boardroom and country club. Roger changed that. He was a genius."

One longtime friend, evangelical Christian leader Ralph Reed, affectionately called Ailes "master of the universe" on Thursday, while former President George H.W. Bush tweeted that he might not have been elected without the Fox chief.

Ailes is universally regarded as a brilliant political strategist. He advised at least four Republican presidents, President Donald Trump among them. Yet for all the praise, Ailes also leaves a legacy of deep divisions that critics say will plague the Republican Party — and American politics — for years to come.

Under his leadership, Fox regularly highlighted conspiracy theories throughout President Barack Obama's time in office.

In 2009, Fox anchors reported incorrectly that the Obama administration was pursuing concentration camps. In subsequent years, anchors and guests, including Trump, promoted the false notion that the nation's first black president was a Muslim born in Africa. Four in 10 Republicans polled by CNN in 2015 said Obama is a Muslim.

"Was he a capable propagandist? Yes. He was an artful liar," said Angelo Carusone, president of the liberal-backed media watchdog Media Matters for America. "Ailes' legacy is that you can actually convince half the country that President Obama was a secret Muslim who wasn't born here."

Longtime Obama adviser David Axelrod acknowledged Ailes' influence.

"For better or worse & the ignominious end 2 his reign at Fox News, the impact of Roger Ailes on American politics & media was indisputable," he tweeted.

Democrats had an 82-seat House majority when Fox News was launched in October 1996. Republicans now have a 45-seat majority, a swing of 127 seats. It's far worse for Democrats in statehouses across the country, where they have lost more than 900 seats since 2009. The GOP has total control of government in at least 25 states and partial control in 20 others.

The Republican success cannot be totally attributed to Ailes' network, of course, but there was broad agreement Thursday on both sides of the aisle that Ailes' conservative network was a major factor.

"The power of Fox News cannot be overstated in Republican politics," said GOP strategist Alex Conant, who advised two presidential campaigns. "I don't think there's ever been one source of media that has such a loyal political following as Fox News does."

Ailes changed the face of 24-hour news when he accepted a challenge from media titan Rupert Murdoch to build a network from scratch to compete with CNN and other TV outlets they deemed left-leaning. Within a few years, it became the audience leader in cable news.

"No one deserves more credit for the rightward movement of this country over the last 20 years or so than Roger Ailes," said Bruce Bartlett, a former aide to Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush who now considers himself an independent. "He made the Republican control of Congress possible."

Yet Bartlett, a Fox critic, warned that Ailes' network has become a "state news service for the Trump administration."

Evangelical leader Reed, a regular Fox guest over the years, offered a more optimistic view: "Whatever

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one thinks of Fox News, and there are certainly people who don't like it for whatever reason, it is undeniable that it changed the media environment and ensured the conservative viewpoint was consistently and reliably represented. I personally think that's a good thing."

Asian shares mostly lower on Trump, Brazil worries

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian stocks were mostly lower Friday as investor worries remained about the U.S. political turmoil over an investigation into possible Russian coordination with President Donald Trump's campaign.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 dipped 0.2 percent to 19,510.96 in morning trading. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged down nearly 0.5 percent to 5,711.10. South Korea's Kospi was little changed at 2,287.30. Hong Kong's Hang Seng was virtually unchanged at 25,131.74. The Shanghai Composite slipped nearly 0.1 percent to 3,087.38.

BRAZIL FACTOR: Markets are also being shaken by a deepening political crisis in Brazil, where President Michel Temer is facing calls for his resignation amid allegations of corruption. Stocks and the currency have plunged there.

U.S. FACTOR: U.S. shares rallied, partly cheered by a positive report jobs data, but it followed the worst drop in eight months. Fears are growing recently Trump may have trouble enacting tax cuts and other business-friendly policies.

WALL STREET: The Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 8.69 points, or 0.4 percent, to 2,365.72. The Dow Jones industrial average added 56.09 points, or 0.3 percent, to 20,663.02. The Nasdaq composite index gained 43.89 points, or 0.7 percent, to 6,055.13.

THE QUOTE: "Given the heightened level of uncertainty, I suspect traders will remain in a kind of Investor Purgatory where risk aversion dominates and fear mounts that the investigation could open up a whole new can of worms which will do little more than compound the markets current panic syndrome," said Stephen Innes, senior trader at OANDA.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude oil futures added 32 cents to \$49.67 a barrel. It rose 28 cents to \$49.35 a barrel in New York Thursday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, climbed 40 cents to \$52.91 a barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The euro slipped to \$1.1112 from \$1.1153 late Thursday in Asia. The dollar strengthened slightly to 111.20 yen from 111.17 yen.

AP Business Writer Alex Veiga contributed to this report.

Follow Yuri Kageyama on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

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Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, May 19, the 139th day of 2017. There are 226 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 19, 1927, the silent movie "Wings," a World War I drama starring Clara Bow, Charles "Buddy" Rogers and Richard Arlen, had its world premiere in San Antonio, Texas, where it had been filmed. ("Wings" would go on to win the first Academy Award for best picture.)

On this date:

In 1536, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of England's King Henry VIII, was beheaded after being convicted of adultery.

In 1780, a mysterious darkness enveloped much of New England and part of Canada in the early afternoon.

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In 1913, California Gov. Hiram Johnson signed the Webb-Hartley Law prohibiting "aliens ineligible to citizenship" from owning farm land, a measure targeting Asian immigrants, particularly Japanese.

In 1935, T.E. Lawrence, also known as "Lawrence of Arabia," died in Dorset, England, six days after being injured in a motorcycle crash.

In 1943, in his second wartime address to the U.S. Congress, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill pledged his country's full support in the fight against Japan.

In 1958, British actor Ronald Colman died in Santa Barbara, California, at age 67.

In 1962, actress Marilyn Monroe sang "Happy Birthday to You" to President John F. Kennedy during a Democratic fundraiser at New York's Madison Square Garden.

In 1967, the Soviet Union ratified a treaty banning nuclear and other weapons from outer space as well as celestial bodies such as the moon. (The treaty entered into force in Oct. 1967.)

In 1977, in what became known as the "Girl in the Box" case, 20-year-old Colleen Stan, hitchhiking her way to a party in northern California, was abducted by a couple she'd accepted a ride from and imprisoned as a sex slave for the next seven years.

In 1981, five British soldiers were killed by an Irish Republican Army landmine in County Armagh, Northern Ireland.

In 1992, in a case that drew much notoriety, Mary Jo Buttafuoco (buh-tuh-FYOO'-koh) of Massapequa, New York, was shot and seriously wounded by her husband Joey's teenage lover, Amy Fisher. Vice President Dan Quayle sparked controversy by publicly criticizing the CBS sitcom "Murphy Brown" for having its title character, played by Candice Bergen, decide to become a single mother.

In 1994, former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis died in New York at age 64.

Ten years ago: Group of Eight financial officials wrapped up two days of talks in Germany by calling for more aid, increased debt relief and responsible lending to Africa. Curlin nipped Kentucky Derby winner Street Sense to win the Preakness Stakes.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama and other G-8 leaders held economic talks at Camp David, where they declared that their governments needed to both spark growth and cut debt. Chen Guangcheng (chehn gwahng-chung), a blind Chinese legal activist, was hurriedly taken from a hospital and put on a plane for the United States, closing a nearly monthlong diplomatic tussle that had tested U.S.-China relations. I'll Have Another overtook Bodemeister down the stretch to win the Preakness, two weeks after claiming the Kentucky Derby. (A tendon injury forced I'll Have Another into retirement on the eve of the Belmont Stakes.)

One year ago: An EgyptAir jetliner en route from Paris to Cairo with 66 people aboard swerved wildly in flight before crashing into the Mediterranean Sea; the cause has yet to be officially determined, although a bomb is suspected. Veteran "60 Minutes" correspondent Morley Safer died in New York at age 84. Actor-comedian Alan Young, who played straight man to a talking horse in the 1960s sitcom "Mister Ed," died in Woodland Hills, California, at age 96.

Today's Birthdays: PBS newscaster Jim Lehrer is 83. TV personality David Hartman is 82. Actor James Fox is 78. Actress Nancy Kwan is 78. Actor Peter Mayhew is 73. Rock singer-composer Pete Townshend (The Who) is 72. Concert pianist David Helfgott is 70. Rock singer-musician Dusty Hill (ZZ Top) is 68. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL player Archie Manning is 68. Singer-actress Grace Jones is 65. Rock musician Phil Rudd (AC-DC) is 63. Actor Steven Ford is 61. Actress Toni Lewis is 57. Rock musician Iain Harvie (Del Amitri) is 55. Actress Polly Walker is 51. Actor Jason Gray-Stanford is 47. Gospel singer Israel Houghton is 46. Rock singer Jenny Berggren (Ace of Base) is 45. Race car driver Dario Franchitti is 44. TV personality Kim Zolciak Biermann (TV: "Real Housewives of Atlanta") is 39. Country/rock singer Shooter Jennings is 38. Actor Drew Fuller is 37. Actor-comedian Michael Che (chay) (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 34. Christian rock musician Tim McTague is 34. Rock musician James Richardson (MGMT) is 34. Actor Eric Lloyd is 31. Pop singer Sam Smith is 25. Actor Nolan Lyons is 16.

Thought for Today: "We are torn between nostalgia for the familiar and an urge for the foreign and strange. As often as not, we are homesick most for the places we have never known." — Carson McCullers, American author (1917-1967).