

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thurs., July 20, 2017

- 1- Recycling trailers
- 1- Olde Bank Floral Ad
- 2- Chicken Soup of the Soul image
- 3- More Emergency Haying and Grazing Land opened up
- 4- Drought Monitor
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- 9- National Weather Map
- 10- Daily Devotional
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### 21

**Senior Menu:** Taco salad, Mexican rice, seasonal fresh fruit, breadstick.

**Amateurs:** hosts Northville, 7 p.m.

State Jr. Teener Tournament in Baltic: Groton vs. Baltic at 8 p.m.

State Legion Tournament in Winner: Groton vs. Vermillion at 10 a.m.

### 22

**Legion:** State at Winner

### 23

**Legion:** State at Winner

**Summer Fest, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., City Park**

### 23

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

**Emmanuel Lutheran:** Worship at 9 a.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 a.m., Worship at 10 a.m.

## Official Notices

- Frederick Town (updated 7-18)**
- Brown County Book (Updated 7-16)**
- Groton City Book (updated 7-11)**
- Groton Area School Book**
- Other Official Notices Book**
- Claremont Town Official Notices Book**
- Frederick Area School Book**

**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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*Fresh flowers, silks, home decor*



**Olde Bank Floral**  
*N More*

Olde Bank @ Floral 

*& so much more*

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“A warm smile is  
the universal  
language of  
kindness.”

-William Arthur Ward

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

## USDA Opens More Land for Emergency Haying and Grazing

Action to Provide Help for Producers Dealing with Persistent Drought in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota

WASHINGTON, July 20, 2017 – Today, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is authorizing the use of additional Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands for emergency grazing and haying in and around portions of Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota affected by severe drought. USDA is adding the ability for farmers and ranchers in these areas to hay and graze CRP wetland and buffer practices.

“We are working to immediately address the dire straits facing drought-stricken farmers and ranchers,” said Perdue. “USDA is fully considering and authorizing any federal programs or related provisions we have available to meet the immediate needs of impacted producers.”

For CRP practices previously announced, including those authorized today, Secretary Perdue is allowing this emergency action during and after the primary nesting season, where local drought conditions warrant in parts of Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota that have reached D2, or “severe”, drought level or greater according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. This includes counties with any part of their border located within 150 miles of authorized counties within the three states, and may extend into Idaho, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and Wyoming. All emergency grazing must end Sept. 30, 2017 and emergency haying must end Aug. 31, 2017.

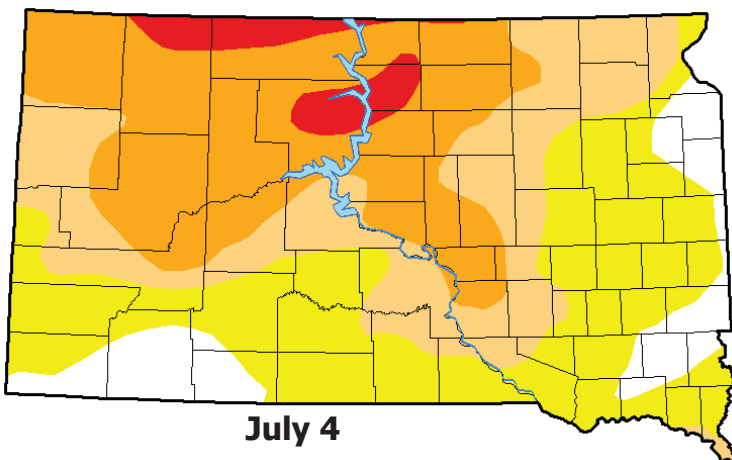
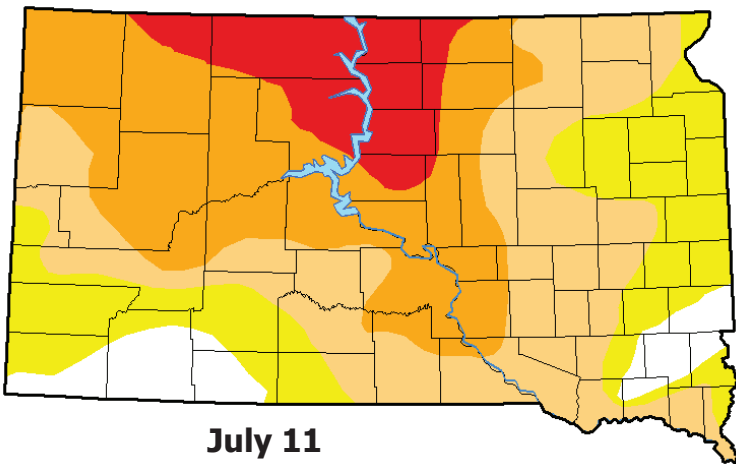
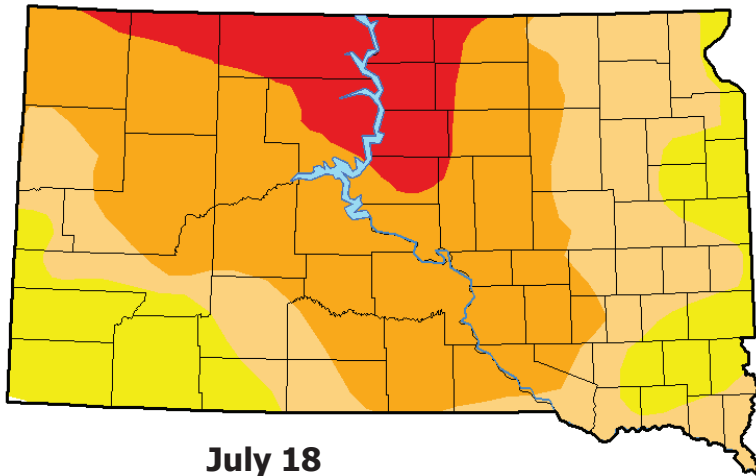
The Secretary said that epic dry conditions, as high as D4 in some areas, coupled with an intense heatwave have left pastures in poor or very poor condition resulting in the need for ranchers to, at best, supplement grain and hay and at worst, sell their herds.

Landowners interested in emergency haying or grazing of CRP acres should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) office and meet with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff to obtain a modified conservation plan to include emergency haying/grazing. Individual conservation plans will take into consideration wildlife needs. CRP participants are reminded that a certain percentage of fields must be left unhayed or ungrazed.

Additional information about the counties approved for emergency haying and grazing and the eligible CRP practices in this area is available at [www.fsa.usda.gov/emergency-hayandgraze](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/emergency-hayandgraze).

For more information on CRP emergency grazing and haying, or other disaster assistance programs and loans, contact your local USDA Service Center, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

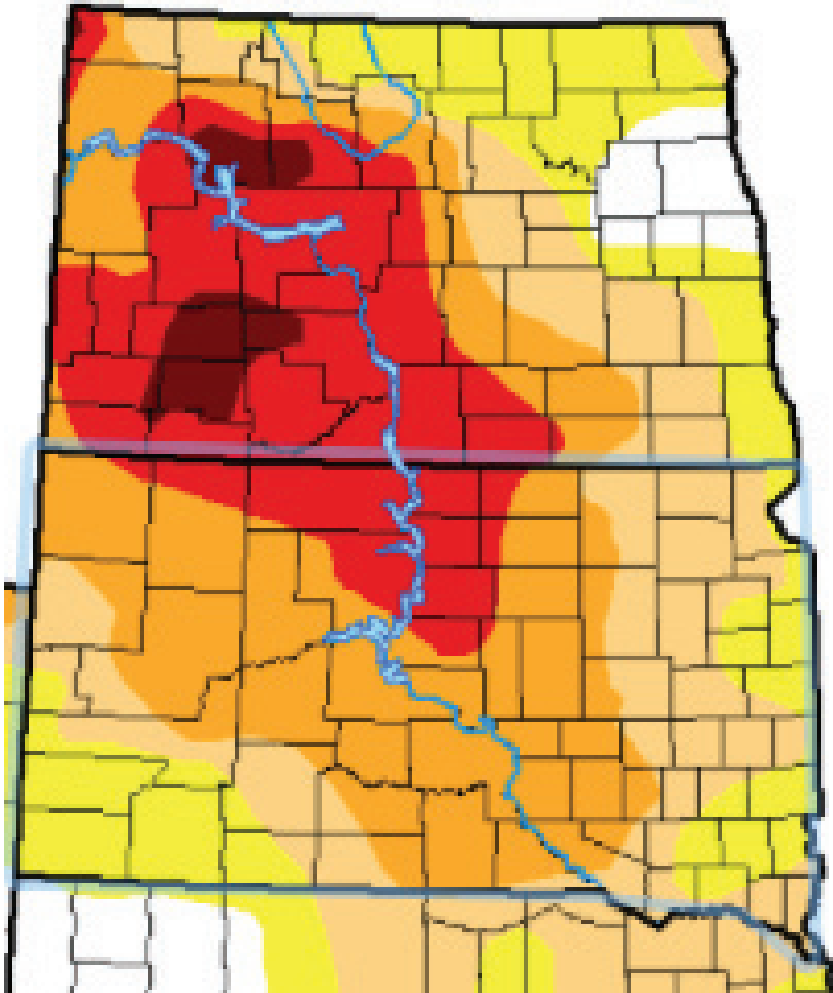
## Drought Monitor



Locally heavy rains fell in southern parts of the High Plains, with over 3 inches reported at several stations in southeast Colorado and southern Nebraska. A few stations in the Dakotas and Kansas received an inch or more of rain this week, but the showers and thunderstorms were spotty and amounts varied significantly. Most stations in the region were drier than normal this week with many receiving a tenth of an inch of rain, if any. With daily temperatures exceeding 90 degrees F, the 7-day average maximum temperature was above 90 in a band from Montana to Kansas. The excessive heat increased evapotranspiration, as reflected in the extreme ESI and EDDI values, and further dried soils which were already parched. According to July 17 USDA reports, topsoil and subsoil moisture was short to very short across 88%/80% (topsoil/subsoil) of Montana, 85%/79% of South Dakota, 65%/58% of North Dakota, 65%/57% of Nebraska, and 62%/58% of Wyoming. The heat and dryness have ravaged crops, with 61% of the spring wheat crop in poor to very poor condition in Montana and 40% in North Dakota. In South Dakota, 74% of the spring wheat was in poor to very poor condition, 38% of the corn crop, 33% of soybeans, and 45% of sorghum. The pasture and rangeland statistics (in poor to very poor condition) were 74% for North Dakota, 68% for South Dakota, 58% for Montana, and 26% for Nebraska. As noted by the North Dakota State Climatologist, the spotty rains might have been enough to green-up the vegetation, but not enough to increase the vegetative volume. Reports from the field include many reports of extensive drop damage, livestock water holes drying up, and cattle losing weight due to poor or nonexistent grazing land. The South Dakota State Climatologist reported that corn is in tasseling stage now; under drought stress, this can lead to an 8% yield loss per day, which is the highest rate of yield loss of any crop stage. The agricultural impacts were compounded by low streamflows. According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Ft. Peck and Ft. Belknap Tribes in Montana declared disaster emergencies in June that remain in effect; the Rocky Boy's reservation, south of Havre, is experiencing drastic water shortages; and several Tribes in the eastern part of Montana have enacted burn bans.

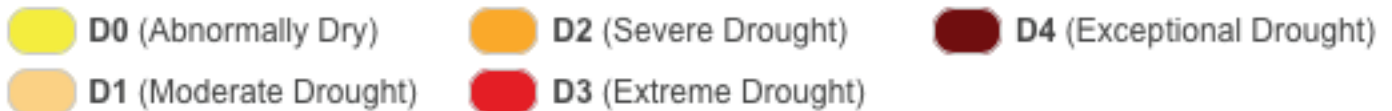
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With many indicators, such as SPI, EDDI, ESI, and soil moisture, converging to exceptionally dry conditions, spots of D4 were added to the USDM depiction in Montana and North Dakota. D0-D3 were expanded in the Dakotas with collateral expansion in adjacent states (Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota). D0-D1 were expanded in Nebraska and Kansas, but D0-D1 were trimmed in other parts of Nebraska and Kansas where an inch to several inches of rain fell.

## Intensity:



*The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying [text summary](#) for forecast statements.*

## Author(s):

Richard Heim, NOAA/NCEI

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## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

### School Board Meeting

July 24, 2017 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

#### AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

#### POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

#### OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. School Board Committee Reports:
  - a. **Building, Grounds, & Transportation:** Clint Fjelstad, Merle Harder, Marty Weismantel
  - b. **Personnel, Policy, & Curriculum:** Deb Gengerke, Grant Rix
  - c. **Negotiations:** Kelly Kjelden, Steve Smith
3. Approve July 2017 Transportation Report.
4. Update on Elementary project progress.
5. Consider Elementary project change orders.
  - a. CCO#001: PRM013 Break Metal Returns at Windows
  - b. CCO#002: PRE02 Type A Light Fixture Revisions
  - c. CCO#002: Add Gravel & Fabric that was eliminated/credited in CCO#001
6. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

#### NEW BUSINESS:

1. Authorize Eide Bailly to conduct school district FY2017 Audit.
2. Approve hiring Tara Arntsen as Math Teacher for 2017-2018 school year.
3. Approve hiring Jenna Strom, Assistant Volleyball Coach for 2017-2018 school year.
4. Approve reassignment of Joni Groeblichhoff to Kindergarten paraprofessional for 2017-2018 school year.
5. Approve Open Enrollment #18-06 (Grade 11) from Ipswich School District.
6. Approve request from Webster Area School District to pick up students in Bristol at designated street stops for the 2017-2018 school year pursuant to SDCL 13-29-4.

#### ADJOURN

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## Today in Weather History

July 21, 1940: From near Miller, an estimated F2 tornado moved southeast, destroying a barn, garage, and two windmills.

July 21, 2000: 3.25-inch hail was reported near Okreek in northeastern Todd County.

1911 - The temperature at Painter, WY, dipped to 10 degrees to equal the record low for July for the continental U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1934 - The temperature reached 109 degrees at Cincinnati, OH, to cap their hottest summer of record. The state record for Ohio was established that day with a reading of 113 degrees near the town of Galipolis. (David Ludlum)

1975 - Six inches of rain fell across Mercer County, NJ, in just ten hours causing the worst flooding in twenty years. Assumpink Creek crested eleven feet above flood stage at Hamilton and Trenton, the highest level of record. Traffic was brought to a standstill, and railway service between New York City and Washington D.C. was cut off for two days. Flooding left 1000 persons homeless, and caused an estimated 25 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)


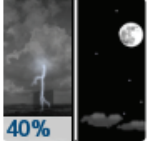





1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Utah to North Dakota, spawning a dozen tornadoes in North Dakota. Thunderstorms in North Dakota also produced baseball size hail at Clifford which caused four million dollars damage, and high winds which toppled a couple of eighty foot towers cutting off power to the town of Blanchard. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - While cool air invaded the central U.S., unseasonably hot weather continued over the western states. The temperature at Spring Valley, NV, soared from a morning low of 35 degrees to an afternoon high of 95 degrees. Fallon, NV, reported an all-time record high of 108 degrees, and Death Valley, CA, reported their sixth straight day of 120 degree heat. (The Weather Channel) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Afternoon thunderstorms over Florida produced wind gusts to 92 mph at Jacksonville, damaging thirteen light planes at Herlong Field. Five cities in Texas reported record low temperatures for the date. Corpus Christi, TX, equalled their record low for the date with a reading of 71 degrees, and then tied their record high for the date that afternoon with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
30%	40%					
Severe Thunderstorms	Severe Thunderstorms then Mostly Clear	Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 92 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 90 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 81 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 85 °F

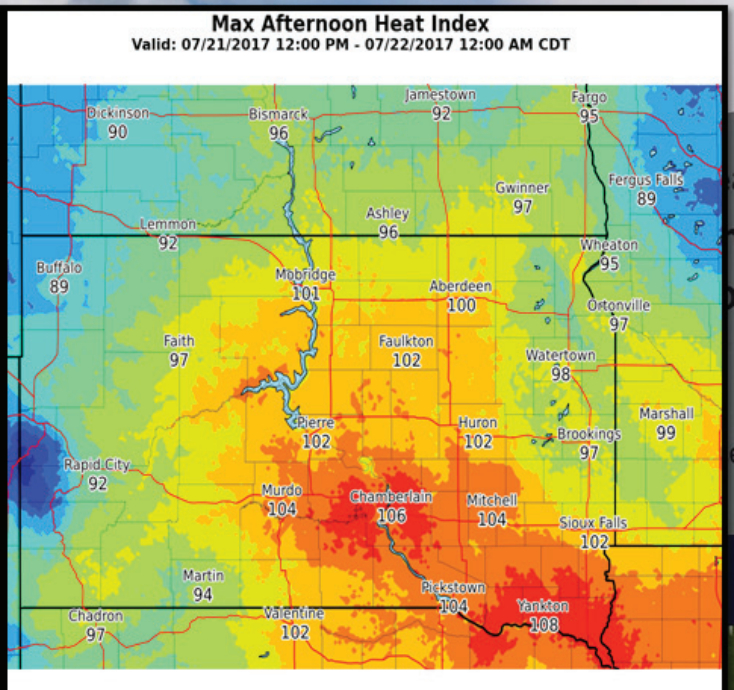
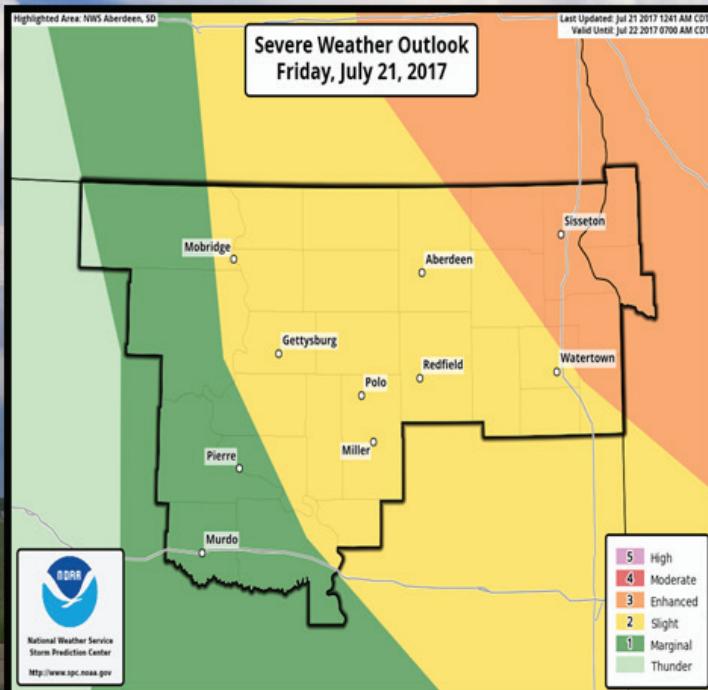
Severe Weather Possible This Afternoon & Evening



Hot and Humid Today: Heat Indices 100-105F



Humid



National Weather Service, Aberdeen SD

Published on: 07/21/2017 at 3:51AM

A slow moving cold front could bring severe storms to the region this afternoon and evening. Hail and strong wind are the main threats. Also, the combination of heat and humidity will create heat indices of 100 to 105F this afternoon and early evening. Try to stay cool and hydrated today!



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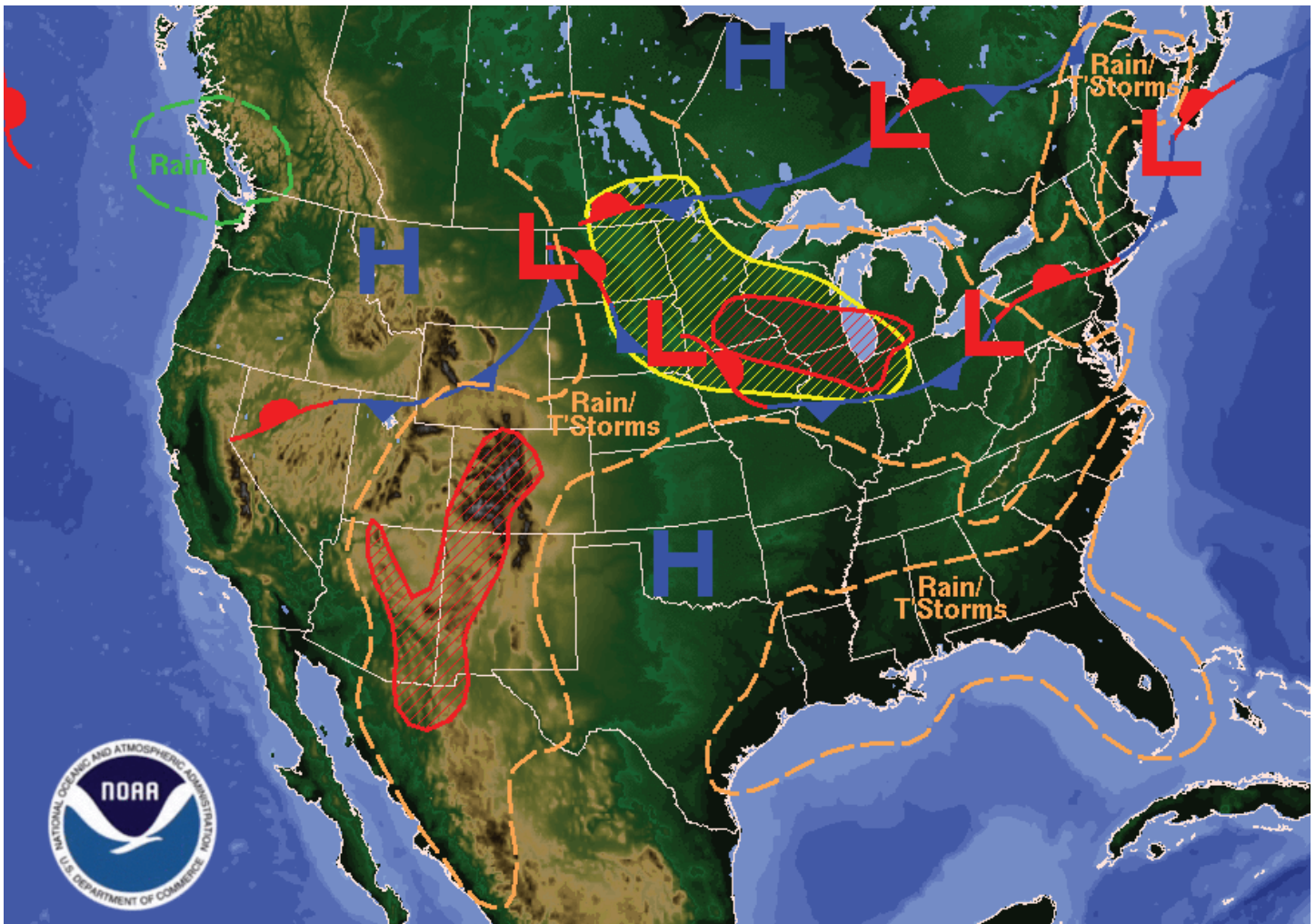
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## Yesterday's Weather

**High Outside Temp: 89.0 F at 5:09 PM**  
**Heat Index:**  
**Low Outside Temp: 60.0 F at 5:21 AM**  
**High Gust: 19.0 Mph at 4:34 PM**  
**Precip: 0.03**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 106° in 1899**  
**Record Low: 41° in 1902**  
**Average High: 84°F**  
**Average Low: 60°F**  
**Average Precip in July: 2.16**  
**Precip to date in July: 1.13**  
**Average Precip to date: 13.00**  
**Precip Year to Date: 6.90**  
**Sunset Tonight: 9:13 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:06 a.m.**



### Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Fri, Jul 21, 2017, issued 4:52 AM EDT  
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center  
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain  
Rain and T'Storms  
Rain and Snow  
Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)  
Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)  
Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)  
Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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## SEARCHING FOR GOD

"The heavens proclaim the glory of God!" Do they really? When the writer looks into the heavens does he really believe that He can actually see God? Does he see an outline of God in a constellation? Are there stars shining somewhere that actually point to God's eternal residence?

No. This psalm, more than any other, reflects the beauty, splendor, power and handiwork of God. He is speaking of the revelation of God in the world of nature. His belief in God as Creator is not an argument against the theory of evolution. For him, Creation reveals the Lord's royal majesty, sovereignty, power and design. He simply declares God's existence and presence and wants to praise Him in worship and wonder.

We see God's glory each morning when we are awakened by a majestic sunrise that erupts from the darkness of the night. We see His handiwork each time we look into the face of a rose, watch a bird in flight or see the crashing of waves. All of creation clearly and convincingly announces the greatness and glory of God.

This Psalm reveals a God who communicates to us through the majesty of His creation. The fact that He speaks openly to us through the work of His hands is a gracious expression of His love and His desire for us to know and worship Him. Although sin has attempted to hide His glory it is still with us and cannot be denied!

Prayer: How great You are, O Lord, our Creator and Redeemer, our source of hope and eternal life. We thank You for our salvation and making Yourself known to us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

## News from the Associated Press

### **Rural banker survey index drops dramatically in July**

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Drought conditions in some areas and weak grain prices are among factors weighing heavily on the rural economy in parts of 10 Plains and Western states.

The overall Rural Mainstreet Index for the region plummeted to 40.7 in July from June's index of 50. The index ranges between 0 and 100, with any number under 50 indicating a shrinking economy.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss says July's was the largest one-month decline recorded in the index since November 2008, which was in the middle of the Great Recession.

The confidence index, which reflects bankers' expectations for the economy six months out, slumped to 38.4 this month from 48.9 in June.

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

### **South Dakota hospital ends court-ordered mental health exams**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's state-run psychiatric hospital is no longer performing court-ordered mental health screenings for criminal defendants.

Department of Social Services spokeswoman Tia Kafka told the Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2ucNIZY>) the Human Services Center discontinued their evaluations July 1 because legislation transferred funding for them to counties.

The legislation was in response to a 2015 investigation by the newspaper that found the state routinely jailed defendants for months without trial because of scheduling delays for the evaluations, which are required to determine if defendants are mentally fit to stand trial.

The center, located in Yankton, had become a bottleneck in recent years as the number of mental health exams requested by judges exceeded the number the hospital was willing to perform.

The Social Services Department and the Association of County Commissioners are creating a fund to help counties hire private doctors to perform the evaluations. Court administrators were working with the department to identify mental health professionals who are qualified to give the evaluations.

"Here in the Second Circuit, the list provided by Social Services so far only gives us two providers in this area," said Karl Thoennes, who manages the court system in Minnehaha and Lincoln counties. "So this circuit has assembled its own list that we will forward the state court administrator and DSS at some point."

Minnehaha County Commissioner Cindy Heiberger attended the first meeting of a watchdog committee assigned to make sure the state's mental health reforms are working. She said she doesn't think a lot will change because judges still will order competency evaluations for defendants, but the Human Services Center won't be the one administering them.

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

### **Yankton Sioux official: Marijuana meeting postponed**

WAGNER, S.D. (AP) — A Yankton Sioux Tribe official says a general council meeting to discuss legalizing marijuana for recreational and other uses has been postponed.

Councilwoman Roseanne Wade says she isn't aware of a new date for the tribal-members only meeting that had been scheduled for Friday at the Fort Randall Casino Bingo Hall. Wade referred a request for additional details to tribal Chairman Robert Flying Hawk, who hasn't answered repeated telephone calls from The Associated Press.

A notice for the meeting said the agenda would include all legal aspects of the business of "legal marijuana/hemp manufacturing, distribution and usage laws..."

The Flandreau Santee Sioux sought in 2015 to develop a commercial operation in recreational marijuana, but ultimately destroyed their crop amid fear of a federal raid.

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## **Aberdeen man pleads guilty to attempted arson, drug charge**

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — An Aberdeen man who fled the area for 10 months has pleaded guilty to attempted arson and cocaine possession.

The American News (<http://bit.ly/2uNeafD>) reports that in exchange for 51-year-old Randell English's guilty pleas, other charges were dismissed. Both charges stem from July 2016.

Brown County State's Attorney Chris White says English poured gas on and around someone and threatened to burn down a house.

Defense attorney Brandon Taliaferro granted that his client threatened to burn the house down. But English says he didn't intentionally dump gas on anyone, saying he only kicked a gas can through an apartment window.

English says that police found cocaine residue on a spoon in his bag in an unrelated drug case.

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

## **State trade group can weigh in on Dakota Access pipeline**

**By BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press**

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A judge deciding whether to temporarily shut down the disputed Dakota Access oil pipeline said Thursday that he will allow North Dakota's main energy trade group to weigh in.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg might also allow some national energy and manufacturing groups to have a say, though he didn't immediately rule. The groups, including the North Dakota Petroleum Council, maintain their input is important because none of the parties in a lawsuit over the \$3.8 billion pipeline to move North Dakota oil to Illinois speaks for the general oil industry.

The pipeline has been operating nearly two months, but Boasberg in mid-June ordered the Army Corps of Engineers to further review its impact on the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, which has sued along with three other tribes over fears of environmental harm. Boasberg is mulling whether to shut down the pipeline while the work is completed.

"Ceasing (pipeline) operations would seriously harm businesses throughout the energy industry in the United States," David Coburn, an attorney representing several of the trade groups, said in court documents.

Texas-based pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners says it would cost at least \$20 million and as much as \$234 million to shut down the line. It says a shutdown would cost the company \$90 million in revenue each month and would impact 16 other pipelines that support the Dakota Access system.

Trade group attorneys maintain a shutdown would have even broader impacts by cutting oil production, increasing less-safe rail shipping, increasing shipping expenses for companies, cutting refinery supplies,

harming state tax revenue and impacting royalty owners. The North Dakota Petroleum Council, which represents more than 500 companies including ETP, said a shutdown "would pull the rug out from under the North Dakota oil industry," which is shipping half of its daily production through the pipeline.

The trade groups also maintain Boasberg's decision could have consequences far beyond Dakota Access. "Any decision by this court to vacate the Corps' approvals and order (the pipeline) to cease operations could result in similar rulings in other pipeline cases," Coburn wrote.

The national groups seeking a say are the American Petroleum Institute, American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, Association of Oil Pipe Lines, national Chamber of Commerce and National Association of Manufacturers.

Standing Rock attorney Jan Hasselman, who has called for shutting down the pipeline and bringing in independent experts to determine harm to the tribe, said Thursday that the tribe won't object to the trade groups' request.

"I expect people will be weighing in on our side, too," he said.

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

## High court vacates Annette Bosworth's perjury convictions

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court this week reversed half of former U.S. Senate candidate Annette Bosworth's convictions stemming from her unsuccessful 2014 Republican primary race.

The 45-year-old Sioux Falls physician said Thursday that she's grateful, but said that she needs to speak with her attorney. Bosworth appealed after a jury in 2015 found her guilty of six felony counts each of perjury and filing false documents that she submitted to appear on the ballot.

The high court in a Wednesday ruling vacated the perjury convictions, but upheld her convictions for filing false candidate nominating petitions. Arguments in the case were held in November 2016.

"I'm so grateful that half of them are gone," Bosworth said. "That's a blessing."

Bosworth said during the trial that she never intended to mislead anyone when she attested to signatures on campaign documents that she didn't actually witness. She was out of the country on a medical mission trip at the time.

Bosworth argued at trial that the prosecution was politically motivated, but her defense attorneys largely relied on the argument that Bosworth knew little about the political process and received bad advice from a consultant, who denied that.

She avoided serving prison time when a judge handed down a suspended sentence provided she completed probation and 500 hours of community service. Bosworth said both are done.

The Supreme Court ruling says that the state failed to prove an element of the offense of perjury. But in upholding the other convictions, it says that a petition is false under state law when it contains a circulator's verification signed by a different person than the circulator.

Attorney General Marty Jackley in a statement highlighted that the court affirmed Bosworth's convictions for filing false petitions, saying that the decision protects the integrity of South Dakota's elections and institutions.

"The decision affirms the hard work and deliberations of our citizen jurors in this case," Jackley said.

## Newell hard hit by storms packing 100 mph winds

NEWELL, S.D. (AP) — Property owners in Butte County are tallying damage from this week's powerful storm that pummeled homes, schools and other buildings with near hurricane-strength winds, torrential rain and baseball-sized hail.

Workers boarded up dozens of shattered windows in the Newell school complex. Carpets in the elementary-middle school addition were soaked with ankle-deep water where rain and hail blew through the open windows.

The Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2tKqDvG>) reports winds of up to 100 mph were reported in Butte

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County. The storm ruined fields of corn that was just ready to be picked near Newell and Vale, as well as soybeans and sorghum crops. Reports of total losses began to come in Wednesday.

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

## **Drought conditions continue to worsen in South Dakota**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Drought continues to worsen in South Dakota.

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor map shows 82 percent of the state in some stage of drought, up from 72 percent last week.

About 11 percent of the state is in extreme drought, stable from last week. But about 44 percent is now listed in severe drought, up from 31 percent.

All of South Dakota is in some stage of drought or abnormally dry. The worst areas are the central and northwest parts of the state.

Farmers and ranchers in several counties are eligible for aid due to disaster declarations in the Dakotas by the federal government.

## **Aberdeen apartment fire prompts evacuation of 7 residents**

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Fire in a three-unit apartment building in Aberdeen prompted the evacuation of seven residents.

The American News reports (<http://bit.ly/2ttLiJn>) that the blaze broke out about 10:30 p.m. Wednesday. Fire and Rescue Battalion Commander Joel Weig says a bathroom ceiling fan overheated, and flames spread to nearby insulation and attic trusses.

No injuries were reported. The evacuated residents were put up at a hotel overnight. Weig says the apartment where the fire occurred needs repairs, but the residents of the other two units will be able to return.

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

## **Track problem caused freight train derailment near Kimball**

KIMBALL, S.D. (AP) — A freight train derailment in Brule County is being blamed on a problem with the tracks.

Dakota Southern Railway spokesman Mark Cutright tells The Daily Republic (<http://bit.ly/2uLMAJt>) that the wreck on Saturday about 6 miles east of Kimball was caused by a kink or buckle in the tracks. He says it's not unusual.

Fourteen cars on the grain train went off the tracks. No one was hurt. Cleanup is continuing.

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

## **Eagle Butte man sentenced to 7 ½ years for gun assault**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — An Eagle Butte man has been sentenced to 7 ½ years in prison for assaulting another man with a gun.

Authorities say 48-year-old Kirk Johnson in January became upset with a man he believed was sleeping with his wife.

Johnson went to the man's house, threatened him and his family, pointed a gun at the man's face, fired about half a dozen shots into the ground at the man's feet and then pistol-whipped him.

U.S. Attorney Randolph Seiler says Johnson in April pleaded guilty to assault with a dangerous weapon. He'll be on supervised release for three years following his prison term.

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## Authorities ID South Dakota teen who died in Nebraska crash

BRUNSWICK, Neb. (AP) — Authorities have released the name of a South Dakota teenager who died after a car accident in northeast Nebraska.

He's been identified as 16-year-old Jordan Rossiter, who lived in Yankton.

The accident was reported around 6 a.m. Monday, about 3 miles (5 kilometers) southwest of Brunswick. The Antelope County Sheriff's Office says the car was northbound on Nebraska Highway 14 when it ran off the roadway into the west ditch and rolled before hitting a tree.

The Sheriff's Office says Rossiter died later at Faith Regional Health Services in Norfolk.

## AP sources: US to ban Americans from traveling to NKorea

By MATTHEW LEE, AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials say the Trump administration will ban American citizens from traveling to North Korea following the death of university student Otto Warmbier, who passed away after falling into a coma into a North Korean prison.

The officials said Friday that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had determined to implement a "geographical travel restriction" for North Korea, which would make the use of U.S. passports to enter the country illegal. They said the restriction would go into effect 30 days after a notice is published in the Federal Register, but it was not immediately clear when that would be. There was no announcement in Friday's editions of the government publication.

The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss the decision before it is announced and spoke on condition of anonymity.

## 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. WHITE HOUSE INVESTIGATING THE INVESTIGATORS

Pushing back against a probe that refuses to go away, Trump's legal team is evaluating potential conflicts of interest among members of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigative team.

### 2. PAROLE BOARD SIDES WITH OJ SIMPSON

Barring any last-minute snafus, the ex-NFL great will walk out of prison a free man in about three months.

### 3. NEW REALITY SETTLING OVER CAPITOL HILL

The Republican effort to repeal and replace "Obamacare, which has consumed the first six months of the Trump administration, may never yield results.

### 4. 'THERE WAS BANGING. THERE WAS SHAKING'

A powerful earthquake strikes the Greek island of Kos, killing at least two people and injuring scores more.

### 5. WHICH DIVIDED CITY IS ON BRINK OF MORE VIOLENCE

Israel is banning Muslim men under age 50 from a contested Jerusalem shrine ahead of expected Palestinian protests over the installation of metal detectors at the holy site.

### 6. COPS TOPPLE ONLINE DRUG MARKETS

A global police operation takes down two illicit online drug bazaars — one with fanfare, the other quietly — in an innovative plan designed to sow uncertainty among buyers and sellers.

### 7. WHAT'S PUZZLING ASIA WATCHERS

North Korea's stony silence to South Korea's offer for rare talks raises a host of questions.

### 8. AT ZION, TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

The sweeping red-rock vistas of Utah's Zion National Park are increasingly filled with a bumper crop of visitors, and now managers are weighing an unusual step: Requiring tourists to make reservations.

### 9. LINKIN PARK FRONTMAN AN APPARENT SUICIDE

The death of singer Chester Bennington mirrors that of fellow rocker and close friend Chris Cornell, who

killed himself in May.

## 10. WHO'S QUITTING TOP FOOTBALL JOB

Hugh Freeze's departure as head coach at Mississippi comes after university officials found a "pattern of personal misconduct" that started with the school's investigation into a call to an escort service.

## Earthquake kills 2 on Greek island, sends tourists panicking

By **MICHAEL PROBST** and **DEREK GATOPOULOS** and **AYSE WIETING**, Associated Press

KOS, Greece (AP) — A powerful earthquake sent a building crashing down on tourists at a bar on the Greek holiday island of Kos early Friday, killing two and striking panic that reached the shores of nearby Turkey. Some 200 people were injured in the tumult.

Rescue authorities said that two men — a Turk and a Swede — died in the collapse at the White Corner Club when the 6.5-magnitude quake struck at about 1:30 a.m., rattling Greek islands and the Turkish Aegean coast in a region where seismic activity is common. The dead vacationers were not named.

Turkey's Foreign Ministry confirmed a Turkish citizen was killed in Kos and said a second national in serious condition was being evacuated to Athens for treatment. The country has also sent a vessel to the island to bring some 200 Turkish tourists home.

Hundreds of revelers were in or near the popular White Corner Club in the old town of Kos when the building partially collapsed.

Greek officials said at least five other people were seriously injured on Kos as tourists and local residents scrambled out of buildings, some even leaping from balconies. Five of the injured were being transported by helicopter to a hospital on the island of Crete.

"There was banging. There was shaking. The light was swinging, banging on the ceiling, crockery falling out of the cupboards, and pans were making noise," Christopher Hackland, a Scottish diving instructor, told the Associated Press.

"There was a lot of screaming and crying and hysterics coming from the hotel. It felt like being at a theme park with one of the illusions, an optical illusion where you feel like you're upside down."

Tens of thousands of tourists spent the night outdoors on Kos, many sleeping on sunbeds along beaches as a quake-related sea swell subsided. The quake damaged churches, an old mosque, and the port's 14th century castle, along with old buildings in the town.

In nearby Turkey, the quake caused cracks on walls of some buildings in the resort of Bodrum, flooded the lower floors of sea-front hotels and restaurants and sent moored boats crashing toward the shore.

Boat captain Metin Kestaneci, 40, told the private Dogan news agency that he was asleep on his vessel when the quake hit.

"There was first a noise and then a roar. Before I could ask 'what's happening?' my boat was dragged toward the shore. We found ourselves on the shore," Kestaneci said. "I've never experienced such a thing."

Turkish authorities said some 70 people were treated in hospitals in the resort of Bodrum for minor injuries, mostly sustained during panicked flight from their homes. But damage was light and they expect life will soon return to normal, encouraging tourists to continue their holidays.

Istanbul-based Kandilli earthquake research center said the quake caused a small 'tsunami' with waters sweeping between 10 and 100 meters (yards) in to the coast, recording more than 160 aftershocks.

Several Greek government ministers, as well as rescuers with sniffer dogs and structural engineers traveled to Kos overnight to coordinate the rescue effort. The British Foreign Office warned travelers of the possibility of aftershocks, urging them to follow the advice of the local authorities.

Authorities said there were no reported injuries of refugees and migrants at camps on the island.

A seafront road and parts of the island's main town were flooded for several hours, and the rising seawater even pushed a boat onto the main road and caused several cars to slam into each other. Ferry services were canceled until further inspection, with passengers rerouted to nearby islands.

Greek officials said the quake was 6.5-magnitude and the numerous aftershocks were weaker but still could put at risk the buildings that were already damaged. The epicenter was 6 miles (10 kilometers)



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south of Bodrum, Turkey, and 10 miles (16 kilometers) east-northeast of Kos with a depth of 6 miles (10 kilometers).

"The damage on the island (of Kos) is not widespread. The airport is working, and the road network and infrastructure are in good shape," Greek government spokesman Dimitris Tzanakopoulos said.

"The damage was at the bar and the old part of the town and we had the very unfortunate deaths of the two people."

The collapsed building dated to the 1930s, according to Kos Mayor Giorgos Kyritsis. "There are not many old buildings left on Kos. Nearly all the structures on the island have been built under the new codes to withstand earthquakes," the mayor said.

Rescuers were checking for trapped people inside houses across Kos at dozens of villages and other sites, but said the damage was confined to the island's main town.

Gatopoulos reported from Athens, Greece; Wieting reported from Bitez, Turkey. Associated Press journalists Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Elena Becatoros in Saranda, Albania; and Ron DePasquale and Stephanie Siek in New York contributed.

## AP Explains: What's behind N. Korean silence to talks offer

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM** and **KIM TONG-HYUNG**, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Is North Korea agonizing? Just not interested? Something else?

At the start of the week, South Korea offered to hold rare face-to-face talks with North Korea at their shared border village in the Demilitarized Zone. One set of talks was proposed for Friday to discuss easing military confrontations and another on Aug. 1 to discuss restarting reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War. The day for the first talks came without a response from the North.

A look at what North Korea's silence may mean for new South Korean President Moon Jae-in's outreach to the North and future ties between the rival countries.

### WHY NO RESPONSE

Exactly how an overture such as Moon's would be reviewed is a mystery, as there is limited knowledge about the North's decision-making under ruler Kim Jong Un. Outside experts see Kim as the ultimate decision-maker, with policy advice related to South Korea mainly coming from two bodies: a ruling Workers' Party organ called the United Front Department and the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea. Pyongyang may be debating whether to accede to both sets of talks or just one; or what kinds of demands it would make for talks to be held. For instance, the North might have been deliberating whether it'll use the military talks to repeat its call for a suspension of regular South Korea-U.S. military drills, a demand that Seoul will surely reject again, according to analysts.

### SKEPTICISM REMAINS HIGH

Analyst Park Hyung-joong at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification is skeptical about the prospects of talks. "It's South Korea that is desperate for talks right now, not the North. Pyongyang's goal is to maximize its nuclear ability so that it could alter political and security dynamics in the region — it wants to create more tension, while the South wants to reduce it," Park said. Some experts predicted earlier that North Korea would accept at least Friday's talks as it had previously stressed the need to ease animosities along the rivals' border. The chances for the second talks were considered slimmer, as the North has repeatedly said it won't resume family reunions unless South Korea repatriates some high-profile North Korean defectors now living in the South. "It's difficult for North Korea to either reject or accept the talks right away as there were some words it has spoken before. I think they have a lot in their minds," said Lim Eul Chul, a North Korea expert at South Korea's Kyungnam University.

### NO INTER-KOREAN HOTLINES

Just to communicate about talks is challenging. South Korea's Vice Defense Minister Suh Choo Suk used

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a televised news conference to propose the military talks, as major cross-border communication hotlines are dormant following the North's fourth nuclear test in January 2016. There is little chance North Korean officials would miss it, because they closely follow and have commented on every major previous move by Seoul regarding Pyongyang. Many analysts say it's highly unlikely that Moon's government would use any secret channel to try to realize talks. That could trigger a backlash from conservatives who argue it's time to pressure the North, rather than seek dialogue. In the past, the two Koreas sometimes resorted to behind-the-scene contacts to set up more high-profile talks. South Korean defense officials have refused to comment on whether they've made any clandestine attempts to reach out to the North this time.

## FATE OF TALKS

Despite the silence, many experts say North Korea will eventually come to the military talks, because it can use them as a venue to call for a suspension of propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts that both Koreas began at the border after the North's fourth nuclear test. It's widely believed the South Korean broadcast stings more in the strictly controlled North. Professor Koh Yu-hwan at Seoul's Dongguk University said North Korea is unlikely to commit to a meeting before August, when South Korean and U.S. militaries have annual drills. "It seems North Korea will likely prolong its wait-and-see approach and observe how things shape up after the August drills," Koh said. If held, the talks would likely start with rounds of working-level meetings between colonel-level officers. And if they continue, general-grade officers would later meet to try to work out steps to reduce tensions. But they won't likely produce any major breakthrough if North Korea sticks to its demand for the end of South Korea-U.S. drills or conducts major weapons tests. The outlook for family reunion talks is more pessimistic unless North Korea stops demanding the return of a dozen women who worked for a North Korean-run restaurant in China. The North says the women were kidnapped by Seoul agents. But the North might think the talks could help pave the way for the restart of a now-stalled lucrative joint tourism project at its scenic Diamond Mountain, where most past family reunions took place, according to professor Chin Hee-gwan at South Korea's Inje University.

## PROSPECT FOR OVERALL TIES

The prospects for Moon's efforts to improve ties with North Korea don't immediately appear bright. The North has higher expectations for what it can get from Moon, the first liberal leader in South Korea in about 10 years, and an elevated assessment of its own status as a nuclear weapons state. Moon will also be cautious about reaching out, because there are worries that his overture might weaken international pressure on the North. The North's state media on Thursday described Moon's overall North Korea policy as "nonsense," noting that South Korea also supports U.S.-led efforts to strengthen sanctions against the North. "The current government in the South is taking an outdated confrontational stance by dancing to the beat of the United States and conservative thugs," the North's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper said in an editorial.

## Israel limits Muslim access to Jerusalem site amid tensions

By **MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH** and **IAN DEITCH**, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel police severely restricted Muslim access to a contested shrine in Jerusalem's Old City on Friday to prevent protests over the installation of metal detectors at the holy site.

Police set up a series of checkpoints, turning away worshippers heading to Jerusalem from Israel and the West Bank. About 3,000 officers were deployed around the Old City, barring entry to Muslim men under the age of 50, except for area residents.

The dispute over the metal detectors has led to rising tensions between Israel and the Muslim world, with even friendly Arab nations, such as Jordan, appealing to Israel to remove the devices.

With the heavy security measures Friday, Israel was effectively doubling down on its earlier decision. The detectors were installed earlier this week, after a deadly Palestinian attack at the shrine left two Israeli policemen dead.

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Muslim religious leaders in the Palestinian territories have alleged the metal detectors are part of an Israeli attempt to expand its control over the Muslim-administered site, a claim Israel denies.

The Muslim clerics have vowed not to relent on what has emerged as a Palestinian consensus issue, and the dispute could escalate. The volatile Jerusalem shrine, revered by Muslims and Jews, sits at the center of rival Israeli and Palestinian national narratives and has triggered major confrontations in the past.

On Friday, about 800 Palestinians gathered for noon prayers, the highlight of the Muslim religious week, at the Old City's Lion's Gate, one of the flashpoints of violence. In recent days, thousands have prayed in the streets near Lion's Gate in the evenings, with smaller numbers then clashing with police.

On Friday, several dozen police officers stood near five metal detectors lined up across the gate, close the shrine, known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as the Temple Mount. The compound houses the Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques.

Worshippers assembled outside the gate, rather than pass through the police checkpoint.

Jerusalem resident Hashem Abu Diab, 60, led the crowd in chants of "Allahu Akbar," or "God is Great."

Abu Diab said the dispute has united Jerusalem's Palestinians who see the 37-acre (15-hectare) compound as their last sanctuary from Israel's 50-year occupation of the eastern part of the city.

"The Al Aqsa Mosque is the last place we have in this country," he said. "If Al Aqsa goes, we lose everything. We don't leave until they remove the metal detectors."

At one point, an Israeli police officer told the crowd in Arabic that ahead of the noon prayers, worshippers would be able to enter without going through metal detectors. After consultations with religious leaders, the crowd rejected the offer, insisting that the devices have to be removed altogether.

Israeli police said in a statement that the metal detectors will remain in place, but suggested police may at times choose to only conduct spot checks. "Israeli police can decide on the level of checks," said police spokeswoman Luba Samri.

Police sharply restricted access to the Old City on Friday, after Muslim leaders had called for the faithful to converge on the shrine, but pray in the streets instead of pass through metal detectors.

Typically, tens of thousands of Muslims from Jerusalem, the West Bank and Israel converge on the shrine for Friday prayers.

On Friday, Palestinians below 50 were turned away at checkpoints on the outskirts of Jerusalem, including those heading to the city from Israel and from the West Bank. An Arab lawmaker in Israel's parliament says he and fellow Arab citizens were stopped by police at the entrance to the city.

A Palestinian advocacy group said Israeli police detained 10 prominent Palestinian activists in Jerusalem, including the leader of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement in the city.

The age restrictions and police deployment came hours after Israel's security Cabinet decided not to overrule an earlier police decision to install metal detectors at the gates to the compound.

The decision to defer to police came amid reports of disagreement among Israel's security services about the need for the metal detectors. The military and the Shin Bet security services, which deal directly with Palestinians and potential unrest, were reportedly opposed to the devices.

Israel had come under growing pressure this week, including from security ally Jordan, to remove the metal detectors. Jordan is the custodian of the Muslim-administered walled compound.

The rule of Jordan's Hashemite dynasty, said to trace its ancestry back to the Prophet Muhammad, rests to a large degree on its role as guardian of the site.

Abbas, the Palestinian president, asked the United States to "intervene urgently" and compel Israel to remove metal detectors, said an adviser, Nabil Abu Rdeneh.

Abbas discussed the growing tensions in Jerusalem in a phone call with Trump's top adviser and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, Abu Rdeneh said.

Abbas told Kushner that the situation is "extremely dangerous and may go out of control" unless Israel removes the metal detectors, the Palestinian official said.

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Associated Press writer Karin Laub in the West Bank contributed reporting.

## O.J. Simpson triumphant, others devastated as he gets parole

By KEN RITTER, Associated Press

LOVELOCK, Nev. (AP) — Barring any last-minute snafus, O.J. Simpson will walk out of prison a free man in about three months, having persuaded a Nevada parole board the bungled hotel-room heist he pulled nearly 10 years ago was a monumental error in judgment and one he will never repeat.

Although he still adamantly maintains he was trying to retrieve his personal property when he barged into a hotel room with five other men in September 2007, he acknowledged repeatedly Thursday that it was something he never should have done.

"I thought I was glad to get my stuff back, but it just wasn't worth it," he told the board. "It wasn't worth it, and I'm sorry."

After a nationally televised hearing that clearly revealed the public's fascination with Simpson continues, four parole commissioners voted unanimously to release him.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," he said quietly as he buried his head on his chest with relief.

Then, as he was led down a hall and back to prison, the Hall of Fame athlete and 1995 murder defendant raised his hands over his head in a victory gesture and said: "Oh, God, oh!"

Some two hours earlier, Simpson, gray-haired but looking trimmer than he has in recent years, had walked stiffly into a small hearing room of the Lovelock Correctional Center in rural Nevada dressed in jeans, a light-blue prison-issue shirt and sneakers.

He chuckled as parole board chairwoman Connie Bisbee began the hearing by mistakenly giving his age at 90 before quickly correcting herself.

"Feels like it though," Simpson, 70, said as laughter erupted.

Bisbee and three other parole board commissioners were gathered in another hearing room about two hours away in Carson City, the state's capital. They questioned Simpson via video.

Several major TV networks and cable channels — including ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, MSNBC and ESPN — carried the proceedings live, just as some of them did two decades ago during a famous Ford Bronco chase over Southern California freeways that ended in Simpson's arrest and again when a jury in his murder trial returned with its not guilty verdict.

During Thursday's hearing, the charisma and charm that once made Simpson one of the most popular figures in American pop culture was clearly on display.

By turns remorseful, jovial and defensive, he heatedly insisted the items he and five others took during the armed robbery in a Las Vegas hotel room in September 2007 were "my stuff."

Asked what he planned to do if released, Simpson said he would move to Florida to be close to two of his four adult children.

"I could easily stay in Nevada, but I don't think you guys want me here," he joked.

At one point, he set off a storm of sarcasm and mockery on social media when, assuring commissioners he would stay out of trouble, he said: "I've basically spent a conflict-free life, you know."

He also insisted he never meant to hurt anyone during the 2007 confrontation, never pointed a gun and didn't make any threats during the holdup of two sports memorabilia dealers.

"These were friends of mine, actually guys who helped me move and store some of this stuff," he said of the dealers, Bruce Fromong and the late Alfred Beardsley.

Fromong testified that was true, adding it was one of the men accompanying Simpson who pointed a gun at him.

"He is a good man. He made a mistake," Fromong said of Simpson, adding that if Inmate No. 1027820 asks him for a ride from prison when he is released he will be there.

"I mean that," he said turning to face Simpson.

Simpson was widely expected to win parole, given similar cases and his good behavior behind bars. His defenders have argued, too, that his sentence was out of proportion to the crime and that he was being punished for the murders he was acquitted of in Los Angeles in 1995, the stabbings of ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman.

Arnelle Simpson, at 48 the eldest of Simpson's four children, told the board, "We recognize that he is

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not the perfect man." But she said he has been "a perfect inmate, following all the rules and making the best of the situation."

Simpson said he has spent his time in prison mentoring fellow inmates, often keeping them out of trouble, and that he has become a better person during those years.

"I've done my time. I've done it as well and respectfully as I think anybody can," he told the board.

Asked if he was confident he could stay out of trouble, he replied that he learned a lot from an alternative-to-violence course he took in prison and that in any case he has always gotten along well with people.

An electrifying running back dubbed "The Juice," Simpson won the Heisman Trophy as the nation's best college football player in 1968 and went on to become one of the NFL's all-time greats.

The handsome and charming athlete was also a "Monday Night Football" commentator, sprinted through airports in Hertz rental-car commercials and built a Hollywood career with roles in the "Naked Gun" comedies and other movies.

All of that came crashing down with his arrest in the 1994 slayings and his trial, a gavel-to-gavel live-TV sensation that transfixed viewers with its testimony about a bloody glove that didn't fit and stirred furious debate over racist police, celebrity justice and cameras in the courtroom.

Two years after his acquittal Simpson was found liable in civil court for the killings and ordered to pay \$33.5 million to survivors, including his children and the Goldman family.

Last year, the case proved to be compelling TV all over again with the ESPN documentary "O.J.: Made in America" and the award-winning FX miniseries "The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story."

The long prison sentence that resulted from the hotel-room stickup brought a measure of satisfaction to some of those who thought Simpson got away with murder. Among them were Ron Goldman's sister, Kim, and their father, Fred.

"The Goldmans are devastated," family spokesman Michael Wright said of Thursday ruling.

Associated Press writers Scott Sonner in Carson City; John Rogers, John Antczak, Christopher Weber and Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles; and Terence Chea in Lovelock contributed to this report.

## Trump legal team looking to investigate Mueller aides

By JULIE PACE, AP Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's legal team is evaluating potential conflicts of interest among members of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigative team, according to three people with knowledge of the matter. The revelation comes as Mueller's probe into Russia's election meddling appears likely to include some of the Trump family's business ties.

Attorney Jay Sekulow, a member of the president's external legal team, told The Associated Press Thursday that the lawyers "will consistently evaluate the issue of conflicts and raise them in the appropriate venue."

Two of the people with knowledge of that process say those efforts include probing the political affiliations of Mueller's investigators and their past work history. Trump himself has publicly challenged Mueller, declaring this week that the former FBI director would be crossing a line if he investigated the president's personal business ties.

The focus on potential conflicts with Mueller's team may well be an effort to distract from snowballing federal and congressional investigations into possible election year coordination between Trump's campaign and Russia. While Trump has assailed the probes as a partisan "witch hunt," the investigations have increasingly ensnared his family and close advisers, including son Donald Trump Jr. and son-in-law and White House senior adviser Jared Kushner.

As the investigations intensify, Trump's legal team is also undergoing a shakeup. New York-based attorney Marc Kasowitz, whose unconventional style has irked some White House aides, is seen as a diminishing presence in the operation, according to the two people with knowledge of the matter.

John Dowd, an experienced Washington attorney, is expected to step up his role on the president's outside legal team, which also includes Sekulow. They're just a few of the fast-growing cadre of attorneys step-

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ping up to represent the president, his family and close advisers as the investigations continue to expand.

In another sign of a shakeup, Mark Corallo, who has been working as a spokesman for the legal team, is no longer part of the operation, according to those familiar with the situation. They insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Trump has grown increasingly frustrated with the investigations, which threaten to shadow his administration for months or even years. In an interview Wednesday with The New York Times, Trump warned Mueller that it would be a "violation" if he investigated the Trump family's financial entanglements.

Mueller's mandate in overseeing the federal probe is broad. He's authorized to investigate Russia's election interference, any potential Trump campaign ties and any matters that stem from those inquiries.

Sekulow told the AP that the president "has not received any indication" from the special counsel that he personally is under investigation.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump has no intention of firing Mueller "at this time," but she did not rule out doing so in the future. She also reiterated Trump's concern about the scope of Mueller's investigation, saying it "should stay in the confines of meddling, Russia meddling, and the election and nothing beyond that."

California Rep. Adam Schiff, top Democrat on the House intelligence committee, said Mueller has the authority to investigate any ties the Trump family has to Russia, "including financial, and anything that arises. That is his duty."

The White House push against the special counsel's probe comes as the outlines of the investigation are beginning to become clearer.

Bloomberg reported that Mueller's investigators are looking into Trump business transactions with Russians including apartment purchases in his buildings, a controversial New York development project, the multimillion-dollar sale of a Florida home and the 2013 Miss Universe pageant held in Moscow.

The Times also reported that federal investigators have been in talks with Deutsche Bank about obtaining records related to his finances, and that the bank expects it will have to provide information to Mueller.

Deutsche Bank has been one of the few major institutions willing to regularly lend to Trump, who alienated large banks in New York with his past financial troubles and confrontational behavior as a borrower. Over the years, the bank's cumulative loans to Trump add up to billions, and loans originally worth \$300 million remain outstanding.

But lending to Trump hasn't always been easy for Deutsche Bank. In 2008, he sued the bank for \$3 billion after he defaulted on a loan for Trump Tower Chicago, using a novel legal theory that he shouldn't be held to the terms of his contract due to Deutsche Bank's involvement in the broader financial crisis.

That eventually led the bank to grant Trump some concessions on the loan, but the suit scarred his relationship with its commercial lending division. Afterward, Deutsche's Trump relationship was transferred to Rosemary Vrablic, a banker in Deutsche's private wealth division.

In yet another development, New York financier Anthony Scaramucci is under consideration to join the administration as communications director, according to two people with knowledge of the situation who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Scaramucci is a frequent defender of the president on television and was a fixture at Trump Tower during Trump's transition.

AP writers Chad Day and Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report.

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

## 'Juice' will be loose: OJ Simpson granted parole in robbery

By KEN RITTER, Associated Press

LOVELOCK, Nev. (AP) — O.J. Simpson was granted parole Thursday after more than eight years in prison for a Las Vegas hotel-room heist, successfully making his case for freedom in a nationally televised hearing that reflected America's enduring fascination with the former football star.

Simpson, 70, could be released as early as Oct. 1. By then, he will have served the minimum of his nine-to-33-year sentence for a bungled attempt to snatch sports memorabilia he claimed had been stolen from him.

During the more than hourlong hearing on live TV, Simpson was, by turns, remorseful, jovial and defensive, heatedly insisting the items taken in the armed robbery were "my stuff."

At one point, the murder defendant in the 1995 "Trial of the Century" set off a storm of sarcasm and incredulity on social media when he said, "I've basically spent a conflict-free life, you know."

All four parole commissioners who conducted the hearing voted for his release after a half-hour of deliberations. They cited, among other things, the low risk he might commit another crime, his community support and his release plans, which include moving to Florida.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," Simpson said quietly as he buried his head on his chest with relief. As he rose from his seat to return to his prison cell, he exhaled deeply.

Then, as he was led down a hall, the Hall of Fame athlete raised his hands over his head in a victory gesture and said: "Oh, God, oh!"

Simpson was widely expected to win parole, given similar cases and his good behavior behind bars. His defenders have argued, too, that his sentence was out of proportion to the crime and that he was being punished for the two murders he was acquitted of in Los Angeles in 1995, the stabbings of ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman.

Inmate No. 1027820 made his plea for freedom in a stark hearing room at the Lovelock Correctional Center in rural Nevada as the parole commissioners questioned him via video from Carson City, a two-hour drive away.

Gray-haired but looking trimmer than he has in recent years, Simpson walked stiffly into the hearing room in jeans, a light-blue prison-issue shirt and sneakers. He chuckled at one point as the parole board chairwoman mistakenly gave his age as 90.

Simpson insisted he never meant to hurt anyone, never pointed a gun and didn't make any threats during the holdup of two sports memorabilia dealers.

"I thought I was glad to get my stuff back, but it just wasn't worth it," he told the board. "It wasn't worth it, and I'm sorry."

Even one of the dealers Simpson robbed, Bruce Fromong, testified on his behalf, telling the parole board that Simpson deserved to be released so he could be with his family.

"He is a good man. He made a mistake," Fromong said, adding the two remain friends.

Arnelle Simpson, at 48 the eldest of Simpson's four children, told the board, "We recognize that he is not the perfect man." But she said he has been "a perfect inmate, following all the rules and making the best of the situation."

"We just want him to come home, we really do," she said.

The commissioners said the murder case played no role in their decision, though a majority of letter writers opposed to Simpson's release asked the board to take it into account.

Among those angered by Thursday's decision were Goldman's father, Fred, and sister, Kim.

"The Goldmans are devastated," said family spokesman Michael Wright, adding they didn't want to say anything more.

Simpson said that he has spent his time in prison mentoring fellow inmates, often keeping them out of trouble, and that he has become a better person behind bars.

"I've done my time. I've done it as well and respectfully as I think anybody can," he told the board.

Asked if he was confident he could stay out of trouble if released, Simpson replied that he learned a lot

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from an alternative-to-violence course he took in prison and that in any case he has always gotten along well with people.

Several major TV networks and cable channels — including ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, MSNBC and ESPN — carried the proceedings live, just as some of them did two decades ago during the Ford Bronco chase that ended in Simpson's arrest, and again when the jury in the murder case came back with its verdict.

Simpson said if released he plans to return to Florida to be near two of his adult children.

"I could easily stay in Nevada, but I don't think you guys want me here," he joked at one point.

"No comment, sir," board chairwoman Connie Bisbee replied.

Authorities must still work out the details of Simpson's release with Florida officials, including where he will live and what rules he must follow.

An electrifying running back dubbed "Juice," Simpson won the Heisman Trophy as the nation's best college football player in 1968 and went on to become one of the NFL's all-time greats.

The handsome and charismatic athlete was also a "Monday Night Football" commentator, sprinted through airports in Hertz rental-car commercials and built a Hollywood career with roles in the "Naked Gun" comedies and other movies.

All of that came crashing down with his arrest in the 1994 slayings and his trial, a gavel-to-gavel live-TV sensation that transfixed viewers with its testimony about the bloody glove that didn't fit and stirred furious debate over racist police, celebrity justice and cameras in the courtroom.

Last year, the case proved to be compelling TV all over again with the ESPN documentary "O.J.: Made in America" and the award-winning FX miniseries "The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story."

In 1997, Simpson was found liable in civil court for the two killings and ordered to pay \$33.5 million to survivors, including his children and the Goldman family.

Then a decade later, he and five accomplices — two with guns — stormed a hotel room and seized photos, plaques and signed balls, some of which never belonged to Simpson.

Simpson was convicted in 2008, and the long prison sentence brought a measure of satisfaction to some of those who thought he got away with murder.

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Associated Press writers Scott Sonner in Carson City; John Rogers, John Antczak, Christopher Weber and Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles; and Terence Chea in Lovelock contributed to this report.

## Seoul calls for Pyongyang to respond to overture for talks

By KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea on Friday urged North Korea to accept its offers for talks as Pyongyang continued to ignore Seoul's proposal for a military meeting to ease animosities along their tense border.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said it has become difficult to hold the meeting Seoul had originally proposed for Friday and called for the North to "quickly accept" the overture for talks.

"Easing the military tension between the South and North and restoring the military dialogue channel are very urgent tasks for peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula," the ministry said in a statement.

North Korea has yet to respond to South Korea's proposal to hold the military meeting and a separate meeting next month to resume the temporary reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War.

If realized, the talks would be the first inter-Korean dialogue since December 2015. Ties between the Koreas have worsened since over North Korea's expanding nuclear and missile programs, but South Korea's new liberal President Moon Jae-in, who took office in May, has expressed a desire to reach out to the North.

Despite North Korea apparently passing over the Friday meeting, some experts say North Korea is likely to agree to the military talks at some point as it has been calling for the suspension of loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts at the border the two Koreas began after the North's fourth nuclear test in January 2016. It's possible that the North is taking time mulling its options and could potentially make a counter-proposal seeking more concessions from the South in exchange for opening dialogue, the experts say.



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The prospects for a Red Cross meeting on the family reunions are murkier as the North has been tying the issue to its demands for the South to send back 12 women and their male manager who worked at a North Korean-run restaurant China before defecting to the South last year. Pyongyang, which often makes extreme claims over defectors, has insisted that the workers were abducted to the South, an accusation Seoul denies.

"The government proposed the military and Red Cross meeting because it considered peace in the Korean Peninsula and humanitarian issues as urgent," said Eugene Lee, a spokeswoman at Seoul's Unification Ministry. "We need to remain calm and take one step forward at a time, without fretting too much about how the North reacts each time."

## Even with Trump warning, Mueller likely to probe finances

By CHAD DAY and JULIE PACE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's growing anxiety about the federal Russia probe has spilled into public view with his warning that special counsel Robert Mueller would be out of bounds if he dug into the Trump family's finances. But that's a line that Mueller seems sure to cross.

Several of Trump's family members and close advisers have already become ensnared in the investigations, including son Donald Trump Jr. and son-in-law and White House senior adviser Jared Kushner. Probing the family's sprawling business ties would bring an investigation the president has called a partisan "witch hunt" even closer to the Oval Office.

Trump told The New York Times it would be a "violation" of Mueller's formal charge if he looked into the president's personal finances.

That comment came amid news reports that the special counsel is interested in Trump's business transactions with Russians and with one of his main lenders, Deutsche Bank. It also comes as Trump's legal team is digging into the backgrounds of Mueller's investigative team looking for potential conflicts of interest.

A person with knowledge of the process says those efforts include the political affiliations of Mueller's investigators and their past work history. The person was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and insisted on anonymity.

Trump attorney Jay Sekulow told The Associated Press that the president's lawyers "will consistently evaluate the issue of conflicts and raise them in the appropriate venue."

In addition to attacking Mueller in the interview with the Times, Trump also lashed out at Attorney General Jeff Sessions; James Comey, the FBI director he fired; Andrew McCabe, the acting FBI director who replaced Comey, and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed the special counsel. The president's comments were a reminder of Trump's willingness to target his own appointees and blur lines that have traditionally existed between the White House and Justice Department investigations.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Thursday that Trump had no intention of firing Mueller "at this time," but she did not rule out doing so in the future. She also reiterated Trump's concern about the scope of Mueller's investigation, saying it "should stay in the confines of meddling, Russia meddling, and the election and nothing beyond that."

California Rep. Adam Schiff, top Democrat on the House intelligence committee, said Mueller has the authority to investigate any ties the Trump family has to Russia, "including financial, and anything that arises. That is his duty."

William Jeffress, a longtime defense attorney at Baker Botts who represented former President Richard Nixon, said Mueller's inquiry will almost certainly involve examining financial information as he looks for any connections between Trump associates and Russia. And he said Trump's threats toward Mueller aren't helping his case.

"If I were his lawyer, I would be telling him to dial it down," Jeffress said.

The White House push against the special counsel's probe comes as the outlines of the investigation are beginning to become clearer.

Bloomberg reported Thursday that Mueller's investigators are looking into Trump business transactions

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with Russians including apartment purchases in his buildings, a controversial New York development project, the multimillion-dollar sale of a Florida home and the 2013 Miss Universe pageant held in Moscow.

The Times also reported that federal investigators have been in talks with Deutsche Bank about obtaining records related to his finances, and that the bank expects it will have to provide information to Mueller.

Deutsche Bank has been one of the few major institutions willing to regularly lend to Trump, who alienated large banks in New York with his past financial troubles and confrontational behavior as a borrower. Over the years, the bank's cumulative loans to Trump add up to billions, and loans originally worth \$300 million remain outstanding.

But lending to Trump hasn't always been easy for Deutsche Bank. In 2008, he sued the bank for \$3 billion after he defaulted on a loan for Trump Tower Chicago, using a novel legal theory that he shouldn't be held to the terms of his contract due to Deutsche Bank's involvement in the broader financial crisis.

That eventually led the bank to grant Trump some concessions on the loan, but the suit scarred his relationship with its commercial lending division. Afterward, Deutsche's Trump relationship was transferred to Rosemary Vrablic, a banker in Deutsche's private wealth division.

Democrats have seized on Trump's relationship with the bank. Rep. Maxine Waters of California, the ranking Democrat on the House Financial Services Committee, has called for the Treasury Department to turn over any documents related to the relationship between the bank and Trump or his family members. She also called on Treasury to turn over any evidence of financial dealing between Trump and Russian banks or government officials. So far, her requests have been rebuffed because Republicans have not signed on.

Trump has denied having any financial dealings with Russia, though the spotlight on his business connections there has intensified since the revelation that a meeting between members of the Trump's campaign's inner circle and a Russian lawyer was brokered by a wealthy family involved in Trump's 2013 Miss Universe contest in Moscow.

The Associated Press reported in June that Mueller's investigation already included the financial dealings of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

Trump Jr., Kushner and Manafort are being called before Senate committees next week to talk about the 2016 campaign, though it's not yet clear if all three will agree to appear. They will almost certainly face questions about their attendance at the June 2016 meeting arranged via emails that advertised it would reveal damaging information about Trump's Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.

According to emails released by the younger Trump, the meeting was put together at the request of Emin Agalarov, a Moscow-based pop singer, whose real-estate tycoon father, Aras, paid \$20 million for Trump to stage the Miss Universe contest in Moscow in 2013.

Trump spent considerable time with the Agalarovs while in Moscow, attending the younger Agalarov's birthday party and appearing alongside him in a music video. Trump also explored the idea of partnering with Aras Agalarov in a Trump Tower in Moscow, though the deal never materialized.

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Associated Press writers Ken Thomas, Jeff Horwitz, Jonathan Lemire and Eric Tucker in Washington and David Pitt in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

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Follow Chad Day and Julie Pace on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ChadSDay> and <https://twitter.com/jpaceDC>

## Freeze resigns as Ole Miss football coach after 5 seasons

By DAVID BRANDT, AP Sports Writer

Mississippi football coach Hugh Freeze resigned Thursday after university officials found a "pattern of personal misconduct" that started with the school's investigation into a call to an escort service.

Freeze's resignation brings a stunning end to a five-year tenure that saw a Sugar Bowl victory, but also a wide-ranging NCAA investigation into rules violations. His ultimate downfall came after school officials investigated Freeze's phone records and found misconduct.

"In our analysis, we discovered a pattern of conduct that is not consistent with our expectations as the

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leader of our football program," athletic director Ross Bjork said. "As of yesterday, there appeared to be a concerning pattern."

Bjork said the school's investigation started last week after an outside Freedom of Information request revealed a concerning phone call that lasted less than a minute. The school then looked into the rest of his phone records and found more problems.

Bjork said Freeze "admitted the conduct" and that the coach offered his resignation Thursday afternoon. When pressed to explain Freeze's conduct, Bjork said the school needed to "protect that information."

"His privacy is important," Bjork said. "The conduct was just not something we could continue with as our head coach."

Freeze's university cell phone records obtained by The Associated Press show a 1-minute call made on Jan. 19, 2016, to a Detroit-based number. An internet search shows the number linked to a site that offers various escort services.

"I've got no idea, to be honest," Freeze told Yahoo Sports, which first reported the nature of the call. "I was in an 813 area code and that was a 313 number, I think that might have been a misdial. I don't think there was even a conversation. There's nothing to it."

Co-offensive coordinator Matt Luke has been named the interim coach.

"This is a sad day for the University of Mississippi," Ole Miss Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter said.

Vitter and Bjork both said Freeze's resignation is strictly because of his personal conduct and not because of the ongoing NCAA investigation.

The Rebels had a quick rise under Freeze, recruiting at a high level and reaching an apex with a Sugar Bowl victory over Oklahoma State following the 2015 season.

But an NCAA investigation — alleging 21 charges of academic, booster, and recruiting misconduct — has overshadowed much of that success, especially over the past year. The school has already self-imposed several penalties, including a one-year postseason ban for the upcoming season.

Freeze — who was making more than \$5 million per year — had a 39-25 record over five seasons, including a 19-21 mark in the Southeastern Conference. Bjork said that Freeze will receive no buyout on his contract.

The 47-year-old Freeze's shocking exit — just a few weeks before preseason camp begins — completes a stunning fall for a coach considered one of the profession's rising stars a few years ago.

Freeze took over after Houston Nutt was fired during a miserable 2011 season that ended with a 2-10 record. Ole Miss immediately improved under Freeze, finishing 7-6 in 2012 and winning the Birmingham Bowl.

The Rebels continued to surge on the field and on the recruiting trail over the next several seasons. They signed some of the nation's top recruits in 2013, including defensive lineman Robert Nkemdiche, receiver Laquon Treadwell and offensive lineman Laremy Tunsil. They helped push the program to eight wins in 2013, nine in '14 and a 10-3 record in '15.

But Ole Miss' newfound ability to recruit at a high level drew the attention of the NCAA, which was already investigating the school for a handful of violations that occurred during Nutt's tenure.

The school has received two Notice of Allegations letters from the NCAA over the past two years. The first alleged 13 rules violations, including nine that were classified as Level I, which the governing body deems the most serious.

But the case expanded in April 2016 after Tunsil became the story of the NFL draft after a bizarre video of him smoking from a gas mask-bong contraption was posted on his Twitter account just before the selections began.

There was also a post on Tunsil's Instagram account showing an alleged text conversation with a football staff member about arranging payment for bills.

Though the NCAA didn't appear to find much from that particular exchange, the governing body did reopen its investigation, sending a second NOA earlier this year that expanded the case to 21 allegations, including 17 that are Level I.

Freeze, a north Mississippi native, had an unlikely rise to major college coaching, spending about a de-

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cade as a successful high school coach in Memphis, Tennessee, before landing a job at Ole Miss in the mid-2000s under Ed Orgeron. After Orgeron was fired in 2007, Freeze became the head coach at Lambuth, a tiny NAIA school in western Tennessee.

He became Arkansas State's offensive coordinator in 2010 and was promoted to head coach in 2011, leading the Red Wolves to a Sun Belt Conference title before being hired at Ole Miss.

Freeze's specialty was on offense and the Rebels were especially efficient on that side of the ball. Behind quarterbacks like Bo Wallace and Chad Kelly, Ole Miss was consistently one of the best schools in the SEC through the air.

More AP college football: <http://collegefootball.ap.org> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## Venezuela strike erupts into violence leaving 2 dead

By **MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN** and **CHRISTINE ARMARIO**, Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — A nationwide strike against plans to rewrite the constitution shut down much of Venezuelan's capital Thursday before erupting into sporadic violence that left at least two young men dead.

President Nicolas Maduro pledged to forge ahead with reshaping Venezuela's government despite the protests and a U.S. threat to levy economic sanctions if he continued. A coalition of opposition groups called what it described as a "great march" for Saturday, returning to a strategy of direct confrontation with the government after a week of alternative tactics like organizing a nationwide protest vote against the constitutional rewrite.

In New York, a senior diplomat resigned from the Venezuelan delegation to the U.N. in what he called a protest of the Maduro's administration's widespread human rights violations.

Isaias Medina told The Associated Press he could no longer tolerate working for a government that advocates for human rights at the U.N. and violates them at the same time. He is among the few members of Venezuela's government outside the opposition-controlled National Assembly to have broken ranks with it.

Medina called on Maduro to resign immediately.

"He needs to respond now before the international community," Medina said.

U.N. Ambassador Rafael Ramirez said on Twitter that Medina had acted dishonestly and been removed from his post.

The issue is certain to be raised when Venezuela's Foreign Minister Samuel Moncada goes to U.N. headquarters in New York Friday to meet U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

In Caracas, wealthier, pro-opposition neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city were shuttered and silent until early afternoon, when improvised blockades left them almost entirely cut off from the rest of the city. Groups of masked young men set fire to a handful of blockades and hurled stones at riot police, who fired back tear gas.

The chief prosecutor's office said 23-year-old Andres Uzcategui was killed in a protest in the working-class neighborhood of La Isabelica in the central state of Carabobo and 24-year-old Ronney Eloy Tejera Soler was killed in the Los Teques neighborhood on Caracas' outskirts. At least nine people were hurt in protests, the prosecutor's office said. It offered no details about the circumstances of the killings.

The slaying drives the death toll over nearly months of protests to at least 95.

A public transport strike appeared to have halted nearly all bus traffic and thousands of private businesses defied government demands to stay open during the first major national strike since a 2002 stoppage that failed to topple Maduro's predecessor Hugo Chavez.

Maduro said on national television that he'll press ahead with plans to rewrite the nation's constitution and said that hundreds of Venezuela's largest companies are functioning "at 100 percent" despite the strike. Opposition leaders said Thursday evening that 85 percent of the nation's workers had participated in the strike.

Neither figure could be independently verified.

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In neighborhoods of western Caracas traditionally loyal to the ruling party, some stores were closed but bakeries, fruit stands and other shops were open and hundreds of people were in the streets, although foot and vehicle traffic were about half of what they would be on a normal weekday.

In the rest of the city, residents commented that the streets were emptier than on a typical Sunday.

The 24-hour strike was meant as an expression of national disapproval of Maduro's plan to convene a constitutional assembly that would reshape the Venezuelan system to consolidate the ruling party's power over the few institutions that remain outside its control. The opposition is boycotting the July 30 election to select members of the assembly.

"Definitively, we need a change," said teacher Katherina Alvarez. "The main objective is for people to see how dissatisfied people are."

Many of those who opted to work said they walked hours to get to their jobs, unable to find a bus or taxi.

"We urgently need a change in government, because what we are living through is pathetic," said Frangeli Fernandez, 24, an accountant who walked three hours to his job at a bank.

Although not entirely in agreement with the strike, Fernandez said he agreed with doing something "very radical to get out of this."

Walking through the streets of Venezuela's capital Thursday, opposition leader Henrique Capriles called on people at roadblocks to allow ambulances and other emergency vehicles through. Protesters across Caracas set up roadblocks of tree branches and tires to protest Maduro's plans to change the constitution.

Some residents were irritated by the roadblocks, saying the protest was yet another way the country's political upheaval is disrupting their lives.

"The government jails the people who protest and those who are protesting are caging the rest of us. It's unfair," said Maria Sandoval, a 27-year-old medical secretary.

Medina, the U.N. diplomat, said he decided he would resign from his post shortly after opposition protests began in early April following a Supreme Court decision stripping the National Assembly of its remaining powers. He said he has never identified with either government or opposition parties, but was irked by images of national guardsmen and police launching tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters, many of them young students.

He did not immediately resign because he wanted to finish organizing a U.N. environmental conference and needed his passport. He made the decision official in a letter and video shared widely on social media Thursday.

In the video, Medina said government leaders responsible for violence against protesters "will be considered murderers."

"I'm ready to stand forward and say what I'm saying because it's the correct thing to do," he added.

A small handful of high-ranking Venezuelan officials have turned against Maduro since the crisis emerged, state prosecutor Luisa Ortega Diaz chief among them. The longtime government loyalist has now become one of Maduro's most outspoken critics as he moves closer to leading a rewrite of the constitution.

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Associated Press reporter Fabiola Sanchez in Caracas, Venezuela, contributed to this report.

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Follow Michael Weissenstein on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mweissenstein>

## **GOP leaders plan Tuesday health vote, it's an uphill climb**

**By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican leaders pushed toward a Senate vote next Tuesday on resurrecting their nearly flat-lined health care bill. Their uphill drive was further complicated by the ailing GOP Sen. John McCain's potential absence and a dreary report envisioning that the number of uninsured Americans would soar.

The White House and GOP leaders fished Thursday for ways to win over recalcitrant senators, including

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an administration proposal to let states use Medicaid funds to help people buy their own private health insurance. But there were no indications they'd ensured the votes needed to even start debating the party's legislative keystone, a bill scuttling and supplanting President Barack Obama's health care law.

"Dealing with this issue is what's right for the country," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. He added, "It was certainly never going to be easy, but we've come a long way and I look forward to continuing our work together to finally bring relief."

As leaders tested revisions that might attract GOP votes, others began comparing the process with the trade-offs they scorned seven years ago as top Democrats pushed Obama's overhaul.

"It's almost becoming a bidding process — let's throw \$50 billion here, let's throw \$100 billion there," said Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn. "It's making me uncomfortable right now. It's beginning to feel a lot like how Obamacare came together."

In a blow, the Congressional Budget Office said McConnell's latest bill would produce 22 million additional uninsured people by 2026 and drive up premiums for many older Americans. Congress' nonpartisan fiscal analyst also said it would boost typical deductibles — the money people must pay before insurers cover costs — for single people to \$13,000 that year, well above the \$5,000 they'd be expected to pay under Obama's statute.

"Many people with low income would not purchase any plan even if it had very low premiums" because of that exorbitant deductible, the budget office said.

That dire outlook resembled one the office released last month on McConnell's initial bill, which the leader had to withdraw as Republicans rebelled against it.

Thursday's report seemed unlikely to do much better to help win over balking moderate Republicans upset over millions of voters losing coverage and cuts in Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor. These included Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine, Ohio's Rob Portman and West Virginian Shelley Moore Capito.

The GOP's fissures have changed little for months.

Conservatives like Sens. Mike Lee of Utah and Texas' Ted Cruz want to loosen Obama's requirements that insurers cover numerous services and cap customers' costs, and some want to cut spending for Medicaid and other programs. Conservative Rand Paul, R-Ky., is most interested in simply repealing the 2010 law. Moderates want to ease the spending reductions and leave consumer protections in place.

"There's a handful of folks who clearly have significant reservations" about backing the bill, said Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa. "But they haven't said no. They haven't said yes either."

Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., a member of the Senate leadership, said a vote was expected Tuesday afternoon. But senators suggested that might change with the possible long-term absence of McCain, the 80-year-old Arizonan who announced Wednesday he is battling an aggressive brain cancer and was home undergoing treatment.

Nursing a slender 52-48 majority and adamant Democratic opposition, McConnell has been unable to muster the 50 GOP votes he'd need to approve his party's health care overhaul. Vice President Mike Pence would cast the tiebreaking vote. Without McCain, the bill would fall if just two Republicans vote against it, and more than that have said they're ready to do so.

Looking for leverage, McConnell and his lieutenants were arguing that Republicans should back the initial procedural vote to begin debate. Should it pass, they reasoned, senators could force votes on any amendments they chose to propose.

In reality, senators were aware that that procedural vote would be viewed as a vote on whatever health care package leaders were pushing, perhaps reflecting changes negotiated with GOP senators. Several senators said leaders still hadn't decided what that might be.

Asked if senators would know beforehand what they'd be voting on Tuesday, the No. 2 Senate GOP leader, John Cornyn of Texas, told reporters, "That's a luxury we don't have." Cornyn spokesman Drew Brandewie later said the lawmaker was referring to the unpredictability of the final shape of the bill after amendment votes.

McConnell presented his reworked bill last week after adding \$45 billion to help states combat overdoses of drugs including opioids and \$70 billion to help insurers control consumers' costs. It also retained tax increases Obama placed on wealthier people to help finance his coverage expansion to 20 million additional people.

And it included a Cruz provision, crucial for winning conservatives' votes, letting insurers sell low-cost policies with minimal coverage. Conservatives say it will reduce premiums, but opponents say it would result in healthy people buying the cheap policies, leaving many with serious medical conditions unable to afford the fuller coverage they need.

Thursday's budget office report did not estimate the coverage impact of that provision.

Associated Press writers Erica Werner and Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

## Publicly assailed by Trump, Sessions says he's staying on

By ERIC TUCKER and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Jeff Sessions, publicly skewered by his boss for stepping clear of the Russia-Trump investigations, declared Thursday he still loves his job and plans to stay on. Yet Donald Trump's airing of his long-simmering frustrations with Sessions raised significant new questions about the future of the nation's top prosecutor.

The White House was quick to insist that the president "has confidence" in Sessions. However, the episode underscored how the attorney general's crime-fighting agenda is being overshadowed by his fractured relationship with Trump and the continuing investigations into allegations of Russian ties to the Republican candidate's presidential campaign.

The challenges for Sessions were laid bare Thursday when the attorney general, at a Justice Department news conference to announce the takedown of a mammoth internet drug marketplace, faced zero questions about that case and was instead grilled on his reaction to being excoriated by Trump in a New York Times interview a day earlier. The news conference on the drug case was quickly ended once it was clear reporters would only ask about the interview.

Sessions did not directly address his relationship to Trump except to say he was still carrying out the agenda of the president.

"I have the honor of serving as attorney general. It's something that goes beyond any thought I would have ever had for myself," Sessions said. "We love this job, we love this department and I plan to continue to do so as long as that is appropriate."

Asked how he could effectively serve if he didn't have Trump's confidence, he responded, "We're serving right now. The work we're doing today is the kind of work we intend to continue."

Asked at the White House about Trump's feelings on Sessions, spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said, "Clearly, he has confidence in him or he would not be the attorney general."

It all followed Trump's statements to the Times that he never would have tapped the former Alabama senator for the job had he known a recusal was coming. Sessions took himself off the Justice Department-led case in March following revelations he'd failed to disclose his own meetings with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. That placed the investigation with his deputy, Rod Rosenstein, who in May appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller to serve as special counsel.

Several people close to Trump — including his eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, who has also been ensnared in the Russia probe — have told the president that they, too, believe Sessions' decision to recuse himself was a mistake, according to three White House and outside advisers who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

In the same Wednesday interview, Trump lashed out at Mueller, Rosenstein, James Comey, the FBI director Trump fired, and acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe, who replaced Comey.

"Jeff Sessions takes the job, gets into the job, recuses himself, which frankly I think is very unfair to the president," Trump told the newspaper. "How do you take a job and then recuse yourself? If he would

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have recused himself before the job, I would have said, 'Thanks, Jeff, but I'm not going to take you.' It's extremely unfair — and that's a mild word — to the president."

The broadside against Sessions in the interview was not a calculated ploy to force the attorney general to resign but rather Trump's frustration with his longtime ally bubbling to the surface, the advisers said. For weeks, the president has seethed about Sessions' decision to recuse himself from the federal investigations into whether Trump's campaign coordinated with Russia during last year's election — Probes that have shadowed the administration from the outset.

That others agree Sessions' recusal was a mistake has only fueled Trump's frustration with the investigation dogging the White House. Despite his protests to the contrary, Trump continues to closely follow cable TV news coverage, and he frequently interrupts conversations about other topics to complain bitterly about the probe or, on occasion, predict that it will soon be behind him.

The advisers said the president viewed Sessions' move as an act of disloyalty — arguably the most grievous offense in the president's mind — and was angry that Sessions did not consult with him ahead of time.

Yet the frustration goes both ways. At the Justice Department, there's displeasure that developments on Trump and Russia routinely drown out work that officials are trying to highlight. Much like Thursday, a May rollout of a sentencing policy shift was overshadowed by Trump's firing of Comey that same week.

At one point, Sessions privately told Trump he was willing to resign his post, but the president did not accept the offer.

And Sessions has given no public hints that he plans to leave, traveling the country for speeches to outline a tough-on-crime approach to violence and immigration. He kept his scheduled appointments Thursday. "I'm totally confident that we can continue to run this office in an effective way," he said.

The first U.S. senator to endorse Trump during the presidential run, Sessions bonded with him over shared hard-line immigration views. Some of Sessions' long-serving advisers are now working alongside the president in the West Wing.

Defense attorney William Jeffress, who represented former President Richard Nixon, said he's concerned that Trump's rhetoric about Sessions reveals a larger misunderstanding of the attorney general's role.

"I really think that the president needs to understand and appreciate the independence of law enforcement," Jeffress said, adding that the president is "just wrong" to look at the attorney general as someone responsible for protecting the Trump's personal interest.

A Sessions resignation could throw Mueller's investigation into uncertainty. Trump would nominate a replacement and could seek assurances that his pick would not recuse himself from the investigations.

Trump raised the prospect of firing Mueller in his interview with the Times, suggesting he had damaging information on the former FBI director. The president also said Mueller's selection for the job was a conflict of interest because Trump had spoken with him about returning to the FBI after the firing of Comey.

"There were many other conflicts that I haven't said, but I will at some point," Trump said.

The president has repeatedly told those close to him that he fears there is a movement underway, fueled in part by Comey, Rosenstein and potentially Mueller, to discredit his presidency. He has denied that his campaign had any contacts with Russia during the election, though that assertion has been challenged by his son's acknowledgment that he accepted a meeting that was billed as part of the Russian government's efforts to tar Democrat Hillary Clinton.

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Associated Press writers Julie Pace, Sadie Gurman and Chad Day contributed to this report.

## Cancer isn't silencing McCain in career's latest chapter

By LAURIE KELLMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — John McCain couldn't bring himself to vote for Donald Trump — so he talked about writing in his best friend's name for president. After the election, he's been the leading Senate Republican critic of Trump's posture toward Russia. And from his Arizona home, where he's battling brain cancer, the Arizona senator on Thursday lobbed a new attack at the White House over its Syria policy.



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The grave medical diagnosis hit the six-term senator just as he was settling into the latest notable role in his storied career. The ex-prisoner of war, former GOP presidential nominee and onetime standard-bearer of the political Straight Talk Express has emerged as a voice for what some Republicans feel is a party lost in the Trump era. He's lambasted Trump as a defamer of military personnel, recoiled from Trump's willingness to cozy up to Russian President Vladimir Putin and rejected Trump's self-described boorishness toward women.

On Thursday, less than 24 hours after announcing he'd be undergoing treatment for glioblastoma, McCain promised — warned, really — that he won't be gone for long.

"He is yelling at me to buck up so I'm gonna buck up," said Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, McCain's close friend in the Senate.

It was classic McCain, whose candor offers a dose of authenticity and moxie at a time when his fellow Republicans control Congress and the presidency but are struggling to govern. His absence, however long, raises the prospect of a Senate without its sometimes trash-talking, yet also self-effacing, senator from Arizona for the first time in more than three decades. In the short term, McCain's treatment deprives Senate Republicans of a vote they need for a controversial health care rewrite in the narrowly divided chamber.

After audio surfaced in October of Trump talking about groping women, McCain broke with the candidate and said he'd write in Graham's name on Election Day. When Trump won, he called for a special committee to investigate Russian meddling in the election, recently lamenting that the Russia issue is "a challenge to Washington, D.C., the way we do business, a challenge to bipartisanship and a challenge to the effectiveness of this newly elected president."

McCain, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, says he received sensitive information last year and turned it over to the FBI, an apparent reference to an unsubstantiated report that Russia had compromising personal and financial information about Trump.

On Thursday, from his home in Arizona, McCain said the administration would be "playing right into the hands of Vladimir Putin" if, as The Washington Post reported, Trump was ending a program to back the opposition to Syrian President Bashar Assad. Graham said McCain had called him three times Thursday on immigration legislation.

"I think John is a force that is unique to him. He has done things that most people could not do," said Graham. "Going forward he's excited, quite frankly, about getting a second chance to finish things that have been stuck."

Yet for all of his confrontational style, McCain has voted with Trump most of the time. He voted in favor of most of the president's Cabinet nominees and with Trump against several Obama-era regulations.

Longtime colleagues, even those McCain has called names, say he developed his fearlessness as a navy aviator held as a prisoner for more than five years in Vietnam. Resilience, they say, has fueled his long Senate career and helped him overcome two failed presidential campaigns. For some, McCain has become the moral voice of the Republican Party, whose leaders have not always said out loud what they really think about Trump.

"He's not afraid of anybody or anything, clearly," said Texas Sen. John Cornyn, a Republican at whom McCain shouted, "F--- you!" in 2007. "He's unique, to say the least."

"He does everything to make sure he's heard," said GOP Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, whom McCain has called "a f----- jerk." "When he disagrees with people he's going to tell them he disagrees."

He's been known to apologize after some of his more colorful outbursts.

Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., said pushing back against the administration only rarely requires a public challenge of the president.

"But I think John McCain figured out that his personality and his history let him do that," Blunt said. "That irascibility helps keep everybody else moving in the right direction."

McCain's relationship with Trump has long been testy, dating back at least to Trump's declaration two years ago that McCain was not a war hero by virtue of having been captured. McCain said Trump owed other veterans an apology for that.

The Arizona senator emerged early in the Trump administration as the new president's nemesis, breaking with Trump on his immigration order, warning him against any rapprochement with Moscow, lecturing him on the illegality of torture and supplying only a lukewarm endorsement of Rex Tillerson, Trump's choice for secretary of state.

"Clearly, in the Republican Party he has been completely unafraid to tell his own party when he thinks they're wrong," said McCain friend Steve Duprey.

McCain has long given policy-watchers whiplash.

He snarled about the Obama administration's handling of the deadly assault in Benghazi, Libya, and ripped into former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel over the Iraq war.

But he also has tried to revive his past bipartisan effort on immigration, at one point reaching out to Obama, the man who beat him for the presidency in 2008.

On Thursday, McCain warned his colleagues, and Trump, not to get too comfortable in his absence.

He tweeted from afar: "I'll be back soon, so stand-by!"

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Associated Press writers Andrew Taylor, Astrid Galvan and Steve Peoples contributed to this report.

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Follow Kellman at <http://www.twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>

## **US says ban on laptops in airplane cabins has been lifted**

**By DAVID KOENIG, AP Airlines Writer**

DALLAS (AP) — The ban on laptops in the cabins of planes flying from the Middle East to the U.S. is over, as federal officials say that large airports in the region have taken other steps to increase security.

Those measures include checking electronic devices to make sure they don't contain a bomb, and pulling more people out of airport lines for additional screening.

A spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security said Thursday that all airlines and airports with flights departing for the U.S. had met the agency's first phase of new security measures, which were announced in late June but not described in any detail.

In March, the U.S. imposed a ban on laptops in the cabins of planes coming into the country from 10 Middle Eastern airports. This week, King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, was the last of the 10 to comply with U.S. security measures and exit the laptop-ban list.

Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly said the laptop ban was a "pause," a stopgap measure until airports could make other security improvements. It grew from fear that terrorists were working on bombs that can be hidden in devices such as laptop and tablet computers.

"We tested it on a real airplane on the ground, pressurized (as an airliner is during flight), and to say the least it destroyed the airplane," Kelly said Wednesday at a security conference in Colorado. He added that intelligence reports indicated terrorists lacked the ability to detonate such a bomb remotely — meaning they couldn't trigger a bomb in the cargo hold while sitting in the cabin.

Some safety experts cautioned, however, that putting devices with lithium ion batteries that are prone to overheating in cargo increased the risk of fire.

Now the Federal Aviation Administration is telling airlines that that devices with lithium batteries should be put in carry-on baggage and not placed in checked luggage — the advice that existed before the March order covering large electronics devices in the cabin.

Kelly said most of the new security measures will not be visible to passengers. He said, however, that there will be additional testing of devices — to make sure they are working computers and not a disguised bomb — and more people will be pulled aside for extra screening. He did not say how agents will decide who gets pulled aside.

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David Koenig can be reached at <http://twitter.com/airlinewriter>

## **McDonald's adds Big Mac onesie, sweatsuit to delivery items**

OAK BROOK, Ill. (AP) — With McDonald's now offering a delivery service, the fast-food giant is looking to make customers comfortable eating at home with a new clothing line that includes an adult-size Big Mac onesie.

Oak Brook, Illinois-based McDonald's describes the McDelivery Collection as "a selection of fun, fashion forward items you can wear or use whenever and wherever you order." It also includes french fry-themed sweatsuits and sandals, hamburger pillowcases and a picnic blanket dotted with McDonald's items.

Customers can get the items for free, while they last, by ordering meals from McDonald's restaurants in select cities through the UberEats app on Wednesday.

McDonald's joins KFC, which recently released its own fast-food apparel. KFC's chicken-themed line consists of socks, shirts and accessories, including a "finger-lickin' good" necklace.

## **Palestinians clash with Israel police at Jerusalem holy site**

**By ARON HELLER and ILAN BEN ZION, Associated Press**

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinians clashed with Israeli security forces near a contested Jerusalem shrine after Muslim worshippers massed outside for evening prayers on Thursday as tensions over the holy site escalated further.

Israel police spokeswoman Luba Samri said Palestinians hurled stones and glass bottles at officers after the prayers outside the site, referred to by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and by Jews as the Temple Mount.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it treated at least 22 people for injuries. Police said no officers were injured; they had no information about injured protesters.

The Palestinians were protesting Israel's placement of metal detectors at the entrance to the holy site after a deadly attack there last week in which three Israeli Arab gunmen killed two Israeli police officers before they were shot and killed at the entrance to the site.

Israel has defended the detectors as a necessary security measure, one it says is used routinely at holy sites around the world.

But Muslim clerics have called for mass protests at the site on Friday — unless the detectors are removed by then. International efforts have been underway to try and stave off a major conflagration.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his security chiefs were to discuss the situation late Thursday after he returned from visits to France and Hungary. The security services are reportedly divided over what to do about the detectors, given the rising tensions surrounding the site.

Earlier in the day, Israel's public security minister, Gilad Erdan, insisted the detectors were essential to maintaining security. "The Israeli police needs these metal detectors so the security checks can give a proper response to the security considerations," he said.

Israeli security forces are on high alert ahead of Friday, when tens of thousands of Muslim worshippers typically descend on the walled compound in Jerusalem's Old City for prayers. The Palestinian militant group Hamas on Thursday called for a "day of rage" against the security measures.

Conflicts over the holy site have repeatedly triggered Israeli-Palestinian confrontations. Hamas called the initial closure of the site following last week's deadly attack a "religious war" and called on followers to attack Israelis.

Muslim clerics have been urging the faithful to skip prayers in neighborhood mosques on Friday and converge on the shrine, in an attempt to draw larger crowds. Worshippers have been asked this week to pray in the streets rather than submit to the new security procedures.

Netanyahu held urgent phone conversations with his security chiefs Wednesday and appears to be under intense international pressure to back down.

Netanyahu said Israel is in close contact with Jordan, the traditional Muslim custodian of the shrine, to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. Jordan's ruling Hashemite dynasty, with ancestry said to go back to Prophet Muhammad, derives much of its legitimacy from custodianship over the shrine. The White House

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has also called for tensions to be reduced.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also called on Israel to remove the metal detectors in a phone conversation with his counterpart Reuven Rivlin. The Israeli president called last week's attack "intolerable" while officials in Erdogan's office say he told Rivlin that violence wasn't acceptable. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Azzam Khatib, the director of the site's Muslim administration, or Waqf, said he was hopeful an arrangement could be found before the Friday prayers. "We will never ever accept any changes in the mosque, and Israel has to put an end to this crisis by removing the metal detectors," he said.

A Jerusalem resident near the site, Ruben Abu Shamsi, said he hopes "the Israeli government will be so wise to avoid the violence."

Nationalist Israeli politicians have been pressuring Netanyahu from the opposite direction.

Education Minister Naftali Bennett, leader of the pro-settler Jewish Home party, warned of an Israeli "capitulation" that "will damage Israel's power of deterrence and will endanger the lives of the visitors, the worshippers and the police officers."

After last week's deadly attack, Israel closed the site for two days for searches. It was only the third closure since Israel captured the shrine, along with east Jerusalem and other territories, in the 1967 Mideast war.

The closure drew wide condemnation from the Muslim world. Israel began opening the site gradually on Sunday.

Jews revere the 37-acre (15-hectare) raised platform as the site of their biblical temples. It is the holiest site in Judaism and the nearby Western Wall, a remnant of one of the temples, is the holiest place where Jews can pray.

Muslims believe the hilltop marks the spot from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. It is Islam's third-holiest site after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Also on Thursday, the Israeli military said it shot and killed a 26-year-old Palestinian attacker who tried to stab soldiers at a checkpoint near the West Bank city of Hebron.

In the past two years, Palestinians have killed 45 Israelis, two visiting Americans and a British tourist in stabbings, shootings and car-ramming attacks. During that same period, Israeli forces have killed more than 255 Palestinians, most of them said by Israel to be attackers while others were killed in clashes with Israeli forces.

Israel blames the violence on incitement by Palestinian political and religious leaders to commit attacks. Palestinians say the attacks stem from anger over decades of Israeli occupation of territories they claim for their future state.

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Associated Press writer Mohammed Daraghmeh in Ramallah, West Bank, contributed to this report.

## **AP-NORC Poll: Shift to political left seen on health care**

**By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and LAURIE KELLMAN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans were never too thrilled with "Obamacare" and they definitely disapprove of Republican alternatives in Congress, so what does the public want to do on health care?

A new poll suggests the country may be shifting left on this core issue, with 62 percent saying it's the federal government's responsibility to make sure that all Americans have health care coverage, while 37 percent say it is not.

The survey findings from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research indicate a change in public attitudes over the past few months, as concerns mounted about GOP legislation estimated to leave tens of millions without coverage.

"Nobody should be without insurance," said Louise Prieto of Fort Lee, New Jersey, a retiree covered by Medicare. She said she's most concerned about seniors, children and people with pre-existing medical conditions.

As recently as March, the AP-NORC poll had found Americans more ambivalent about the federal gov-

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ernment's role, with a slim 52 percent majority saying health coverage is a federal responsibility, and 47 percent saying it is not.

The survey didn't specify how the government might make sure that people have coverage, but a true guarantee entails something like the "Medicare for all" plan that was a rallying cry for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign last year. And that would involve hard-to-swallow tax increases.

"There is a significant increase in people who support universal coverage," said Robert Blendon of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, who tracks opinion trends on health care. "The impact of the debate over dropping coverage looks like it has moved (more) people to feel that the government is responsible for making sure that people have coverage."

Currently the U.S. has a hybrid system of paying for medical care, with employers, federal and state governments, and individuals sharing responsibility. Government at all levels pays close to half the annual \$3 trillion cost, and federal tax breaks support employer-provided coverage.

Employers cover more than 170 million workers, dependents, and retirees. Medicare, the federal government's flagship health care program, covers about 56 million retirees and disabled people. Medicaid, a federal-state Medicaid partnership, covers more than 70 million low-income people, from newborns, to severely disabled people, to many elderly nursing home residents. About 28 million people remain without coverage although former President Barack Obama's health care law has brought the uninsured rate to a historic low of about 9 percent.

The latest AP-NORC poll found a familiar partisan split: more than 8 in 10 Democrats said health care is a federal responsibility, compared with 3 in 10 Republicans. Political independents were more closely divided, with 54 percent saying coverage is a federal responsibility and 44 percent saying it is not.

In the poll, Americans didn't find much to like about the Republican legislation offered in Congress. Overall, only 17 percent thought they and their families would be better off; 37 percent thought they would be worse off.

On specifics, 73 percent opposed giving states the option to let insurers charge some people higher premiums because of their medical history. And 57 percent opposed allowing states to reduce the types of benefits that federal law now requires insurers to cover. Similarly, 64 percent opposed allowing states to permit some health plans to omit coverage for mental health and drug addiction treatment. There was also solid opposition to Medicaid cuts (62 percent) and overwhelming disapproval (78 percent) for allowing insurers to raise premiums for older adults beyond what is currently permitted.

Republicans have argued that allowing states to loosen such insurance rules, particularly for people who let their coverage lapse, would result in lower premiums all around. The poll also found that Americans disapprove of various strategies that the Obama law and the GOP bills rely on to nudge healthy people to buy coverage, from the current tax penalties for those who don't have insurance, to waiting periods and premium penalties proposed by Republicans.

The poll was conducted as the GOP "repeal and replace" plan floundered in the Senate during the past week. With the seven-year Republican campaign against the Affordable Care Act now verging on collapse, a strong majority said lawmakers should try to negotiate on health care.

In the poll, 8 in 10 said Republicans should approach Democrats with an offer to negotiate if the current GOP overhaul effort fails, rather than sticking with their own "repeal and replace" campaign of the past seven years. And nearly 9 in 10 said Democrats should take Republicans up on such an offer.

A foundation for common ground seems to be this: Nearly everyone wants changes to the Obama law, while hardly anyone wants to see it abolished without a substitute in place.

Among Democrats, only 22 percent actually want the ACA kept just as it is; 64 percent want it kept but with changes. Among Republicans, 27 percent want immediate repeal, while 54 percent favor repealing the law when a replacement is ready.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,019 adults was conducted July 13-17 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Associated Press polling editor Emily Swanson contributed to this report.

Online:

<http://apnorc.org/projects/Pages/Americans-Views-on-Replacing-the-ACA.aspx>

## They escaped Islamic State's bastion, but remain terrified

By SARAH EL DEEB, Associated Press

AIN ISSA, Syria (AP) — They have escaped their hold, but displaced residents of Raqqa still fear the militants of the Islamic State group, terrified they will return and seek revenge for defeats.

In one of the largest camps housing those who fled the northern Syrian city, survivors of the group's terror machine cannot shake off the horrors they witnessed in the group's self-declared capital. They described public killings, hangings, people thrown off roofs and other punishments for the slightest offenses.

For children, what they saw or heard of is engrained into their minds like horrific fairy tales.

One girl around 12 years old described how women accused of stealing were immersed in boiling oil. With an air of excitement, she acted out the women being slid into a vat. Then another girl, slightly older, interjected to correct her and said, no, she had actually seen it and just the women's hands were plunged into the oil.

A 10-year old girl chimed in, saying fighters scolded her for wearing a red T-shirt.

"We were living under unimaginable psychological pressure, God only knows," said 39-year-old Fatima Mohammed. "There was a state of terror inside every home."

Mohammed said one scene set the tone for her for the three years under IS rule: a 14-year old who had been accused of theft begging for his life as a militant raised a sharp knife over his head in a public square.

"He kept saying I am innocent," she said. The boy tried to fend off the knife with his hands, she said, then the fighter finally shot him twice in the head.

"I could not bear it anymore," she said.

The next time a young man tried to break away from the group's grip, Mohammed risked it all to save him, and helped him escape.

Nearly a dozen people spoke at the camp in Ain Issa, a town about 50 kilometers (31 miles) north of Raqqa. Most of those asked to be identified by their first name or no name at all, fearing IS retaliation against themselves or their families. Most of them fled within the past three months as U.S.-backed Syrian fighters have battled their way into Raqqa.

The Islamic State group enforced its radically bloody version of religious rule across the so-called "caliphate" it declared in Iraq and Syria. Iraq's larger Mosul and Syria's more resource-rich Deir el-Zour were important administrative and economic hubs; but Raqqa stood out as the model where the group sought to impose most purely its stringent vision of "public morality," interfering in the smallest details of people's lives.

The resulting terror has been entrenched in the local population. The escaped residents said that many of the Islamic State group's members were fellow Raqqans. They said they feared IS members could be among the displaced people and could threaten them or their loved ones.

A resident who asked only to be identified by his first name, Abdullah, said he survived IS rule by "toeing a straight line."

"When you see a (person) being beheaded in front of you, won't you be scared?" Abdullah said. He said many people, including him, had expected good things from a group that said it would observe religion and mete out justice. It was a year before he lost faith in them.

Now he fears that Raqqa residents who joined IS will seek vengeance against those who turned against the group. "Many people are still with them," he said. "They have a very strong security apparatus." He fears for relatives living in villages closer to Raqqa than Ain Issa where the militants could return.

The United Nations estimates that about 190,000 residents of Raqqa province have been displaced since

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April, including about 20,000 since the operation to seize the provincial capital began in early June. Most of the displaced stay within Raqqa province.

Abdel-Meguid Suleiman, a father of four who got to the camp only days earlier, said he didn't have the means to pay for smugglers to leave Raqqa, where he worked as a day laborer.

"It was like a dream," he said joyously, describing his escape, crossing the Euphrates River with his children and extended family to safety amid militant's sniper fire. A senior IS member was his neighbor and told him to flee the city or he would have to execute him.

But for him, the group has the terrifying air of invincibility. "It will be almost impossible to penetrate Raqqa," he said of the U.S.-backed assault on the city. "They have made very tight reinforcement."

One woman who covered her face as she spoke to the AP joined a crowd that gathered to extoll the group's horrors.

Halima al-Hamouda, a 32-year-old mother of four, said her then-12-year-old daughter was harassed by an IS nurse who asked her to marry a fighter of the group. Her son, now 12, was taken to the police station for wearing jeans and he and his father reprimanded. She herself was flogged for showing her hands, breaking rules that she cover from head to toe in dark colors.

"It was a man that carried out the 20 lashes," she recalled, bristling at how she had to bend before him to beat her back.

But it was the story of her neighbors that broke her heart.

She said a boy was thrown off the roof after another neighbor reported him as being gay to the IS's morality police. The boy's father is now working to save money to return to Raqqa to get his vengeance against the neighbor, she said.

"He was a beautiful and wise 13 year-old boy," she said.

## **APNewsBreak: Claims of human rights abuses in Hawaii fleet**

**By CALEB JONES, Associated Press**

HONOLULU (AP) — A human rights complaint has been filed with an international commission to investigate claims of human rights violations in Hawaii's commercial fishing industry.

Turtle Island Restoration Network told The Associated Press on Wednesday that they filed the complaint last week with the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. The filing asks the panel to determine the responsibility of the U.S. for human rights abuses against foreign workers in Hawaii's longline fishing fleet.

An Associated Press investigation into the seafood industry revealed that hundreds of men are confined to Hawaii boats that operate due to a federal loophole that exempts the foreign fishermen from most basic labor protections.

Many come from impoverished Southeast Asian and Pacific nations to take the jobs, which can pay as little as 70 cents an hour.

The fleet catches \$110 million worth of luxury seafood annually.

The petition, which the Pacific Alliance to Stop Slavery and Ocean Defenders Alliance joined, was filed on July 13 with the agency that can make non-binding recommendations to government officials and policymakers.

The Inter-American Human Rights Commission is an autonomous body of the Organization of American States, which works to protect human rights in the hemisphere. The U.S. is a member of that organization.

"Hawaii's longline fishery operates in a void of regulation. Government at the state and federal level is failing to ensure even the most basic human rights for these workers," said Cassie Burdyslaw, advocacy and policy director for the Turtle Island group.

Since initial reports, little has changed in the industry that provides ahi tuna and other fish to American and overseas consumers at a premium price.

"The lack of action taken to address ongoing human rights abuses acts as a tacit approval of slave-like working conditions to provide luxury seafood to wealthy United States citizens," the petition says.

Two Hawaii lawmakers introduced measures to create more oversight, but they failed. Both proposals

aimed to find ways to get more information about what's happening on the boats and to catch potential problems.

"The lobby was out full force to kill this bill, just as I expected," said state Rep. Kaniela Ing, who introduced one of the measures. "It's difficult because there's very few advocacy organizations for these sorts of migrant workers, so their voice is not as loud as the moneyed lobby behind the longline guys."

In written testimony submitted during legislative hearings, Jim Cook and Sean Martin of the Hawaii Longline Association argued that foreign fishermen "possess legal standing and have legal recourse."

However, U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents now stamp "Refused" on every fisherman's landing permit. That means they are technically not allowed to set foot on U.S. soil, customs officials said. The state requires fishermen to be legally admitted to the U.S. to get fishing licenses.

The men are not permitted to fly into the country because they do not have visas and must instead arrive by boat.

Attempts to contact Cook and Martin were unsuccessful Wednesday.

## Trump administration pulls health law help in 18 cities

By CARLA K. JOHNSON, AP Medical Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration has ended Affordable Care Act contracts that brought assistance into libraries, businesses and urban neighborhoods in 18 cities, meaning shoppers on the insurance exchanges will have fewer places to turn for help signing up for coverage.

Community groups say the move, announced to them by contractors last week, will make it even more difficult to enroll the uninsured and help people already covered re-enroll or shop for a new policy. That's already a concern because of consumer confusion stemming from the political wrangling in Washington and a shorter enrollment period. People will have 45 days to shop for 2018 coverage, starting Nov. 1 and ending Dec. 15. In previous years, they had twice that much time.

Some see it as another attempt to undermine the health law's marketplaces by a president who has suggested he should let "Obamacare" fail. The administration, earlier this year, pulled paid advertising for the sign-up website HealthCare.gov, prompting an inquiry by a federal inspector general into that decision and whether it hurt sign-ups.

Now insurers and advocates are concerned that the administration could further destabilize the marketplaces where people shop for coverage by not promoting them or not enforcing the mandate compelling people to get coverage. The administration has already threatened to withhold payments to insurers to help people afford care, which would prompt insurers to sharply increase prices.

"There's a clear pattern of the administration trying to undermine and sabotage the Affordable Care Act," said Elizabeth Hagan, associate director of coverage initiatives for the liberal advocacy group Families USA. "It's not letting the law fail, it's making the law fail."

Two companies — McLean, Virginia-based Cognosante LLC and Falls Church, Virginia-based CSRA Inc. — will no longer help with the sign-ups following a decision by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services officials not to renew a final option year of the vendors' contracts. The contracts, awarded in 2013, were never meant to be long term, said CMS spokeswoman Jane Norris in an email.

"These contracts were intended to help CMS provide temporary, in-person enrollment support during the early years" of the exchanges, Norris said. Other federally funded help with enrollment will continue, she said, including a year-round call center and grant-funded navigator programs. The existing program is "robust" and "we have the on-the-ground resources necessary" in key cities, Norris said.

But community advocates expected the vendors' help for at least another year. "It has our heads spinning about how to meet the needs in communities," said Inna Rubin of United Way of Metro Chicago, who helps run an Illinois health access coalition.

CSRA's current \$12.8 million contract expires Aug. 29. Cognosante's \$9.6 million contract expires the same date.

Together, they assisted 14,500 enrollments, far less than 1 percent of the 9.2 million people who signed



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up through HealthCare.gov, the insurance marketplace serving most states. But some advocates said the groups focused on the healthy, young adults needed to keep the insurance markets stable and prices down.

During the most recent open enrollment period, they operated in the Texas cities of Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Austin, McAllen and El Paso; the Florida cities of Miami, Tampa and Orlando; Atlanta; northern New Jersey; Phoenix; Philadelphia; Indianapolis; New Orleans; Charlotte, North Carolina; Cleveland and Chicago.

The insurance exchanges, accessed by customers through the federal HealthCare.gov or state-run sites, are a way for people to compare and shop for insurance coverage. The health law included grant money for community organizations to train people to help consumers apply for coverage, answer questions and explain differences between the insurance policies offered.

In Illinois, CSRA hired about a dozen enrollment workers to supplement a small enrollment workforce already in the state, Rubin said. The company operated a storefront enrollment center in a Chicago neighborhood from November through April.

"It was a large room in a retail strip mall near public transit with stations set up where people could come in and sit down" with an enrollment worker, Rubin said.

CSRA spokesman Tom Doheny in an email said the company "is proud of the work we have accomplished under this contract." He referred other questions to federal officials.

Cognosante worked on enrollment in nine cities in seven states, according to a June 6 post on the company's website. The work included helping "more than 15,000 Texas consumers" and staffing locations "such as public libraries and local business offices." A Cognosante spokeswoman referred questions to federal officials.

The health care debate in Congress has many consumers questioning whether "Obamacare" still exists, community advocates said.

"What is the goal of the Trump administration here? Is it to help people? Or to undermine the Affordable Care Act?" said Rob Restuccia, executive director of Boston-based Community Catalyst, a group trying to preserve the health care law.

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Follow AP Medical Writer Carla K. Johnson on Twitter: @CarlaKJohnson

## Power-sharing deal between former foes taking shape in Gaza

By FARES AKRAM and MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH, Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — A power-sharing deal between two former arch foes is slowly taking shape in Gaza and could lead to big changes in the Hamas-ruled territory, including an easing of a decade-long border blockade.

In the latest sign that the Egypt-backed understandings are moving forward, Hamas permitted more than 2,000 supporters of its former nemesis, Mohammed Dahlan, to stage a rally in Gaza City on Thursday. They held up banners with large photos of the ex-Gaza strongman and signs reading, "Thank you, Dahlan."

Dahlan backers also opened an office in Gaza last month as a springboard for political activity and began disbursing \$2 million in Dahlan-procured aid from the United Arab Emirates to Gaza's poor.

All involved appear to benefit from the new deal for Gaza, described in detail by key players.

— Egypt, which is battling Islamic extremist insurgents in the Sinai Peninsula next to Gaza, hopes to contain the Islamic militant Hamas through new security arrangements.

— Dahlan, forced into exile after falling out with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2010, is poised to launch a comeback and advance his Palestinian leadership ambitions.

— Hamas gets a chance to prolong its rule with a promised easing of Gaza's stifling border blockade. Egypt and Israel had imposed the closure after Hamas seized Gaza in a violent 2007 takeover that included battles with forces loyal to Dahlan.

The three-way agreement aims to revive Gaza's battered economy and restore a sense of normalcy for 2 million Gazans, who have largely been barred from travel and trade for the past decade and have endured rolling power cuts, most recently of up to 20 hours a day.

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Yet a stable Palestinian "mini-state" in Gaza could undermine long-standing Palestinian ambitions to set up an entity that is also meant to include the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Israel, which captured those territories in the 1967 Mideast war, withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but keeps a tight grip on the rest.

Abbas, who administers autonomous West Bank enclaves, has tried to negotiate a broader statehood deal with Israel, but his internationally backed efforts ran aground almost a decade ago, in part because of continued Israeli settlement expansion in east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Israel's hard-line government has said it would not withdraw to the pre-1967 lines in the West Bank or give up Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

If Gaza stabilizes, Israel could argue that Palestinians already have a state there and face less international pressure to negotiate a broader peace deal. The Trump administration promised to try to revive statehood negotiations, but expectations are low and there's no sign the U.S. found a way to break the long-standing diplomatic impasse.

"The expected changes in Gaza are posing a big threat to the Palestinian national project," said analyst Ali Jerbawi, a former minister in Abbas' self-rule government.

The emerging Dahlan-Hamas agreement was made possible, in part, by the election of Yehiyeh Sinwar as the new Hamas chief in Gaza in March.

Dahlan, 55, and Sinwar, 54, have known each other since boyhood. Both grew up in the same neighborhood of southern Gaza's Khan Younis refugee camp, attended the same U.N. school and later the territory's Islamic University, said Ahmed Yousef, a former Hamas official who also grew up in southern Gaza.

Their paths diverged when they joined rival political factions, Hamas and Fatah, where both became known for their ruthlessness.

Sinwar helped establish the Hamas military wing in the late 1980s, while Dahlan rose through the ranks of Fatah, becoming chief of a feared Gaza security service that used to shave heads of Hamas prisoners to humiliate them.

Rumors of rapprochement began circulating in late spring. By early June, delegations led by Dahlan and Sinwar were negotiating in Egypt, and participants said the two men established an easy rapport. The recent shift of Hamas' power from exile in Qatar to Gaza, a result of leadership elections, also helped the deal by speeding up decision-making.

Hamas spokesman Salah Bardaweel said this week that the deal with Dahlan and Egypt is moving forward.

Egypt has begun sending fuel to Gaza's only power-plant, helping ease a debilitating electricity shortage.

Hamas, meanwhile, has been clearing brush to create a security buffer zone on the Gaza side of the border, and pledged not to give refuge to anti-Egypt insurgents from the Sinai.

Egypt is refurbishing the now largely closed Rafah crossing with Gaza, and is to reopen it by the fall for passengers and goods, Bardaweel said. The extent of future Rafah operations remains unclear.

Dahlan, who has strong ties with the United Arab Emirates, pledged to funnel tens of millions of dollars in Gulf aid to Gaza, Bardaweel said.

The money will be used to compensate the families of some 400 people killed in Fatah-Hamas clashes that preceded the 2007 Hamas takeover, he said. In June, a UAE-funded committee also began distributing aid to 30,000 needy families from a \$2 million fund.

It remains unclear to what extent Dahlan would be involved in governing Gaza. Hamas will remain in charge of the security forces, while Dahlan is to serve as Gaza's advocate abroad.

Dahlan has no plans for now to settle in Gaza. However, his top lieutenants are to return to Gaza as early as next week and join those who remained in rebuilding his political organization.

Last month, they opened a new headquarters in Gaza City. During a visit Wednesday, the office was still sparsely furnished, lacking phones and computers.

Hamas and Dahlan's supporters will also try to revive the Palestinian parliament, defunct since 2007, in hopes of boosting their political legitimacy.

The 82-year-old Abbas has been watching the developments with alarm, seeking reassurances last week from Egypt in a hastily arranged trip to Cairo. If the deal goes forward, it would further undercut Abbas'

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claim that he represents all Palestinians.

Despite the apparent progress, both sides are cautious, taking small steps.

"We and Hamas are political rivals, but at the same time, we have common ground," said Sufian Abu Zaydeh, a pro-Dahlan lawmaker.

"There are obstacles on the ground, but we have to kick-start the reconciliation and cooperation to face the tough problems in Gaza," he said. "We are making real progress."

<sup>—</sup>Daraghmeah reported from Ramallah, West Bank. Associated Press writer Karin Laub in the West Bank contributed to this report.

## Ryan Seacrest back as host of 'Idol' when it returns on ABC

By FRAZIER MOORE, AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Seacrest in!

Ryan Seacrest will be back hosting "American Idol" when it returns for its first season on ABC. Kelly Ripa made the announcement on Thursday's "Live with Kelly and Ryan," which she has co-hosted with Seacrest since he joined her in May.

"I am happy to confirm ... that Ryan Seacrest is returning as the host of 'American Idol,'" said Ripa as the studio audience whooped.

Seacrest said he was excited to be doing it again.

"I don't know if you've ever been in a 15-year relationship and then, for a reason that you really don't know, you break up," he said. "I thought, 'Gosh, it would be great to get back together at some point.'"

Seacrest had a grand history with "Idol" during its smash-hit run on Fox from 2002 through 2016. Reclaiming that job now gives him an additional role in the Disney family, which owns ABC and produces the syndicated "Live."

His potential return to "Idol" had sparked much speculation since ABC announced in May that it would revive the talent competition. The program airs from Los Angeles and "Live" airs weekday mornings from New York. But the 42-year-old Seacrest is no stranger to a packed work schedule and cross-country flights.

"You can have all the tickets you want," he told Ripa, "and you can come back and forth with me any weekend."

Seacrest will also continue his syndicated Los Angeles morning-drive-time radio show, as well as a nationally syndicated Top 40 radio show, from his iHeartMedia studio in the same Manhattan complex where "Live" is telecast. He also hosts and executive produces ABC's annual "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest," and is a busy producer of series in which he doesn't appear, including "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" and its many spin-offs.

ABC Entertainment President Channing Dungey called Seacrest's talent "limitless, and I can't think of a more appropriate person to honor the 'Idol' legacy as it takes on new life than the man who has been there through it all."

On Fox, "Idol" dominated TV in the 2000s and minted stars like Carrie Underwood, Jennifer Hudson and Kelly Clarkson, while making its judges, such as Randy Jackson and Simon Cowell, household names. It was the No. 1 series for nine years, peaking with 30 million viewers each episode in 2006. But by its last season the average audience had dipped to 11 million and skewed older, and NBC's "The Voice" surpassed it in popularity. Fox eliminated it. Even so, in today's television world, an audience of 11 million would rank it among TV's top 20 shows, a fact that clearly didn't escape ABC's notice.

On the final Fox edition, a hopeful Seacrest told viewers, "Goodbye — for now."

The nationwide search for the first ABC-aired "Idol" begins next month. ABC has not announced a premiere date.

## By embracing Russia, Trump bumps up against top advisers

By VIVIAN SALAMA, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's persistent overtures toward Russia are placing him increasingly at odds with his national security and foreign policy advisers, who have long urged a more cautious approach to dealing with the foreign adversary.

The uneasy dynamic between the president and top aides has been exacerbated by the revelation this week of an extended dinner conversation between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the recent summit in Germany. The previously undisclosed conversation, which occurred a few hours after their official meeting, raised red flags with advisers already concerned by the president's tendency to shun protocol and press ahead with outreach toward Russia, according to two U.S. officials and three top foreign officials.

The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss private conversations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Deep divisions are increasingly apparent within the administration on the best way to approach Moscow in the midst of U.S. investigations into Russian meddling in the American presidential election. Trump has repeatedly cast doubt on the conclusion of U.S. intelligence agencies that the Russian government sought to tip the election in his favor and has dismissed investigations into the possibility of collusion between his campaign and Moscow as a "witch hunt."

Meanwhile, he has pushed for cooperation between Moscow and Washington on various matters, including the raging conflict in Syria.

But some top aides, including National Security Adviser Gen. H.R. McMaster, have been warning that Putin is not to be trusted. An intelligence officer-turned-politician, Putin is known for steering discussions in his own favor.

The three foreign officials who have spoken with top Trump advisers described a disconnect, or "mixed signals," between Trump and his team over Russia, highlighting a lack of a clear policy. U.S. officials echoed that sentiment, with one saying diplomats and intelligence officials were "dumbfounded" by the president's approach, particularly given the evidence of Russia's election meddling.

McMaster expressed his uneasiness over Trump's course to foreign officials during the lead-up to his trip to Germany. The general specifically said he had reservations about Trump's decision to hold an Oval Office meeting in May with top Russian diplomats and with the president's reluctance to speak out against Russian aggression in Europe, according to the three foreign officials.

McMaster and other national security aides also advised the president against holding an official bilateral meeting with Putin.

In a highly unusual move, McMaster did not attend the meeting with Putin. Only Trump, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and a translator made up the U.S. side.

Meetings with such critical national security implications typically include a broader team, including the national security adviser and a regional specialist from the National Security Council — in this case, the head of the Russia directorate, a position recently filled by Russia expert Fiona Hill.

Foreign and U.S. officials said the Russians recommended that a note taker be present in the bare-bones official meeting. But Trump, who has repeatedly expressed concern over leaks, refused, instead relying on Tillerson to document the meeting. The session was scheduled for 30 minutes but stretched to more than two hours.

The White House did not respond to questions about Trump's refusal to have a note taker for his meeting with Putin, or about whether McMaster communicated his concerns to the president.

The formalities and discipline of diplomacy have been a rough fit for Trump, whose reputation as a businessman was that of a freewheeling, impulsive dealmaker.

As for his dinnertime conversation with Putin, unofficial discussions between world leaders over dinner do not violate protocol. But it is unusual and can be risky for a president to speak directly to Putin without a U.S. translator present. He was forced to rely on Russia's interpreter for the discussion, which report-

edly went on for nearly an hour.

"The Russian interpreter probably interpreted very clearly, but the problem is there's no record of the discussion on the American side," said Steven Pifer, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine. It would have been wise for Trump to have his interpreter take notes so there would be a record, he said.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders was dismissive of the controversy surrounding the Trump-Putin dinner chat, blaming it on a "Russia fever" gripping the media.

She said other presidents, including Barack Obama, had similar informal conversations.

"To act as if this were some secret is absolutely absurd," she said.

Trump addressed his earlier, official meeting with Putin in an interview with reporters last week onboard Air Force One. The president said he repeatedly confronted Putin on reports of Russia's election meddling — interference that Putin staunchly denies. But Trump would not say whether he believed Putin's denials, as the Russian president claimed.

White House officials said the public may never know what was discussed between Putin and Trump over dinner. But advisers past and present said that characterizing any conversation with Putin as casual would be a mistake.

"There are no meaningless conversations between presidents," said Jeffrey Edmonds, the NSC's former Russia director.

"That's what is so divergent here," he said. "Relations have been at an all-time low because of Russian meddling in our elections and so it's hard to see how a meeting with President Putin for an hour during dinner isn't important."

\_\_\_ Associated Press writer Jon Lemire contributed to this report.

## What drug-dealing 'darknet' sites have in common with eBay

By ANICK JESDANUN, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — AlphaBay, the now-shuttered online marketplace that authorities say traded in illegal drugs, firearms and counterfeit goods, wasn't all that different from any other e-commerce site, court documents show.

Not only did it work hard to match buyers and sellers and to stamp out fraud, it offered dispute-resolution services when things went awry and kept a public-relations manager to promote the site to new users.

Of course, AlphaBay was no eBay. It went to great lengths to hide the identities of its vendors and customers, and it promoted money-laundering services to mask the flow of bitcoin and other digital currencies from prying eyes.

Such "darknet" sites operate in an anonymity-friendly internet netherworld that's inaccessible to ordinary browsers. If you've ever found yourself wondering just how they really work, a U.S. criminal case unveiled Thursday offers an eye-opening look.

### WHAT IS ALPHABAY?

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions calls it the largest darknet marketplace shut down in a sting. Darknet refers to the use of various technologies to mask the site's operators and users, allowing buyers and sellers to connect anonymously — to each other and to law enforcement.

Authorities say the site trafficked drugs such as heroin and cocaine, fake and stolen IDs, computer hacking tools, firearms and counterfeit goods. The site also facilitated services such as money laundering and swatting — the practice of making bomb threats and other false reports to law enforcement, usually to harass perceived enemies.

AlphaBay went so far as to hire scam watchers to monitor and quash scams on the site. It had a public-relations manager responsible for outreach to users and the broader illicit-trade community. The site also employed moderators to resolve disputes and refund payments when necessary.

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## STAYING HIDDEN

AlphaBay hid its tracks with Tor, a network of thousands of computers run by volunteers. With Tor, traffic gets relayed through several computers. At each stop, identifying information is stripped, so that no single computer knows the full chain. It would be like one person passing on a message to the next, and so on. The 10th person would have no clue who the first eight people are.

Tor has a number of legitimate uses. Human rights advocates, for instance, can use it to communicate inside authoritarian countries. But Tor is also popular for trading goods that eBay and other legitimate marketplaces won't touch.

To further promote secrecy, AlphaBay accepted only digital currencies such as bitcoin and monero. In doing so, participants skirted reporting requirements that come when moving \$10,000 or more in a single transaction. While bitcoin can be traced when converted back to regular currencies, AlphaBay offered "mixing and tumbling services" to shuffle bitcoin through several accounts before the conversion.

Vendors were also required to use encryption for all communications to keep them safe from spies.

## MONEY MATTERS

Buyers funded their accounts with digital currencies, similar to loading an Amazon gift card with money. When making a purchase, buyers moved money from their accounts to an escrow. The payment was released to sellers once buyers confirmed receipt of the goods.

AlphaBay took a 2 percent to 4 percent commission, and that added up. The suspect behind the site, Alexandre Cazes, had amassed a fortune of \$23 million. As part of the case, authorities sought the forfeiture of properties in Thailand, bank accounts and four vehicles, including a Lamborghini and a Porsche.

## **Apollo 11 bag laced with moon dust sells for \$1.8 million**

NEW YORK (AP) — A bag containing traces of moon dust sold for \$1.8 million at an auction on Thursday following a galactic court battle.

The collection bag, used by astronaut Neil Armstrong during the first manned mission to the moon in 1969, was sold at a Sotheby's auction of items related to space voyages. The buyer declined to be identified. The pre-sale estimate was \$2 million to \$4 million.

The artifact from the Apollo 11 mission had been misidentified and sold at an online government auction, and NASA had fought to get it back. But in December a federal judge ruled that it legally belonged to a Chicago-area woman who bought it in 2015 for \$995.

Sotheby's declined to identify the seller. However, details of the 2015 purchase were made public during the court case.

Investigators unknowingly hit the moon mother lode in 2003 while searching the garage of a man later convicted of stealing and selling museum artifacts, including some that were on loan from NASA.

The 12-by-8½-inch (30-by-20-centimeter) bag was misidentified and sold at an online government auction. Nancy Carlson, of Inverness, Illinois, got an ordinary-looking bag made of white Beta cloth and polyester with rubberized nylon and a brass zipper.

Carlson, a collector, knew the bag had been used in a space flight, but she didn't know which one. She sent it to NASA for testing, and the government agency, discovering its importance, fought to keep it.

The artifact "belongs to the American people," NASA said then.

U.S. District Judge J. Thomas Marten, in Wichita, Kansas, said that while it shouldn't have gone up for auction he didn't have the authority to reverse the sale. He ordered the government to return it.

The judge said the importance and desirability of the bag stemmed solely from the efforts of NASA employees whose "amazing technical achievements, skill and courage in landing astronauts on the moon and returning them safely have not been replicated in the almost half a century since the Apollo 11 landing."

When it comes to moon landings, Thursday's auction is far from the final frontier.

A group called For All Moonkind Inc. mentioned the moon bag this week while campaigning for "measures to preserve and protect the six Apollo lunar landing sites." It plans to take up the issue next month.

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at the Starship Congress 2017 in California.

Also getting out-of-this-world interest at the auction was the Flown Apollo 13 Flight Plan, with handwritten notations by all three crew members. It sold to an online bidder for \$275,000, well above its pre-sale estimate high of \$40,000.

## Texas company recalls coffee with Viagra-like substance

GRAND PRAIRIE, Texas (AP) — A Texas coffee company is recalling one of its roasts because it was making some men a bit too excited.

Bestherbs Coffee LLC issued the voluntary recall for its New of Kopi Jantan Tradisional Natural Herbs Coffee after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration found it contains desmethyl carbodenafil, which is similar to sildenafil in the erectile dysfunction drug Viagra.

Bestherbs, which is based in the Dallas suburb of Grand Prairie, sold the coffee nationwide from July 2014 through June 2016 on various websites and in some retail stores. Albert Yee, who identified himself as the product importer, said he did not know how much of the product was recalled after distribution stopped more than a year ago.

Some customers were buying it to help in the bedroom, but FDA spokeswoman Lyndsay Meyer said it is not clear if the product works like Viagra.

No injuries have been reported, but the FDA says the undeclared ingredient could interact with prescription medicine and lower blood pressure to dangerous levels. The product also contains undeclared milk, which could cause a life-threatening reaction to consumers with milk allergies.

The FDA advised customers not to purchase the coffee last year because of the Viagra-like ingredient. The notification was intended to inform the public of foods with hidden drugs and chemicals that are often represented as a natural way to promote sexual enhancement, weight loss and body building, according to the FDA warning.

Bestherbs is notifying customers of the recall and offering a full refund for products returned by mail.

## Alexa, turn up my Kenmore AC; Sears cuts a deal with Amazon

HOFFMAN ESTATES, Ill. (AP) — Sears will begin selling its appliances on Amazon.com, including smart appliances that can be synced with Amazon's voice assistant, Alexa.

The announcement Thursday sent shares of Sears soaring almost 11 percent. The tie-up with the internet behemoth could give shares of the storied retailer one of its biggest one-day percentage gains ever.

Sears, which also owns Kmart, said that its Kenmore Smart appliances will be fully integrated with Amazon's Alexa, allowing users to control things like air conditioners through voice commands.

"The launch of Kenmore products on Amazon.com will significantly expand the distribution and availability of the Kenmore brand in the U.S.," Sears Chairman and CEO Edward Lampert said in a company release.

Sears has struggled with weak sales for years, and announced more store closings earlier this month, partly due to the emergence of Amazon.com and other internet operators. It said in March that there was "substantial doubt" it could continue as a business after years of bleeding money.

Neil Saunders, managing director of research firm GlobalData Retail, said it's a win for Sears, putting its products where customers are shopping.

Sales at existing Sears stores, a key measure of a retailer's health, have been in rapid retreat for years. "Other channels and routes to market are needed," Saunders said.

Many saw the agreement with Amazon.com as a lifeline for Sears, with the volume of trading company shares enormous on Thursday.

And the law of action-reaction is almost always visible when Amazon.com is in the mix.

Shares of other major retailers that sell appliances, Best Buy, Home Depot and Lowe's, fell between 4 percent and 6 percent.

The agreement with Seattle-based Amazon goes beyond the point of sale for Sears. Also part of the deal is delivery, installation and the service work that comes with product warranties, which will be provided

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by Sears Home Services.

While Saunders doesn't think the deal represents a big shift for the retail sector, he said that it does illustrate how retailers must adapt and offer goods through multiple channels if they want to thrive. He believes others are already scrambling to do so.

Shares of Sears Holdings Corp., based in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, just outside of Chicago, jumped 92 cents to close at \$9.60.

## Asian shares meander as ECB, BOJ hold monetary policy steady

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares were mixed Friday in muted trading after the European Central Bank announced no changes to its stimulus policies.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 slipped 0.2 percent to 20,109.57 while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.2 percent to 5,750.70. South Korea's Kospi rose 0.2 percent to 2,446.86. Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 0.2 percent to 26,702.84. The Shanghai Composite slipped 0.2 percent at 3,249.90.

EUROPE FACTOR: Europe's central bank maintained its current policies and ECB President Mario Draghi said the bank hasn't even set a date for considering changes. Still, foreign exchange markets reacted by pushing the euro higher. That followed the Bank of Japan's decision Thursday to keep its monetary policy unchanged, while pushing back its expected time frame for achieving its 2 percent inflation target to 2019.

WALL STREET: The Standard & Poor's 500 index slipped at the finish, losing 0.38 points to 2,473.45. The Dow Jones industrial average fell 28.97 points, or 0.1 percent to 21,611.78. The Nasdaq composite rose 0.1 percent to a record high of 6,390.

THE QUOTE: "The ongoing rally in the euro was the most significant feature of the international market landscape last night. However, growing nervousness over U.S. politics and weak commodity prices has set a soft tone for this morning's market open," Ric Spooner of CMC Markets said in a commentary.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude gained 3 cents to \$46.95 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It lost 40 cents on Thursday, to \$46.92. Brent crude, the standard for international oil prices, rose 5 cents to \$49.35 a barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The dollar edged down to 111.97 yen from 112.12 yen. The euro jumped to \$ 1.1629 from \$1.1507.

\_\_\_ Follow Yuri Kageyama on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

Her work can be found at <https://www.apnews.com/search/yuri%20kageyama>

## Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 21, the 202nd day of 2017. There are 163 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 21, 1925, the so-called "Monkey Trial" ended in Dayton, Tennessee, with John T. Scopes found guilty of violating state law for teaching Darwin's Theory of Evolution. (The conviction was later overturned on a technicality.)

On this date:

In 1773, Pope Clement XIV issued an order suppressing the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits. (The Society was restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814.)

In 1861, during the Civil War, the first Battle of Bull Run was fought at Manassas, Virginia, resulting in a Confederate victory.

In 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed an executive order establishing the Veterans Administration (later the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs).

In 1944, American forces landed on Guam during World War II, capturing it from the Japanese some three weeks later. The Democratic national convention in Chicago nominated Sen. Harry S. Truman to be



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vice president.

In 1949, the U.S. Senate ratified the North Atlantic Treaty.

In 1955, during a summit in Geneva, President Dwight D. Eisenhower presented his "open skies" proposal under which the U.S. and the Soviet Union would trade information on each other's military facilities and allow aerial reconnaissance. (The Soviets rejected the proposal.)

In 1961, Capt. Virgil "Gus" Grissom became the second American to rocket into a sub-orbital pattern around the Earth, flying aboard the Liberty Bell 7.

In 1967, actor Basil Rathbone, remembered for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes in a series of films, died in New York at age 75.

In 1973, Israeli agents in Lillehammer, Norway, killed Ahmed Bouchikhi, a Moroccan waiter, in a case of mistaken identity, apparently thinking he was an official with Black September, the group that attacked Israel's delegation at the 1972 Munich Olympics and killed 11 athletes.

In 1980, draft registration began in the United States for 19- and 20-year-old men.

In 1997, the USS Constitution, which defended the U.S. during the War of 1812, set sail under its own power for first time in 116 years, leaving its temporary anchorage at Marblehead, Massachusetts, for a one-hour voyage marking its 200th anniversary.

In 2011, the 30-year-old space shuttle program ended as Atlantis landed at Cape Canaveral, Florida, after the 135th shuttle flight.

Ten years ago: Doctors removed five polyps from President George W. Bush's colon after he temporarily transferred the powers of his office to Vice President Dick Cheney under the rarely invoked 25th Amendment. Ruediger Diedrich, one of two Germans kidnapped in southern Afghanistan on July 18, was found dead. David Beckham made his debut with the Los Angeles Galaxy in front of a sellout crowd of 27,000. (Beckham got into the exhibition game in the 78th minute of Chelsea's 1-0 victory.) "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows," the final volume of the wizard series by J.K. Rowling (ROHL'-ing), went on sale.

Five years ago: The president of the International Olympic Committee, Jacques Rogge (zhahk ROH'-geh), rejected the latest calls for a minute of silence for the Israeli victims of the 1972 Munich massacre at the opening ceremony of the London Olympics. Staff Sgt. Luis Walker, an Air Force training instructor at Lackland Air Force base in San Antonio, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for crimes that included rape and sexual assault. (Walker died in August 2014.)

One year ago: Donald Trump accepted the GOP presidential nomination with a speech in which he pledged to cheering Republicans and still-skeptical voters that as president, he would restore the safety they feared they were losing, strictly curb immigration and save the nation from Hillary Clinton's record of "death, destruction, terrorism and weakness." The NBA moved the 2017 All-Star Game out of Charlotte because of its objections to a North Carolina law that limited anti-discrimination protections for lesbian, gay and transgender people. Former NFL head coach Dennis Green, 67, died in San Diego.

Today's Birthdays: Movie director Norman Jewison is 91. Actor David Downing is 74. Actor Leigh Lawson is 74. Actor Wendell Burton is 70. Singer Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens) is 69. Cartoonist Garry Trudeau is 69. Actor Jamey Sheridan is 66. Rock singer-musician Eric Bazilian (The Hooters) is 64. Comedian Jon Lovitz is 60. Actor Lance Guest is 57. Actor Matt Mulhern is 57. Comedian Greg Behrendt is 54. Rock musician Koen Lieckens (K's Choice) is 51. White House budget director Mick Mulvaney is 50. Soccer player Brandi Chastain is 49. Rock singer Emerson Hart is 48. Rock-soul singer Michael Fitzpatrick (Fitz and the Tantrums) is 47. Actress Alysia Reiner is 47. Country singer Paul Brandt is 45. Christian rock musician Corey Cooper (Skillet) is 45. Actress Ali Landry is 44. Actor-comedian Steve Byrne is 43. Actor Justin Bartha is 39. Actor Josh Hartnett is 39. Contemporary Christian singer Brandon Heath is 39. Actress Sprague Grayden is 39. Reggae singer Damian Marley is 39. Country singer Brad Mates (Emerson Drive) is 39. MLB All-Star pitcher CC Sabathia is 37. Singer Blake Lewis ("American Idol") is 36. Rock musician Will Berman (MGMT) is 35. Rock musician Johan Carlsson (Carolina Liar) is 33. Actress Vanessa Lengies (LEHN'-jeez) is 32. Actor Rory Culkin is 28. Actor Jamie Waylett ("Harry Potter" films) is 28. Figure skater Rachael Flatt is 25.

Thought for Today: "Success is getting what you want; happiness is wanting what you get." — Ingrid Bergman, Swedish-born actress (1915-1982).