

Groton Daily Independent

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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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27

Senior Menu: Roast pork, mashed potatoes, squash, tomato spoon salad, carrot bar, whole wheat bread.

Olive Grove: Full Circle Golf Tourney

28

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak with gravy, baked potato, coleslaw, frosted brownie, whole wheat bread.

Olive Grove: Ferney Open

30

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.

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

31

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, broccoli, garlic toast, orange sherbet.

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

Olive Grove: Kid's Lessons

Dakota Brush

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

Get Ready for Spring With
Wash Brushes & Squeegees

397-9337

104 N. Main, Groton

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A close-up photograph of a hand holding a bouquet of small white flowers with green stems and leaves. The background is a bright, sunlit outdoor setting, possibly a field or garden, with a soft, golden glow. The hand is wearing a white sleeve. The overall mood is peaceful and inspirational.

Remember,
people will
judge you by
your
actions, not by your
intentions.

-Author Unknown

@ChickenSoupSoul
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Producers Encouraged to Share Drought Information on Drought Impact Reporter Website

BROOKINGS, S.D. - South Dakota producers are encouraged to share drought impact information through the website, droughtreporter.unl.edu.

www.Droughtreporter.unl.edu is home to the Drought Impact Reporter, a reporting feature that allows producers to report local drought impacts and conditions. The tool was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.

"The current drought has had a devastating impact on many South Dakota farmers and ranchers. We need individuals to share information on the conditions they see on their farms and ranches through the proper channels so all information can be reviewed and valuable information is not lost," said Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension State Climatologist.

As State Climatologist, Edwards provides recommendations which are utilized by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration when developing the U.S. Drought Monitor Map and assigning drought designations.

"Much of the recommendation is based on water and climate data which we as a team pull from weather stations, satellites, stream gauges and other tools. However, we also use information from impact reports, provided by landowners," Edwards said.

These impact reports are pulled from the Drought Impact Reporter website.

"It is so important that South Dakota's farmers and ranchers share information of the impact this drought is having on their land and livestock through this website," said Mike Jaspers, South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture. "The Drought Monitor can only be as accurate as the data used to write it. The more people sending in reports, the more data points the authors have to get a clear and complete picture of conditions on the ground."

For those not familiar with drought designations and why a specific designation matters to South Dakota's agriculture producers - it comes down to disaster relief funding.

A few disaster relief programs, provided through the USDA, Farm Service Agency (FSA) base eligibility on the drought designation assigned to specific counties.

"FSA does not report information to the authors of the U.S. Drought Monitor, we simply rely on the information for program purposes," explained Jamie White, Acting State Executive Director, Executive Officer, USDA-FSA, South Dakota. "For producers concerned about the integrity of the U.S. Drought Monitor, the best thing they can do is provide a complete report of weather conditions through the reporting tool designated for producers. The Drought Impact Reporter streamlines the information provided to the authors of the U.S. Drought Monitor."

More about Drought Impact Reporter

The U.S. Drought Monitor reporting tool can be found at www.droughtreporter.unl.edu under the Submit Report tab. This report allows producers to:

- Provide a written description of drought impacts on livelihood, activities, etc.;
- Select categories to show losses and gains as a result of the drought;
- Report on the duration of drought event;
- Select Affected Places - geographic areas ranging from an entire state to a small area within a state;
- Submit images that document the drought and its impact;
- Provide contact information (includes an option to keep information confidential).

For more information, including state-specific drought impact maps, visit the U. S. Drought Monitor homepage: <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/Home.aspx> .



**Back LtoR: Natalia Warrington, Alicia Davis, Nicole Marzahn, Addison Ward, Gabe Mattson
Front LtoR: Mckenna Tietz, Teagan Hanten, and Ashlynn Warrington**

Brown County 4-H Fashion Revue Results

The 2017 Brown County 4-H Fashion Revue was held Tuesday, July 25th. Primrose Retirement Community graciously offered their facility for the event. Becca Tullar and Nicholas Achen narrated, while eight youth modeled eight constructed and selected outfits.

In the early afternoon, Pat Dennert of Frederick and Diane Steinheiser of Redfield judged the models. The models were judged on the following criteria: the fit and style of the garment, as well as the accessories; the individual's modeling ability; the construction of the garment; and the garments cost and care. Each model was given a ribbon placing. Senior and junior participants will represent Brown County at the South Dakota State Fair.

RESULTS:

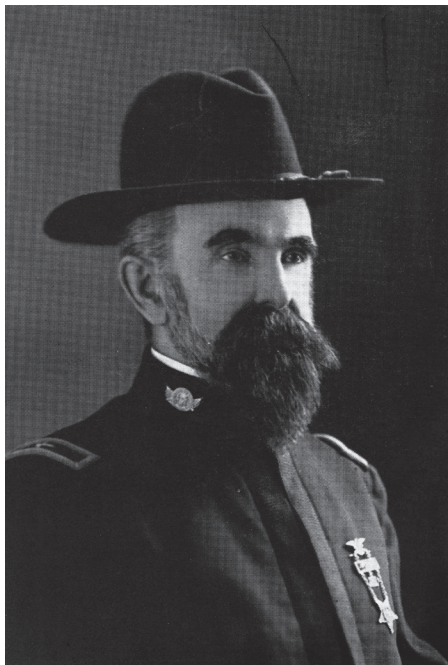
Beginners:

Purple Ribbons: Alicia Davis, Teagan Hanten, Gabe Mattson, Mckenna Tietz, Addison Ward, Natalia Warrington, and Ashlynn Warrington

Juniors: None

Senior:

Purple Ribbon: Nicole Marzahn



SOUTH DAKOTA

HISTORY & HERITAGE

The Ministry of the Rev. C.B. Clark

He was the man who got Calamity Jane to church.

Dr. Charles B. Clark preached the sermon at the funeral of Martha Jane Canary, also known as Martha Jane Burke or Calamity Jane, at the Deadwood Methodist Church on Aug. 4, 1903. Calamity Jane had died at nearby Terry on Aug. 1.

Clark was pastor of the church. According to "Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend" by James D. McLaird, Clark emphasized Calamity Jane's humanitarian acts during Deadwood's early years in the eulogy. "Echoing popular sentiment, Clark asked, 'How often amid the snows of winter did this woman find her way to the lonely cabin of the miner' to help one suffering from illness?'"

The minister's son and namesake, poet Charles Badger Clark, often lamented that his father was the person to preside over Calamity Jane's

funeral.

"My father's deeds of mercy are unnumbered, but such is the irony of human nature, he'll be remembered longest, because he buried Calamity Jane," Badger Clark was quoted as saying in articles by Helen F. Morganti.

The elder Clark did, indeed, do much more than bury the notorious woman of the West. In his 57 years as a minister, the Rev. C.B. Clark built four churches and took more than 2,000 people into the church, most of them being converts under his preaching.

"The primary job of a preacher in those days was to preach and Dr. Clark could preach. His sermons were to the point and well thought out," wrote Morganti.

In Clark's obituary in the "Journal of Dakota Conference," an unnamed minister is quoted as saying, "I think that all who heard him speak felt as I did --- that I was ashamed of every mean thing I had ever thought or done and wanted to do better. Dr. Clark loved men as he loved God; this made him a believer in them and a rare friend and sympathizer. In all the thirty-five years I was acquainted with him, I never heard him say an unkind thing of friend or foe."

Badger Clark described his father as "a man of above middle height, had a full black beard which gave him a practical aspect but which was offset by kindly crinkles around his eyes. He wore the true badge of professional men of those days, the Prince Albert coat and topped the costume with a Stetson hat, always cocked slightly to the right."

The Rev. C.B. Clark also possessed a mellow bass voice, a fluent command of English and a sunny temperament.

Clark was born around 1840 in Sauquoit, N.Y. The family moved west in 1857, finally settling at Mount Pleasant, Iowa. He attended Iowa Wesleyan University, leaving to enlist in the 25th Iowa Infantry in 1862, fighting for the Union Army in the American Civil War. The private received a shell wound to his head at the battle of Arkansas Post in 1863 and was discharged from the service.

His injury resulted in the total loss of hearing in his right ear. He returned to Iowa, resumed his studies, was ordained as a Methodist minister and became a circuit-riding minister in Iowa. A patriotic man, Clark was active in the Grand Army of the Republic, serving as president of the South Dakota department of that organization for a year.

The work and outdoor life restored Clark's strength, and he developed into an able and popular preacher,

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occupying some of the best pulpits in the Iowa conference.

Overwork took a toll on him, and, as Badger Clark put it, "doctors told him that he could remain a citizen of this world only if he dropped preaching and all the nerve-straining activities of his profession and took up outdoor work, not too heavy, for the rest of his life."

The family moved to Dakota Territory in 1883 and homesteaded four miles south of Plankinton.

The minister's health improved and he returned to his first love of preaching. He was appointed to the Methodist pastorate at Mitchell. He later became district superintendent at Mitchell and pastor at Huron. He was one of the original promoters of Dakota Wesleyan University, which conferred upon him an honorary doctor of divinity degree in 1892.

Clark accepted a transfer to Deadwood in 1898, as the health of his wife, Mary Ellen, was declining due to tuberculosis and he thought the change in altitude would benefit her. However, his wife died that October.

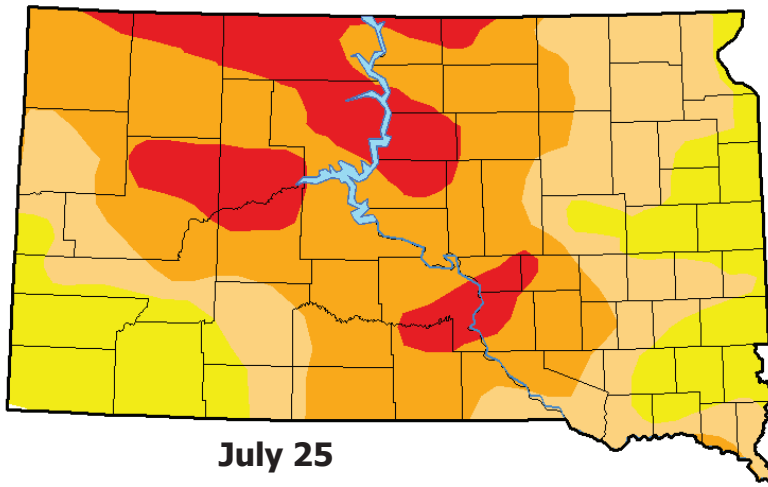
Clark married Rachel Anna Morris three years later. He closed his active ministry as chaplain at Battle Mountain Sanitarium in Hot Springs. He died in Hot Springs on June 10, 1921, and was buried in Graceland Cemetery in Mitchell.

This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at www.sdhsf.org. Contact us at info@sdhsf.org to submit a story idea.

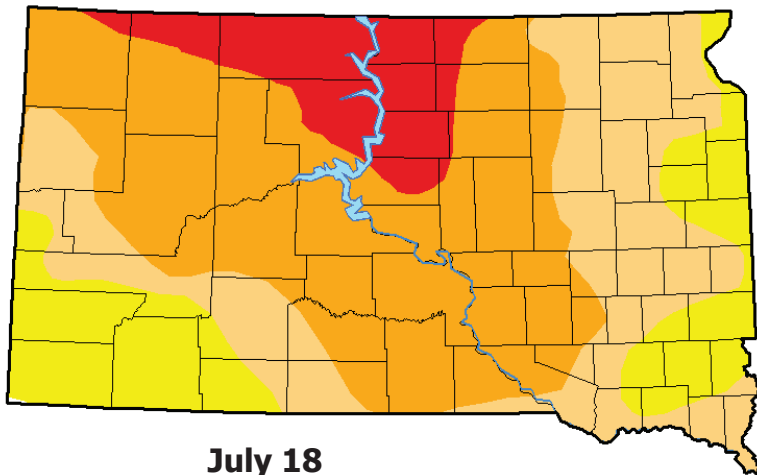
Drought Monitor

Half an inch or more of rain fell across parts of the Dakotas this week, but the rain did little to improve drought conditions, only holding off drought expansion or intensification. D0-D3 were pulled back in parts of South Dakota where rainfall amounts totaled 2 inches or more, D0 was pulled back in southeast North Dakota and southwest Minnesota, and D0-D1 were pulled back in parts of north central and south central Nebraska and north central Kansas.

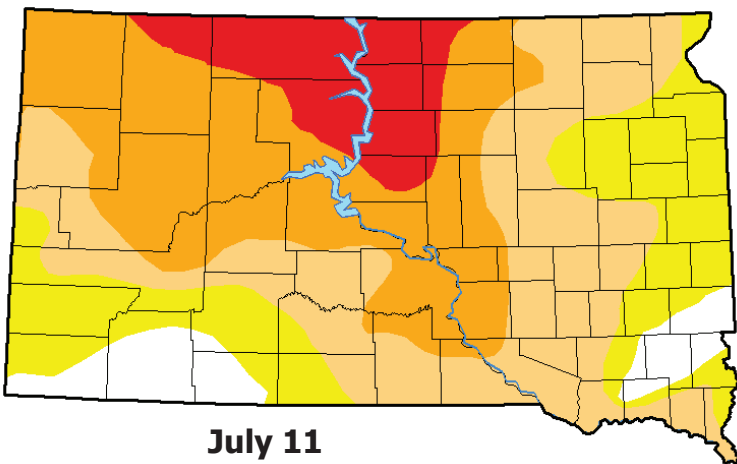
But expansion occurred in other parts of the region. Much of Montana and parts of the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas had no rain this week; some areas have been drier than normal for the last 2 to 3 months; and some drought indicators reflect dryness for the last 12 months. D3-D4 were expanded in northeast Montana, and D3 expanded in northwest South Dakota and was added in southeast South Dakota, where the Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) was consistently at those dry levels for the last 1 to 9 months. D1-D4 expanded in northwest North Dakota where the SPI was consistently at those dry levels for the last 1-6 months. D0-D2 expanded across much of Nebraska, with collateral expansion of D1-D2 in adjacent South Dakota, D1 in adjacent Iowa, and D0-D1 in southeast Wyoming, and D0 expanded in parts of eastern Kansas and northeast Colorado, due to 30-90 day precipitation deficits and high evapotranspiration caused by excessive heat. Governors provided much-needed response to the dire drought impacts. Montana Gov. Steve Bullock issued an executive order declaring a drought disaster in 28 counties and five Indian reservations in the eastern part of the state. Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts issued an emergency proclamation, allowing the state Emergency Management Agency to address unmet drought needs, particularly those related to wildfires. According to July 23rd USDA reports, 92% of the topsoil moisture and 88% of the subsoil moisture were rated short or very short in Montana, 82%/81% of the topsoil/subsoil moisture was short or very short in South Dakota, 71%/66% in Nebraska,



July 25



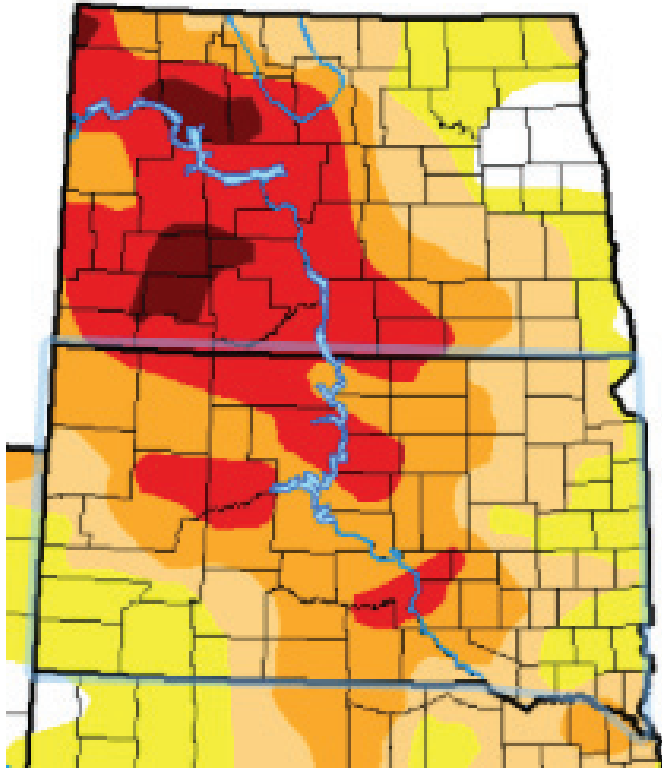
July 18



July 11

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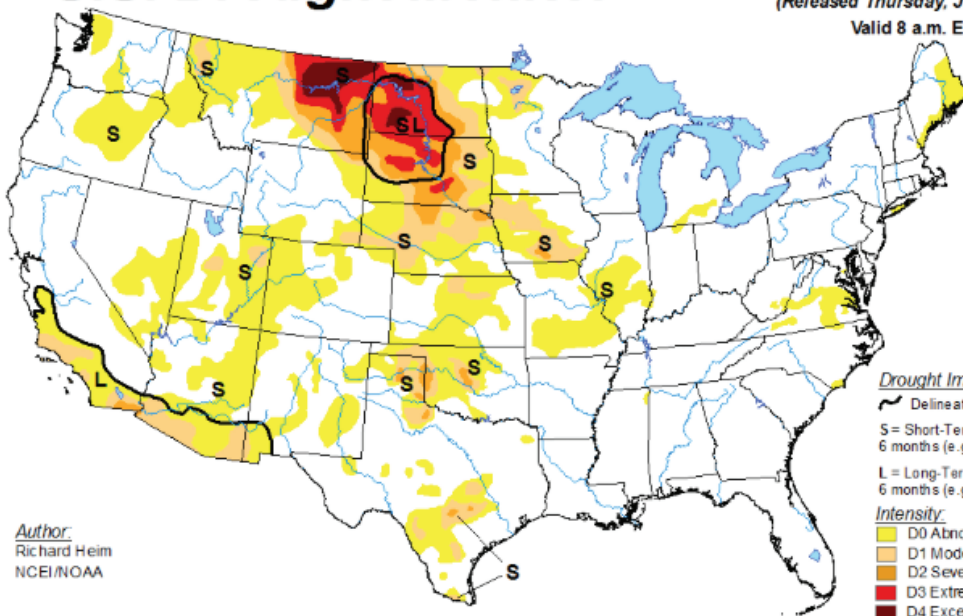
67%/62% in North Dakota, 61%/58% in Wyoming, and 45%/41% in Colorado. More than half of the pasture and rangeland were rated in poor to very poor condition in North Dakota (75%), South Dakota (73%), and Montana (56%). In South Dakota, 37% of the corn crop, 34% of soybeans, 57% of sorghum, and 76% of the spring wheat were in poor to very poor condition. In North Dakota, 23% of the corn crop and 39% of the spring wheat were in poor to very poor condition. In Montana, 55% of the spring wheat was in poor to very poor condition. According to media reports, as of July 25th, the Lodgepole Complex wildfire in Montana was the largest wildfire in the CONUS.

U.S. Drought Monitor

July 25, 2017

(Released Thursday, Jul. 27, 2017)

Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Author:
Richard Heim
NCEI/NOAA

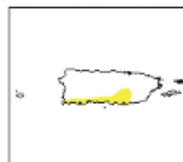
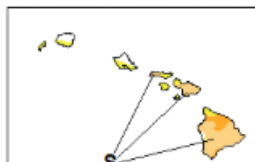
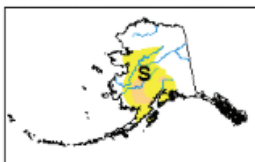
Drought Impact Types:

- ~ Delineates dominant impacts
- S = Short-Term, typically less than 6 months (e.g. agriculture, grasslands)
- L = Long-Term, typically greater than 6 months (e.g. hydrology, ecology)

Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.



<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

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Today in Weather History

July 27, 1999: Golf ball size hail and high winds destroyed hundreds of acres of crops on a farm southeast of Ipswich. Golf ball size hail and high winds caused extensive damage to the Richland Wesley Church and the pastor and associate pastor home. The hail poked numerous holes in the siding and shingles of the buildings and broke many windows. Several cars were damaged, and a large tree was also downed. An F1 tornado snapped large branches of an oak and drove them into the ground. The tornado knocked down approximately five headstones in a small cemetery and took a roof off a small outbuilding. It destroyed an empty grain bin, moved a grain auger 50 feet, and took off several large doors on a machine shed. The tornado also knocked down or snapped off numerous large trees in shelter belts and destroyed a barn and several outbuildings just north of Chelsea.

July 27, 2001: An F1 tornado damaged homes, public buildings, trees, and power lines in the town of Lennox, Lincoln County. The American Legion building had its entire front facade ripped off, and its windows shattered. Several vehicles near the building sustained major damage from flying debris, and one was lifted and dropped partly onto another vehicle. Damage to homes included holes in permanent siding, several roofs heavily damaged, windows were broken, fences blew down, garages damaged including at least one totally destroyed. Damage to public buildings included the pump house at the water tower being destroyed, the roof at the water plant was damaged, flag poles next to the ambulance building were broken, and an overhead door at the fire station was torn off. A fire truck at the fire station was damaged, and the window air conditioner was blown out along with some ceiling tiles inside. Power was lost to much of the city for at least an hour and a half because of the downed power lines.

1819: A hurricane affected the coast from Louisiana to Alabama. New Orleans was on the fringe of the storm and suffered no severe damage. Ships at the Balize experienced a strong gale for 24 hours that only grounded three ships. Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne rose five to six feet during the storm, with farms along the lakes flooded by the storm tide. Forty-one lives were lost on the U.S. Man of War schooner Firebrand, a 150-ton gun ship, while it lay off the west end of Cat Island. At least 43 people died in all.

1926: A destructive Category 4 hurricane struck Nassau during the evening hours on the 25th. The hurricane passed just east of Cape Canaveral early on the 28th and made landfall near present day Edgewater, Florida.

1943: A "surprise," Category 2 Hurricane moved ashore near Galveston, Texas. Due to World War II, all news underwent censorship, including any weather reports making this the surprise storm. The hurricane killed 19 people and caused millions of dollars in damages. Of particular note, Lieutenant Colonel Joe Duckworth and Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair flew an AT-6 Texan into the eye of the hurricane, becoming the first flight into the eye of the storm.

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

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








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

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

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

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| Today | Tonight | Friday | Friday Night | Saturday | Saturday Night | Sunday |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sunny | Mostly Clear | Mostly Sunny | Partly Cloudy | Mostly Sunny | Chance T-storms | Mostly Sunny |
| High: 85 °F | Low: 61 °F | High: 84 °F | Low: 64 °F | High: 87 °F | Low: 63 °F | High: 87 °F |



Mostly Sunny
Highs in the 80s



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Updated: 7/27/2017 4:32 AM Central

Published on: 07/27/2017 at 4:34AM

High pressure will remain dominant over the region today, resulting in mostly sunny skies and near normal temperatures.

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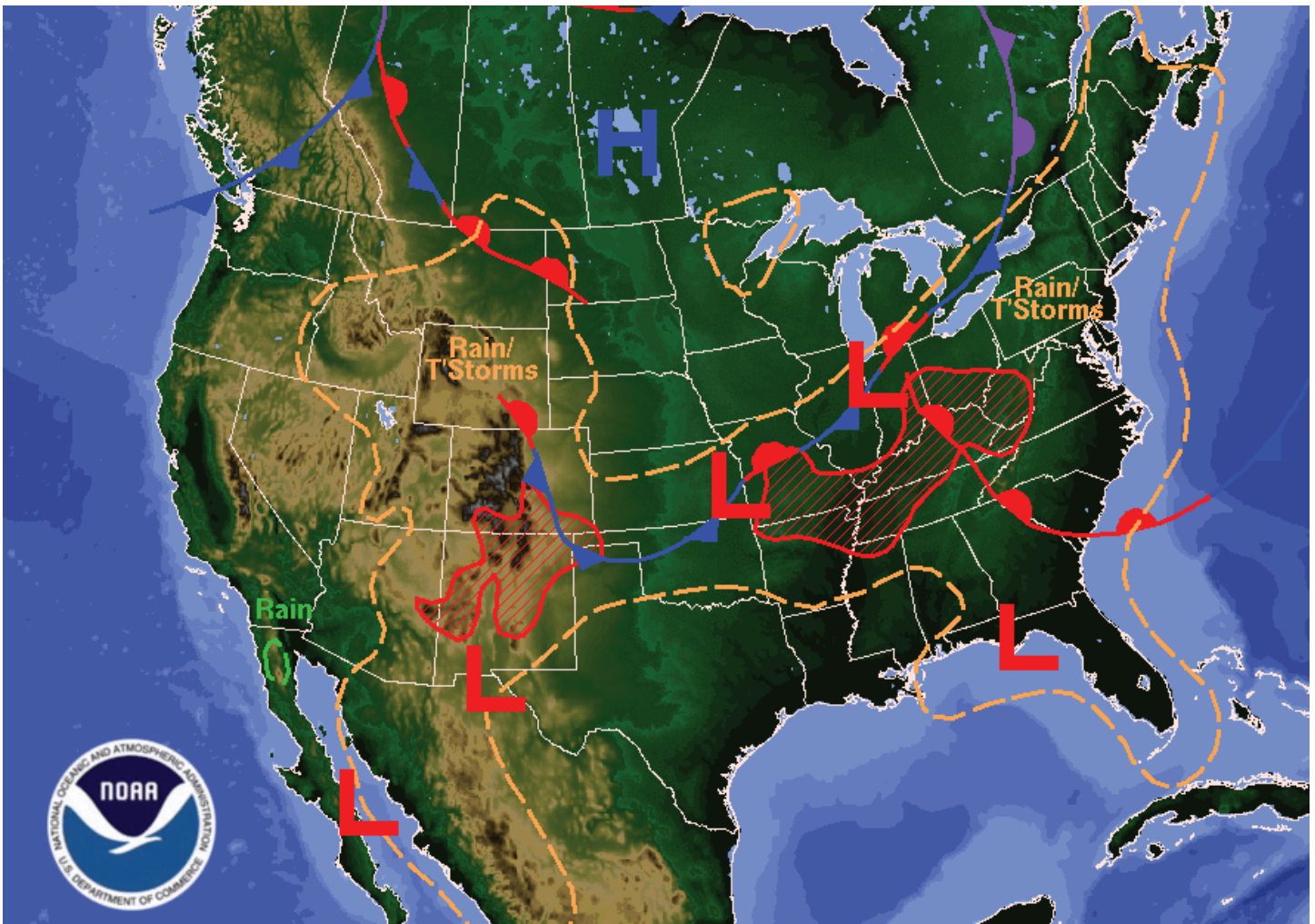
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 84.1
Heat Index:
Low Outside Temp: 67.3
High Gust: 12
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 110° in 1931
Record Low: 41° in 2013
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in July: 2.68
Precip to date in July: 1.47
Average Precip to date: 13.52
Precip Year to Date: 7.24
Sunset Tonight: 9:07 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:13 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Jul 27, 2017, issued 4:50 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)



THE THREAT OF GOD'S SILENCE

Prayer puts our faith at risk.

When we "pray to God in faith believing" and nothing happens or the results are different from what we expected or there is no answer at all, the tendency is to question the goodness and wisdom of God. We often doubt the need for prayer when we don't get what we want.

As we begin to read Psalm 28 David seems to be having a problem in his prayer life. "I pray to You, O Lord, my Rock. Do not turn a deaf ear to me." Notice the way he begins: "I pray to You!" His prayer is direct and intense. But there is something very important to be noted here. In this moment of need David, in no uncertain terms, lets us into his heart. Prayer was not just part of his life. It was at the center of his life. He was completely dependent upon the Lord for help. "You, O Lord, are my Rock!" This prayer, though we do not know specifically what David was praying for, arose from a definite need at a specific time in his life. Perhaps years later, when he wrote this psalm, he could not remember specifically what his request was. But he could not forget that he had a need that only God could meet. And God met that need and granted his request.

In this prayer we hear his cry and see his hands raised to God demonstrating his dependence on Yahweh. And his prayer was answered. "Praise be to the Lord," he finally shouted, "for He has heard my cry for mercy."

God always answers us – but on His terms and in His time.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to depend only on You – not on ourselves or others – when we face our greatest needs. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 28:1 To you, LORD, I call; you are my Rock, do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who go down to the pit.

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News from the Associated Press

Sioux Falls man gets lengthy prison term on child sex charge

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls man who had sex with a teenage girl and recorded it on his cellphone has been sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Authorities arrested 38-year-old Terance Highbull in February 2015 after discovering evidence of the assault against a 13-year-old girl. He pleaded guilty last April to sexual exploitation of a child.

U.S. Attorney Randolph Seiler says Highbull will be on supervised release for 15 years following his prison term.

Farm Rescue hauling hay for drought-impacted ranchers

HORACE, N.D. (AP) — The Farm Rescue nonprofit in the northern Plains is coming to the aid of ranchers affected by drought.

The organization is transporting hay free of charge to producers in need in the Dakotas and Montana. All three states have been hit hard by drought this summer.

The free hay hauling will continue until money for the effort runs out. The nonprofit also is accepting donated or discounted hay.

North Dakota-based Farm Rescue does physical labor for farmers in need in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa and eastern Montana. Volunteer-based services including crop planting and harvesting, haying, hay bale-hauling and grain-hauling.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

03-05-20-32-35

(three, five, twenty, thirty-two, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$379,000

Hot Lotto

03-31-34-39-45, Hot Ball: 1

(three, thirty-one, thirty-four, thirty-nine, forty-five; Hot Ball: one)

Estimated jackpot: \$8.66 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$282 million

Powerball

07-19-21-42-69, Powerball: 12, Power Play: 2

(seven, nineteen, twenty-one, forty-two, sixty-nine; Powerball: twelve; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$220 million

South Dakota officials mull future of historic buildings

PICKSTOWN, S.D. (AP) — Officials in a city in the southeastern part of South Dakota are deciding whether to replace or renovate two of the town's three original buildings.

Pickstown officials are holding a public hearing Wednesday to discuss whether the town should construct new buildings or restore the existing structures. The buildings to be discussed are the former shopping center as well as its police and fire station, the Press and Dakotan (<http://bit.ly/2uZhQdQ>) reported.

"It would be sad to see the last two commercial buildings of a multi-million-dollar, company-style town destroyed," said Ken Stewart, a South Dakota historian. "Those buildings are a memorial to all the people who worked to build the (Missouri River's) Ft. Randall Dam."

Board of Trustees President Bob Altenburg said that talk of demolishing the original buildings is premature. "The plan for a new building would be to house the financial office, community room, museum and new fire truck bays, but that is only if the town wants it," Altenburg said. "There has not been any talk about demolishing the older buildings or what will be done with them if a new building is established."

Pickstown resident Bill Lampman said he's currently working with the South Dakota Historical Society to try to have the two buildings placed on the National Historical Register. The move wouldn't protect the buildings from the will of the Board of Trustees, but it could provide a way for the town to access grant money for updating and preserving the locations.

"We are trying to preserve our history," Lampman said. "There are only three original buildings left in town."

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

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

The Daily Republic, Mitchell, July 26

Resistance to wind turbines unites southeast SD

There's no denying it's windy in South Dakota, but South Dakotans are denying wind turbines.

As Davison County wind farm opponents await a setback proposal from the county's Planning Commission, Lincoln County voters last week upheld a requirement that all turbines must be placed at least a half-mile from all habitable dwellings.

Lincoln County's vote comes one year after the Letcher Township established a one-mile setback, and 11 months after 47 people signed a statement to the S.D. Public Utilities Commission in opposition to another large wind energy project near Avon.

There's a commonality throughout each case in southeastern South Dakota: locals don't want wind turbines in their backyards.

Whether it's the lights, the sounds or other perceived health effects, it's growing clearer that South Dakotans settle into two camps when it comes to wind energy. Residents typically either have little to no opinion on wind turbines or they vehemently oppose them.

Following the Lincoln County vote, another tale in a long string of opposition to wind projects in the region, perhaps it's time the Davison County Planning Commission return to the table with a setback proposal in mind. And maybe — due to the impassioned opposition backed by thorough research — that setback should be fairly large.

When the commission was considering a proposed setback of 1,000 feet in May, it decided to absorb the public's comments to make an informed proposal at a later date. But locals have waited long enough.

As we wrote in an editorial shortly after the board's decision to conduct more research, the board acted valiantly. But rather than forcing the Planning Commission to make a difficult recommendation to the Davison County Commission, we suggest proposing a half-mile setback and somehow put it to a public vote.

Allowing the public a say on the matter during the next major election cycle would help the county determine whether the opposition to wind energy is a case of a noisy minority or if the few represent the

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many. It would also take the impossible task the Planning Commission has been given to make all parties happy out of its hands and place that task into the hands of the voters.

After years of debate, Lincoln County can finally end all wind energy talk. Now, more than one year after Davison County barred a 9- to 11-turbine project from entering county limits, Davison County is still talking about wind tower setbacks.

Wouldn't it be nice to simply let the people of Davison decide what they want and then move on? We think so, and we suspect Lincoln County residents are glad to put the vote behind them.

American News, Aberdeen, July 26

Lee family continues to help Aberdeen prosper with donation to new library

One door closed, and another opened recently in Aberdeen.

Karl O. Lee recently donated \$900,000 to the Alexander Mitchell Library Foundation's capital campaign, "Beyond Books, Providing Access for All."

The donation essentially brought the library foundation's successful \$2.1 million capital campaign to an end.

The new K.O. Lee Aberdeen Public Library is expected to open in less than two months.

Nice.

"This donation is the largest in the history of the Aberdeen Public Library," foundation President Troy McQuillen said in a news release announcing the gift.

Lee, his father C. C. Lee, and his grandfather K.O. Lee have made multiple contributions within the city of Aberdeen that have resulted in the development of facilities from tennis courts and the Lee Park Golf Course to the C.C. Lee Elementary School and K.O. Lee Adult Day Health Center at Bethesda.

In other words, Aberdeen wouldn't be Aberdeen without residents such as the Lee family. It takes vision, sweat and money by many to make a city work, move forward and prosper.

Mayor Mike Levsen said Lee's recent contribution is a testament to the donations his family has provided through the decades to develop areas in town.

"It's a name that's all over town already," Levsen said. "The Lee family has been a significant source of funds for all kinds of projects for at least three generations. The family just continues to contribute to the good of the city."

Construction of Aberdeen's new \$8 million library started in 2016 and is scheduled for completion in the next couple of weeks. The library, scheduled to open Sept. 11, is being built with a combination of city funds and a \$2.1 million commitment from the library foundation. It's at 215 Fourth Ave. S.E.

The new facility replaces the current library at 519 S. Kline St. that's been in use since 1963.

While opponents have criticized much about the new library — from the cost, to the location, to the amenities, to the parking, to the orientation of the windows and front doors — this editorial board has always been behind the project since it became an issue about a decade ago.

We felt a modern library was a quality-of-life issue, and as a result, a draw to potential employers and employees who are deciding whether to make this community their home. Those looking for work, education or entertainment can take advantage of library services — and do so for free.

"This is one of the proudest days of my life," Lee said. "This is an incredibly special moment and I hope this donation will in some small way continue to make Aberdeen the kind of community we all want to live in. My fondest wish is for this facility to become a place for discovery and inspiration for generations to come."

That is our wish as well.

The Public Opinion, Watertown, July 25

Phone scams should not happen

Earlier this month, the Watertown Police Department alerted the public to a scam involving a local person who received a phone call that they were part of a lawsuit and needed to call a certain number to

“clear it up.”

The recipient’s caller ID indicated the call originated from the Watertown Police Department.

And that is frightening.

These days, the average middle school student carries around a smart phone that is more powerful and more technologically advanced than the computers that guided U.S. astronauts to the moon. We’ve all become somewhat dependent on our phones and trust them to tell us everything from the weather forecast to our checking account balances to directions to that new restaurant we’ve been wanting to try.

We’ve come to depend on our phones, and to trust them. So when our phone tells us a call is from the Watertown Police Department, we should be able to believe it.

But that’s not the case. A WPD detective was quoted in our story as saying “there is no way to stop people from spoofing our phone number.”

Really? There is no way to stop this? We find that hard to believe. If crooks can come up with a way to do it, there should be a way to stop it.

This falls under the realm of the Federal Communications Commission. According to the FCC’s website, it is charged with writing regulations “so that new technologies flourish” and with “providing leadership in strengthening the defense of the nation’s communications infrastructure.” But if criminals are allowed to hijack the system and trick people into believing they are getting a call from the Watertown Police Department, then the FCC is failing miserably at its stated purpose.

The U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation is tasked with oversight of the FCC, and that committee is chaired by our own Sen. John Thune. In our story, Thune called such scams “a vexing problem,” but added that “the FCC is starting to use its authority to crack down on people who target and scam vulnerable consumers.”

Sounds good, but if people are being scammed now, it means the FCC has already failed. The very fact that criminals have found a way to be identified as police on our caller IDs means the FCC has failed miserably at keeping consumers safe.

And it’s up to Congress to make sure the FCC has the tools and the authority to do its job. When the bad guys are better armed than the good guys, bad things are bound to happen.

Thune said he’s “been leading oversight efforts in Congress and working to advance legislation that gives enforcement officials more tools to protect consumers from being preyed upon by these bad actors.”

Perhaps these efforts should have been made and safeguards put in place before these “bad actors” began starring in such scams.

We hope the FCC and Congress’ efforts aren’t too little, too late.

Man sentenced to prison in shooting outside Box Elder club

BOX ELDER, S.D. (AP) — A man facing a potential life sentence for a shooting in Box Elder has been sentenced to 7 ½ years in prison.

Thirty-two-year-old Jarrad Smith was convicted during a May trial of aggravated assault in the shooting of 27-year-old Kyle Haverly during a fight outside the Belle Starr Gentlemen’s Club in December.

The Rapid City Journal reports (<http://bit.ly/2vJRyD>) Smith was acquitted of other charges including attempted murder but still faced a possible sentence of life behind bars because of prior felonies.

Prosecutors asked for a 30-year sentence on Tuesday, while the defense sought a five-year term.

Judge Jeff Connolly gave Smith a 15-year sentence and suspended half of it. He also ordered \$30,000 in restitution.

Smith will be eligible for parole after serving a little more than five years.

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

Tribes fight trade groups' intervention in pipeline dispute

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON**, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — American Indian tribes trying to shut down the Dakota Access oil pipeline are objecting to the possible intervention of national energy and manufacturing trade groups in the legal dispute.

Attorneys for the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes say in court documents filed Tuesday that the arguments of the trade groups are too lengthy and duplicate those already made by Texas-based pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners and the Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency that permitted the \$3.8 billion pipeline which began moving North Dakota oil to Illinois about two months ago.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg, in Washington, D.C., in June ordered the Corps to further review the pipeline's impact on the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, which has sued along with three other tribes over fears of environmental harm — a claim ETP rejects. Boasberg is deciding whether to shut down the pipeline while the work is completed.

The national trade 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. They maintain in court documents that ceasing pipeline operations "would have serious adverse economic impacts throughout the oil industry and local and regional economies."

Tribal attorneys Jan Hasselman and Nicole Ducheneaux say the groups' 18-page argument is too long and "reiterates many of the arguments and legal principles raised by the Corps and Dakota Access (ETP)."

The trade groups on Wednesday submitted a revised argument that is only 10 pages contended again that their input can help Boasberg with his decision.

Boasberg last week ruled that the North Dakota Petroleum Council, which represents more than 500 companies, including ETP, will be allowed a say in the shutdown debate. The state group maintains it could be devastating to North Dakota's oil industry to shut down a pipeline shipping half of the daily production of the nation's No. 2-producing oil state.

The tribes aren't objecting to the intervention of the state group, saying its argument "consists primarily of factual information specific to the North Dakota oil industry."

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

Vigil held in honor of woman killed outside care center

ALCESTER, S.D. (AP) — Hundreds of people gathered at a vigil to show support for the family of a woman who was killed when a car struck a group of people outside a care center in southeast South Dakota.

Friends say 31-year-old Jenna Benzel had started working as an activities assistant at the Alcester Care and Rehab Center only days before she was killed in a crash that also killed one other person and injured six.

Authorities say an elderly woman pulled into the center's driveway and unintentionally stepped on the gas pedal instead of the brakes. The car hit the people and slammed into the building.

Those who spoke at the vigil Tuesday evening in Harrisburg said Benzel had a positive spirit, according to the Argus Leader <http://argusne.ws/2uYKeMZ>).

Bekah Hauert said her friend was always happy and smiling and was thrilled to be in a job helping people who needed extra care.

"She was so happy, so pumped to be able to give something," Hauert said.

Benzel leaves behind her husband, Shane Benzel, and three children. Her oldest son, 11-year-old Bram, told the crowd that his mother was always helping someone, even in her last moments.

"We went to the care center, where it happened," he said. "We met the person who was with her when she died."

With his voice breaking, he relayed what that person told him about his mother.

"She pushed people out of the way. She saved people's lives," her son said.

A memorial service is scheduled Thursday at Trinity Lutheran Church in Vermillion.

The second person who died in the crash has not been identified.

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

Trial date set in Rapid City store clerk homicide

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City man accused of killing a convenience store clerk during a robbery is scheduled for trial in December.

Nineteen-year-old Cody Grady is charged with first-degree murder or manslaughter in the January stabbing death of 45-year-old Kasie Lord at the Loaf 'N Jug. He's also charged with aiding and abetting first-degree robbery of grand theft.

A Seventh Circuit judge has set his trial to begin Dec. 4 at the Pennington County Courthouse. The Rapid City Journal (<http://bit.ly/2vJJids>) reports Grady is seeking to throw out statements he made to law enforcement while intoxicated.

A 17-year-old co-defendant is asking to move his case to juvenile court.

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

Sanford Medical Center open in Fargo

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — One of the largest private construction projects in the Dakotas is open for business. Sanford Health has opened a \$494 million hospital in Fargo. Sanford Medical Center in North Dakota's largest city has 284 beds, 28 operating rooms and 51 emergency bays.

The new 1 million-square-foot hospital is North Dakota's largest medical center and includes an adult and pediatric trauma center, birth center and Children's Hospital. The facility opened Tuesday after five years of construction.

Sanford's downtown surgery center, Roger Maris Cancer Center and other clinics across the metro area will stay open.

Sanford Health is based in Fargo and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. It bills itself as one of the largest health systems in the nation, with 45 hospitals and nearly 300 clinics in nine states and four countries.

Grass fire spreads to home in Fairburn, kills woman

FAIRBURN, S.D. (AP) — A woman is dead after a grass fire spread to a home in the Custer County town of Fairburn.

Authorities did not immediately identify the 26-year-old woman whose body was found Tuesday morning. Custer Fire Chief Joe Harbach tells the Rapid City Journal that the grass fire had the potential to destroy the small town.

It damaged at least three buildings in addition to the home, as well as several vehicles and hay bales before being brought under control.

The cause of the blaze wasn't immediately determined.

Suspect in killing of Rapid City retiree pleads not guilty

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A man accused of escaping from custody and killing a retired teacher in Rapid City has pleaded not guilty to murder.

Twenty-eight-year-old Andrew Eastman is accused in the death last month of 64-year-old Larry Mintzlaff. Authorities allege Eastman escaped from an inmate job site in Rapid City on June 2 using a city-owned pickup, then went to Mintzlaff's house.

Eastman was arrested in Albuquerque, New Mexico, three days after Mintzlaff's body was found June 6. Authorities say Eastman was driving Mintzlaff's missing car and had used credit cards belonging to Mintzlaff.

Police say Eastman and Mintzlaff had known one another, and that a letter from Eastman had been discovered at Mintzlaff's residence.

Eastman remains jailed. His bond was set earlier at \$1 million cash.

AP sources: US seeks to test Iran deal with more inspections

By JOSH LEDERMAN and MATTHEW LEE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is pushing for inspections of suspicious Iranian military sites in a bid to test the strength of the nuclear deal that President Donald Trump desperately wants to cancel, senior U.S. officials said.

The inspections are one element of what is designed to be a more aggressive approach to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. While the Trump administration seeks to police the existing deal more strictly, it is also working to fix what Trump's aides have called "serious flaws" in the landmark deal that — if not resolved quickly — will likely lead Trump to pull out.

That effort also includes discussions with European countries to negotiate a follow-up agreement to prevent Iran from resuming nuclear development after the deal's restrictions expire in about a decade, the officials said. The officials weren't authorized to discuss the efforts publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The inspections requests, which Iran would likely resist, could play heavily into Trump's much-anticipated decision about whether to stick with the deal he's long derided.

If Iran refuses inspections, Trump finally will have a solid basis to say Iran is breaching the deal, setting up Tehran to take most of the blame if the agreement collapses. If Iran agrees to inspections, those in Trump's administration who want to preserve the deal will be emboldened to argue it's advancing U.S. national security effectively.

The campaign gained fresh urgency this month following a dramatic clash within the administration about whether to certify Iran's compliance, as is required every 90 days.

Trump was eager to declare Tehran in violation, even though the International Atomic Energy Agency that monitors compliance says its infractions are minor. At the urging of top Cabinet members, Trump begrudgingly agreed at the last minute to avoid a showdown for another three months — but only with assurances the U.S. would increase pressure on Iran to test whether the deal is truly capable of addressing its nuclear ambitions and other troublesome activities.

Trump faces another certification deadline in three months, and it's far from clear that either new inspections or any "fixes" to address whether his concerns will be in place by then. Trump told The Wall Street Journal this week he expects to say Iran isn't complying, setting a high bar for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and other aides to persuade him otherwise.

"If it was up to me, I would have had them noncompliant 180 days ago," Trump said.

To that end, the administration is seeking to force Iran to let in IAEA inspectors to military sites where the U.S. intelligence community believes the Islamic Republic may be cheating on the deal, several officials said. Access to Iran's military sites was one of the most contentious issues in the 2015 deal, in which Tehran agreed to roll back its nuclear program in exchange for billions of dollars in sanctions relief.

Last week in Vienna, where the International Atomic Energy Agency is based, Undersecretary of State Thomas Shannon floated the proposal to the European members of the Joint Commission that oversees the deal, one official said. Britain, France and Germany joined the U.S., Russia, China and the European Union two years ago in brokering the deal with Iran.

To force inspections of new sites in Iran, the U.S. would need to enlist the support of the IAEA and a majority of the countries in the deal. But the U.S. has run into early resistance over concerns it has yet to produce a "smoking gun" — compelling evidence of illicit activity at a military site that the IAEA could use to justify inspections, officials said.

Among the concerns about a rush toward inspections is that if they fail to uncover evidence of violations, it would undermine the IAEA's credibility and its ability to demand future inspections. So the U.S. is working to produce foolproof intelligence about illicit activity, officials said. The officials declined to describe the intelligence activities or the Iranian sites the U.S. believes are involved.

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Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, alluded to the strategy during an event hosted Wednesday by The Washington Post. Corker said the U.S. was trying to “radically enforce” the deal by asking for access to “various facilities” in Iran.

“If they don’t let us in, boom,” Corker said. “You want the breakup of this deal to be about Iran. You don’t want it to be about the U.S., because we want our allies with us.”

As a candidate, Trump threatened to rip up the deal that President Barack Obama brokered. As president, Trump has yet to take that step, as his administration finishes a broader Iran policy review expected to conclude in August.

The other major step to try to address what Trump has deemed flaws in the deal involves ensuring that Iran can’t revert to old behavior once the limitations on its program “sunset” over the next decade-plus. The State Department said Trump has directed his administration to “work with allies to explore options” for dealing with that and other shortcomings. Talks are underway with the European countries about a supplemental deal, though it’s unclear how Iran could be persuaded to sign on.

The deal’s provisions for inspections of military facilities, or “undeclared sites,” involve a complex process with plenty of opportunities for Iran to stall. Tehran can propose alternatives to on-site inspections, or reject the request, which would trigger a 24-day process for the Joint Commission countries to override the rejection.

That could drag on for months. And under ambiguities built into the deal, it’s unclear whether Iran must allow IAEA inspectors into military sites, or whether the Iranians can take their own environmental samples and send them to the IAEA for testing, as was allowed under a 2015 side agreement that let Iran use its own experts to inspect the Parchin military site.

Even if Trump declares Iran in violation of the deal — a move that would invigorate his conservative base — he could still leave Iran’s sanctions relief in place.

American businesses are eager for the deal to survive so they can pursue lucrative opportunities in Iran. The aviation industry recently signed billions of dollars of contracts to sell passenger plans to Iranian airlines, including a \$16.6 billion deal for Boeing.

Associated Press writer George Jahn in Vienna contributed to this report.

Reach Josh Lederman on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/joshledermanAP> and Matthew Lee at <http://twitter.com/APDiploWriter>

Ohio, California close ‘Fire Ball’ ride after fatal accident

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The Ohio State Fair will open Thursday one day after a man was killed and seven other people were injured when a thrill ride broke apart, but the rides won’t be running until they all are deemed safe, officials state.

Video captured by a bystander at the fair Wednesday evening shows the Fire Ball ride swinging back and forth like a pendulum and spinning in the air when it crashes into something and part of the ride flies off. Screams are heard as passengers are thrown to the ground.

“The fair is about the best things in life, and tonight with this accident it becomes a terrible, terrible tragedy,” said Republican Gov. John Kasich.

Officials said the man who was killed was one of several people who were thrown to the ground when the ride malfunctioned. They have not released his name. Ohio State Medical Center said three of the injured were being treated there. Two of them were in critical condition, the hospital said Thursday.

Officials did not know what caused the ride to break apart, saying the investigation was ongoing.

“Of course we want to get to the bottom of this,” Kasich said, noting that there could be things to be learned that could help other fairs and amusement parks. “Make no mistake about it, it’s a very, very sad night for all of us.”

A Columbus fire official told WKRC-TV that the man killed was 18 and that the seven people injured

ranged in age from 13 to 41.

Kaylie Bellomy was in the next group waiting to board the Fire Ball.

"It was going for a minute and it was at its highest point and I saw somebody fall on the ride, and then a minute later the whole like row of seats fell off and hit the ground," Bellomy told WCMH-TV.

It was chaos afterward, she said. "Everybody was running. I got ran over trying to get out of the way."

A company providing rides at the Ohio State Fair this year describes the Fire Ball as an "aggressive thrill ride."

The accident prompted California State Fair officials to shut down the Fire Ball ride there. Barry Schaible, an inspector with a company hired by the fair, told KCRA-TV in Sacramento, "We shut down the ride immediately, unloaded it and it's closed right now."

On its website, Amusements of America said that since its debut in 2002, the Fire Ball, which was manufactured by KMG, had become "one of the most popular thrill rides on the AOA Midway." The company's description of the ride said it swings riders 40 feet (12 meters) above the midway, while spinning them at 13 revolutions per minute.

Amusements of America did not immediately return a phone message seeking comment.

Ride inspectors did not notice anything out of the ordinary when they conducted their inspections and cleared the Fire Ball for passengers, said Director of Agriculture David Daniels. All of the rides at the fair are checked several times when they are being set up to ensure they are set up the way the manufacturer intended, he said.

"We started out today with 11 rides that did not open because the inspection work was not done on them," said Daniels. Four rides will not be operating because they do not meet the mechanical test, he said.

Officials said none of the rides would be open until they are all fully inspected.

"Our hearts are heavy for the families of those involved in last night's tragic accident," the fair said early Thursday morning in a statement posted on its Twitter page. "We have shut down all rides until the state has inspected each and every ride again and deemed them to be safe."

The Ohio State Fair, which is one of the largest state fairs in the U.S., runs through Aug. 6.

Trump's transgender troops ban divides veterans in Congress

By RICHARD LARDNER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's decision to ban transgender service in the armed forces drove a wedge through military veterans in Congress, with one camp standing squarely behind the commander in chief and the other decrying his order as an ugly attack on dedicated troops.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., a former Army helicopter pilot who lost her legs and partial use of her right arm during the Iraq war, called Trump's announcement discriminatory.

"When my Black Hawk helicopter was shot down in Iraq, I didn't care if the American troops risking their lives to help save me were gay, straight, transgender or anything else," she said. "All that mattered was they didn't leave me behind."

Duckworth said if a person's willing to risk their life as a member of the armed forces "and you can do the job, you should be able to serve — no matter your gender identity, sexual orientation or race."

Rep. Steve Russell, R-Okla., said Trump's decision is understandable given the mounting concern among members of Congress over the amount of money the Pentagon is required to spend on gender transition surgeries and hormone therapy. Russell, a retired Army officer who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, said service members undergoing these medical procedures often aren't ready to deploy.

"I'm not surprised that the administration has come out like this," Russell said on C-Span's Washington Journal.

Trump's tweets announcing the ban came as the administration and House GOP leaders were trying to work out a problem involving medical costs for service members seeking to transition to another gender while serving in the military, an issue that had created problems for a sweeping spending bill.

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Social conservatives, led by Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Mo., were pressing for an amendment to the spending bill blocking funding for such costs, including reassignment surgery. The House narrowly defeated Hartzler's measure last week, yet she and other conservatives were trying to revive it. That sparked a battle with Republican moderates who had threatened to block the House from turning to the spending bill.

According to a senior Republican aide, House leaders were taken by surprise when Trump announced the broader ban; they had been pressing for a more narrow response. The aide spoke on condition of anonymity because the individual was not authorized to publicly discuss internal talks.

In the Senate, John McCain, R-Ariz., a Navy pilot during the Vietnam war, blasted Trump's decision and criticized the president for making the announcement over Twitter.

"There is no reason to force service members who are able to fight, train, and deploy to leave the military — regardless of their gender identity," said McCain, who spent more than five years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam.

But Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., a former Marine who served three combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Trump made the right call by reversing an Obama administration directive issued in 2016 that allowed transgender service members to serve openly in the armed forces.

"National security should trump social experimentation, always," Hunter said. "It's about time that a decision is made to restore the warrior culture and allow the U.S. military to get back to business."

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., echoed Hunter's remarks.

"I think back to my days in the military and wonder how it would work," Inhofe, an Army veteran, said of the intensely close living and working quarters that service members inhabit.

"It's a housing problem. There are other problems," Inhofe said. "Those of us who have been in the service can see that it would be a difficult thing to deal with."

But Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., called Trump's transgender ban "a divisive political move" and a "retreat in the march toward equality."

Reed, a West Point graduate who later served in the 82nd Airborne Division, added that Trump announced the ban on the anniversary of President Harry Truman's order desegregating the U.S. military.

"This discriminatory policy denies Americans, no matter how skilled and qualified they are, the opportunity to serve," said Reed, the top ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee.

Associated Press writer Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

Contact Richard Lardner on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/rplardner>

Isolated Qatar hires firm founded by Trump aide amid crisis

By JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Qatar has hired a Washington influence firm founded by President Donald Trump's former campaign manager and another specialized in digging up dirt on U.S. politicians, signaling it wants to challenge Saudi Arabia's massive lobbying efforts in America's capital amid a diplomatic dispute among Arab nations.

The Gulf rift already has seen slogan-plastered taxicabs in London, television attack ads in the United States and competing messages flooding the internet and state-linked media on both sides since the crisis began on June 5.

Hiring a firm associated with former Trump aide Corey Lewandowski shows Qatar wants access to a White House with close ties to Saudi Arabia. Lewandowski left the firm in May.

But matching Saudi Arabia, which scored a diplomatic coup by hosting Trump's first overseas trip, could be a tough battle for Qatar, even if it does boast the world's highest per-capita income due to its natural gas deposits.

"The Qataris are belatedly working up to the scale of the challenge they face," said Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a research fellow at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University who lives

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in Seattle. "This whole crisis, now that it's kind of settled down into a prolonged confrontation or standoff, it's become almost a struggle to win the hearts and minds in D.C."

Qatar, in the midst of building stadiums for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, isn't afraid to spend its money. Since the crisis began, Qatar paid \$2.5 million to the law firm of former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft to audit its efforts at stopping terrorism funding — one of the allegations levied by the Saudi-led quartet of nations.

According to documents newly filed to the U.S. Justice Department, Qatar has hired Avenue Strategies Global for \$150,000 a month to "provide research, government relations and strategic consulting services." The contract also says that activity "may include communications with members of Congress and Congressional staff, executive branch officials, the media and other individuals."

Lewandowski founded Avenue Strategies just after the November election that put Trump in the White House. Lewandowski resigned from the firm in May, saying he was troubled by a firm-related project he hadn't sanctioned. Others tied to Avenue Strategies had started a firm of their own, pitching Eastern European clients with promises of access to Trump and high-ranking White House officials.

The firm, which includes a former chief of staff to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, did not respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press.

Qatar also signed a three-month, \$1.1 million renewable contract with the opposition research firm Information Management Services, according to a Justice Department filing.

The firm, run by Jeff Klueter, a former researcher for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, did not respond to requests for comment. It advertises itself as doing so-called "oppo," which includes digging into political opponents' past and comments for incriminating or simply embarrassing material.

Qatar did not respond to a request for comment about the lobbying contracts. But it may serve as recognition that while Qatar has had success in speaking with the State Department and the Pentagon, it needs to make inroads to the Trump White House, Ulrichsen said.

Despite hosting a major U.S. military base, Qatar has been a target of Trump over its alleged funding of extremists, something Doha denies. Saudi Arabia enjoys close relations to Trump, as well as his son-in-law Jared Kushner.

In Washington, Saudi Arabia spends millions of dollars on lobbying, including a most-recent push to oppose a law allowing Sept. 11 victims' families to sue the ultraconservative Muslim nation in U.S. courts. Its lobbying firms have been putting out memos on Qatar.

Meanwhile, an organization called the Saudi American Public Relation Affairs Committee launched an online campaign called the Qatar Insider highlighting material critical of Doha. The committee also paid \$138,000 to air an anti-Qatar attack ad on a local Washington television station, according to the Qatar-funded satellite news network Al-Jazeera.

"Our aim is to show the American people that Qatar has been employing a foreign policy that harms its neighbors and contributes to regional instability," said Reem Daffa, the executive director of the committee, known by the acronym SAPRAC.

But while Daffa said SAPRAC does no lobbying, it has registered as a lobbying firm with Congress and tweeted a Qatar attack ad at Trump. It also has not filed paperwork with the Justice Department despite the committee being listed as entirely owned by a Saudi national.

The Foreign Agents Registration Act, first put in place over concerns about Nazi propagandists operating in the U.S. ahead of World War II, requires those working on behalf of other countries or their citizens to file regular reports to the Justice Department.

There are no similar rules in Britain, though the crisis recently could be seen on the streets of London. Pro-Qatar ads appeared on the city's famous black taxis, bearing the message: "Lift the Blockade Against the People of Qatar." Al-Jazeera Arabic even did a story about them.

But whether any of it will sway policy makers remains unclear.

"The prevailing view is that there are no perfect allies," recently wrote Steven A. Cook, a senior fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations. "So whatever money the Gulf countries are spending in Washington,

they should know it is not very well spent.”

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

US-backed Syrian fighters control almost half of Raqqa

By SARAH EL DEEB, Associated Press

RAQQA, Syria (AP) — U.S.-backed Syrian fighters have captured almost half of Raqqa from the Islamic State group, but the push into the northern city has slowed due to large amounts of explosives planted by the extremists and their counteroffensives, a spokeswoman for the fighters and a monitoring group said Thursday.

The assault on Raqqa by the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led fighting coalition, began June 6, backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and U.S. troops advising the local forces. Since then, the SDF has made steady advances from the eastern and western sides of the city reaching the walled old quarter.

The capture of Raqqa, the Islamic State group's self-proclaimed capital, would be a huge loss for the extremist group that earlier this month lost the Iraqi city of Mosul. But the liberation of Raqqa is still far off despite the progress.

Nisreen Abdullah, the Kurdish spokeswoman, told The Associated Press that the pace of the advance into Raqqa has slowed because of massive amounts of explosives laid by IS fighters. As the extremists become more surrounded, they have increased their suicide attacks against fighters of the SDF, she added.

“Raqqa has become a booby trapped city and this shows their (IS) weakness,” Abdullah, of the Women's Protection Units, said speaking from northern Syria. “They are also using civilians as human shields and this is slowing the push as well.”

She said fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces, which includes the YPJ, now controls 45 percent of Raqqa. She added that since the offensive in Raqqa began, SDF fighters have fully captured eight neighborhoods.

Plumes of smoke could be seen behind buildings in Raqqa a day earlier as the coalition pounded IS targets in the city. Syrian children looked on as U.S. armored vehicles drove by. One American soldier on a vehicle made the victory sign.

Mustafa Bali, who heads the SDF media center, confirmed Thursday that the group now has half of Raqqa and said the most important areas liberated in the past four days were the Nazlet Shehadeh and Panorama Square neighborhoods — both on the southwestern part of the city. But he said there are IS counterattacks, IS sleeper cells and tunnels in the area.

“It was not easy, we have casualties and martyrs,” he said, adding that the fighting was ongoing.

In the eastern front, where SDF forces breached IS defenses on the edge of the old city about a month ago, fighters have now reached the old citadel, an SDF commander in charge of one sector in the front told AP.

“As we move forward we find a tunnel every 100 meters,” Jihad Khabat said. He said the enemy, “besieged and in distress,” hides in deep and long tunnels spread all under the city, from where they would appear and harass Syrian fighters with frequent daily counterattacks.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also said SDF fighters control half of Raqqa.

The attacks on the city have claimed many civilian casualties among the tens of thousands who are still trapped in areas controlled by IS.

The Observatory said 29 people, including eight children, were killed in airstrikes on the city on Wednesday. The activist-operated Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently group said 36 people were killed and more than 50 wounded in airstrikes and shelling of Raqqa.

The reports could not be independently confirmed.

In central Syria, fighting edged closer to the IS stronghold of Sukhna, the last major town held by IS in

the Homs province, according to the Observatory and the government-controlled Syrian Central Military Media.

SCMM said Syrian troops killed and wounded a number of IS fighters in battles near a mountain that overlooks the area. The Observatory said troops are now about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from Sukhna, which has been held by IS since the summer of 2015.

Suspects to plead not guilty in Kim Jong Nam's assassination

By EILEEN NG, Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Two women accused of poisoning the estranged half brother of North Korea's ruler in a bizarre airport assassination are expected to plead not guilty when they appear in a Malaysian court on Friday, their lawyers said.

Indonesian Siti Aisyah and Vietnamese Doan Thi Huong are accused of smearing Kim Jong Nam's face with the banned VX nerve agent at a crowded airport terminal in Kuala Lumpur on Feb. 13. The women, who face a possible death penalty if convicted, say they were duped into thinking they were playing a harmless prank for a hidden-camera TV show.

They are the only suspects in custody in a killing that South Korea's spy agency said was part of a five-year plot by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to kill a brother he reportedly never met. Four North Korean suspects fled the country, police say.

The women's lawyers say their clients are expected to plead not guilty at the High Court on Friday. Here's a look at the significance of Kim's death and the two suspects:

WHY WAS KIM JONG NAM ASSASSINATED?

North Korea has a long history of ordering killings of people it views as threats to its regime. While Kim Jong Nam was not thought to be seeking influence, his position as eldest son of the family that has ruled North Korea since its founding could have made him appear to be a danger. Kim Jong Nam had also spoken out publicly against his family's dynastic control of the nuclear-armed nation.

North Korea has refused to publicly accept that the dead man was leader Kim Jong Un's half brother and has suggested the victim died of a heart attack. It has accused Malaysia of working with South Korea and other "hostile forces" in blaming the North.

Kim Jong Nam died en route to a hospital after falling ill at a budget terminal at Kuala Lumpur International Airport while waiting for a flight to Macau. He told medical workers before he died that he had been attacked with a chemical spray that Malaysian officials later identified as VX nerve agent.

Kim Jong Nam, who was 45 or 46, had been living abroad for years. He reportedly fell out of favor when he was caught trying to enter Japan on a false passport in 2001, saying he wanted to visit Tokyo Disneyland.

INDONESIAN SUSPECT

Siti Aisyah, 25, was recruited in early January by a North Korean man known as James to star in prank videos, according to her lawyer, Gooi Soon Seong.

The two met at a pub in downtown Kuala Lumpur and over the course of several days, James had Siti rub oil or pepper sauce on a victim's face from the forehead downward, which he would film on his phone, the lawyer said. They practiced at malls, hotels and airports. Gooi said Aisyah was paid \$100-\$200 for each prank and hoped the income would allow her to stop working as a social escort.

In late January, Aisyah flew to Cambodia where James introduced her to Hong Song Hac, one of four North Korean suspects who left Malaysia on the day of the killing, the lawyer said. Hong had introduced himself as Chang, a Chinese who produces video prank shows for the Chinese market, the lawyer said.

Gooi said Hong asked Aisyah to do several more pranks at the Kuala Lumpur airport a few days before Kim was attacked. He said that Hong identified Kim to Aisyah at the airport and allegedly put the poison on her hand.

James, identified by police as Ri Ji U, was among seven North Korean suspects wanted by Malaysian

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police. Four fled the country on Feb. 13 and the other three, including James, hid inside their country's embassy in Kuala Lumpur to avoid questioning, they said.

The three were later allowed to fly home in exchange for nine Malaysians held in Pyongyang, as part of a deal to ease a diplomatic spat between the two countries. Gooi said James was key to Aisyah's defense and his absence could weaken her case.

Aisyah, who has a son, has written to her family telling them to pray for her "so that the case will be over soon and I can go back home."

VIETNAMESE SUSPECT

Doan Thi Huong, 29, was caught on airport surveillance video wearing a white jumper emblazoned with the letters "LOL" — an acronym for "laughing out loud."

Security video apparently showed her lunging at Kim Jong Nam from behind in the crowded terminal.

Little is known about Huong. Raised in a rice farm in northern Vietnam, her family said they had hardly heard from her since she left home a decade ago, aged just 18.

She made postings on a Facebook page under the name Ruby Ruby, according to her niece, Dinh Thi Quyen.

Photos on the page show Huong wearing a white shirt that appears to say "LOL." Others show her posing in Kuala Lumpur a few days before the attack and in January in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Her last post was on the morning of Feb. 11, two days before the attack, from an area near the airport.

"I want to sleep more but by your side," she wrote above a photo showing her with her eyes closed.

His future clouded, Sessions opens mission to El Salvador

By **SADIE GURMAN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — With his future as the nation's top prosecutor in doubt after a week of blistering public scorn from the president, Attorney General Jeff Sessions is flying to El Salvador on Thursday seeking ways to stamp out the brutal street gang MS-13.

As the Trump administration tries to build support for its crackdown on illegal immigration, it has increasingly tried to make the gang with Central American ties the face of the problem. Recent killings tied to its members have stoked the national debate on immigration.

Trump praised Sessions when he announced his mission to eradicate the gang in April. But the attorney general has since fallen out of favor with his onetime political ally.

In day after day of public humiliation, Trump rued his decision to choose Sessions for his Cabinet and left the former Alabama senator's prospects dangling. Trump's intensifying criticism has fueled speculation that the attorney general may step down even if the president stops short of firing him. But Sessions is showing no outward signs that he is planning to quit, and on Wednesday, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said that Trump "wants him to lead the department."

"Look, you can be disappointed in someone and still want them to continue to do their job," she said.

Forging ahead with the tough-on-crime agenda that once endeared him to Trump, Sessions plans to meet his Salvadoran counterpart, Attorney General Douglas Melendez, before convening with other law enforcement officials on what his program calls a transnational anti-gang task force. He will tour a detention center and meet former members of MS-13, also known as Mara Salvatrucha, which Sessions has called a top threat to public safety in the U.S.

The gang is an international criminal enterprise, with tens of thousands of members in several Central American countries and many U.S. states. The gang originated in immigrant communities in Los Angeles in the 1980s then entrenched itself in Central America when its leaders were deported.

The gang is known for hacking and stabbing victims with machetes, drug dealing, prostitution and other rackets. Its recruits are middle- and high-school students predominantly in immigrant communities and those who try to leave risk violent retribution, law enforcement officials have said.

Its members have been accused in a spate of bloodshed that included the massacre of four young men

in a Long Island, New York, park and the killing of a suspected gang rival inside a deli. The violence has drawn attention from members of Congress and Trump, who has boasted about efforts to arrest and deport MS-13 members across the country.

Both he and Sessions have blamed Obama-era border policies for allowing the gang's ranks to flourish, though that administration took unprecedented steps to target its finances.

The trip was planned before Trump's broadsides against his attorney general, and it remains to be seen whether his work in El Salvador will help mend their fractured relationship. Their shared view, rare among the political class, that illegal immigration was the nation's most vexing problem was what united Sessions and Trump.

Muslim leaders tell faithful to return to Jerusalem shrine

By IAN DEITCH and MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Muslim leaders told the faithful to return to pray inside a major Jerusalem holy site on Thursday after Israel removed security devices it installed outside entrances to the shrine following a deadly Palestinian attack at the compound.

Thousands of Palestinians had been praying in the streets outside the shrine to protest the security measures since the crisis began.

"After extensive discussion and after achieving this victory in this round we call on our people in Jerusalem and inside (Israel) and anyone who can access the Al-Aqsa Mosque to enter ... en masse," the Islamic leaders declared in a statement.

The head of the Supreme Islamic Committee, Ikrema Sabri, said the first prayers would be held there Thursday afternoon.

Abdel Azim Salhab, of the Waqf, Jordan's religious body that administers the site, said "We call on Imams to close all mosques in Jerusalem Friday in order for all worshippers to pray Friday prayer in Al-Aqsa mosque only."

Friday prayers are the highlight of the Muslim religious week. Thousands of Muslims from around the country and Palestinian areas typically worship at the holy compound in Jerusalem's Old City.

Salhab said all devices had been removed from the entrances but didn't know if security cameras that had been mounted on the wall of the compound were also dismantled. He said if they are there then "we reject it."

Israel installed the new security measures earlier this month after Palestinian gunmen shot and killed two police officers from within the site.

It said the security measures were necessary to prevent more attacks and are standard procedure to ensure safety at sites around the world. Palestinians claimed Israel was trying to expand its control over the site.

The issue sparked some of the worst street clashes in years and threatened to draw Israel into conflict with other Arab and Muslim nations.

Palestinians danced, chanted "God is Great" and set off fireworks after some security devices were removed early Thursday morning. It dismantled metal detectors there earlier this week.

Israel removed the devices under intense pressure and said it plans to install sophisticated security cameras instead.

But Palestinian politicians and Muslim clerics had insisted that wasn't enough and demanded Israel restore the situation at the shrine in Jerusalem's Old City to what it was before the July 14 attack.

The fate of the site is an emotional issue at the heart of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Even the smallest perceived change to delicate arrangements pertaining to the site sparks tensions.

Israel's decision to add security measures there outraged Muslim and triggered protests, and low-level clashes have continued in and around Jerusalem in the days since.

The continued standoff highlighted the deep distrust between Israel and the Palestinians when it comes to the holy site.

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Jews revere the hilltop compound in Jerusalem's Old City as the Temple Mount, site of the two Jewish 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 site 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.

The latest development could put Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a tough spot as he tries to tamp out a wave of unrest that has triggered international pressure while not appearing to his hard-line base as capitulating.

A senior member of Netanyahu's coalition government criticized Israel's dismantling of the security devices warning it could spell more violence.

Naftali Bennett, leader of the Jewish Home party, told Army Radio that "every time the state of Israel folds in a strategic way we get hit with an Intifada. You seemingly benefit in the short term but in the long term you harm deterrence."

The Islamic militant group that rules Gaza praised the move. Izzat Rishq, a senior Hamas leader, tweeted that Palestinians achieved a "historic victory." He said "Today, our people celebrate the removal of the gates (security measures), tomorrow they will celebrate the removal of the occupation itself."

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. TRUMP'S TRANSGENDER TROOPS BAN DIVIDES VETS IN CONGRESS

One camp is standing squarely behind the commander in chief and the other decrying his order as an ugly attack on dedicated troops.

2. GOP EYES NARROW BILL TO ADVANCE 'OBAMACARE' REPEAL

Senate Republicans are lowering their sights and trying to unite behind a so-called "skinny repeal" that would undo just a few of the most unpopular elements of the health care law.

3. AP SOURCES: US SEEKS TO TEST IRAN DEAL WITH MORE INSPECTIONS

The Trump administration is also working to fix what aides have called "serious flaws" in the landmark deal that — if not resolved quickly — will likely lead Trump to pull out.

4. 1 KILLED, 7 HURT AFTER DEADLY RIDE MALFUNCTION AT OHIO FAIR

Dramatic video shows the Fire Ball ride swinging back and forth like a pendulum and spinning in the air when it crashes into something and part of the ride flies off, throwing passengers to the ground.

5. MUSLIM LEADERS SAY IT'S OK TO PRAY INSIDE SHRINE

Clerics in Jerusalem are telling the faithful to return to a holy site to pray after Israel removed security devices it installed there.

6. WHO ARE TRUMP'S FRIENDS, FOES ON GLOBAL STAGE

Through his foreign travels, statements and actions, the president has made it clear who is in which camp. AP journalists report on the view from Saudi Arabia, Israel, Poland, Iran, the Koreas and Venezuela.

7. TECH GIANTS REFLECT GROWING TREND: DELIVER IT NOW

The decision by Amazon and Foxconn to add tens of thousands of workers in the United States reflect the pressures companies now feel to be as close to their customers as possible.

8. BUSINESSES, CITIES CASHING IN ON TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE CROWDS

Tennessee-based American Paper Optics ramps up production for next month's eclipse and expects to make 50 million paper and plastic eclipse glasses.

9. WHY TWITTER WON'T BAN TRUMP

The president's tweets draw attention to the struggling service, even if posts mocking reporters and rivals undercut its rules against harassment.

10. POLICE: BIEBER ACCIDENTALLY HITS PHOTOGRAPHER WITH PICKUP TRUCK

Video posted on social media shows the pop star trying to pull away when of the photographers steps

toward the truck and is hit in Beverly Hills

Jury: Michael Jackson estate owes Quincy Jones \$9.4 million

By BRIAN MELLEY, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A jury on Wednesday found that Michael Jackson's estate owes Quincy Jones \$9.4 million in royalties and production fees from "Billie Jean," "Thriller" and more of the superstar's biggest hits.

The award from a Los Angeles Superior Court jury fell short of the \$30 million the legendary producer sought in the lawsuit filed nearly four years ago, but well above the approximately \$392,000 the Jackson estate contended Jones was owed.

The jury of 10 women and two men had been deliberating since Monday.

"This lawsuit was never about Michael, it was about protecting the integrity of the work we all did in the recording studio and the legacy of what we created," Jones wrote in a statement. "Although this (judgment) is not the full amount that I was seeking, I am very grateful that the jury decided in our favor in this matter. I view it not only as a victory for myself personally, but for artists' rights overall."

Estate attorney Howard Weitzman said he and his team were surprised by the verdict and would appeal it.

Weitzman and co-counsel Zia Modabber wrote in a statement that Jones was seeking money that wasn't owed to him.

"Any amount above and beyond what is called for in his contracts is too much and unfair to Michael's heirs," the lawyers said. "Although Mr. Jones is portraying this is a victory for artists' rights, the real artist is Michael Jackson and it is his money Mr. Jones is seeking."

Jones claimed in the lawsuit that Jackson's estate and Sony Music Entertainment owed him for music he had produced that was used in the concert film "This Is It" and two Cirque du Soleil shows that used Jackson's songs.

The lawsuit said the entities had improperly re-edited the songs to deprive Jones of royalties and production fees, and that he had a contractual right to take first crack at any re-edit or remix.

The Jackson camp held that Jones should only be paid licensing fees for songs used in those three productions. Jones claimed he was entitled to a share of the overall receipts from them.

The trial centered on the definitions of terms in the two contracts Jackson and Jones signed in 1978 and 1985.

Under the deals, for example, Jones is entitled to a share of net receipts from a "videoshow" of the songs. The Jackson attorneys argued that the term was meant to apply to music videos and not feature films.

Jury foreman Duy Nguyen, 28, said the contracts were the strongest pieces of evidence the jury considered, and said hearing Jones' testimony was also helpful.

He said he and many members of the jury are Jackson fans, but that didn't factor into the deliberations. He said the verdict amount was a compromise figure based on an expert's testimony.

Jones took the stand during the trial, and was asked by Jackson estate attorney Howard Weitzman whether he realized he was essentially suing Jackson himself.

Jones angrily disagreed.

"I'm not suing Michael," he said. "I'm suing you all."

The defense attorneys pointed out that Jackson's death in 2009 has already been lucrative for Jones, who made \$8 million from his share of their works in the two years after the singer's death, versus \$3 million in the two years previous.

"You don't deserve a raise," Weitzman said during closing arguments. "You can't have any more of Michael Jackson's money."

Jones insisted he was seeking his due for the work he has done rather than merely seeking money.

His attorney Scott Cole accused the defense of using "word games and loopholes" to deny Jones, the Hollywood Reporter said.

The producer worked with Jackson on the three-album run widely considered the performer's prime: "Off the Wall," "Thriller" and "Bad."

Jackson's hits from those albums including "Billie Jean," "Thriller" and "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough"

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are among the songs Jones claims were re-edited.

The lawsuit initially set the amount Jones sought at least \$10 million, but his attorneys later arrived at \$30 million after an accounting of the estate's profits from the works.

Jones and Jackson proved to be a perfect partnership starting with 1979's "Off the Wall." Jackson gave a youthful pop vitality to Jones, who was known primarily as a producer and arranger of jazz and film soundtracks. And Jones lent experience and gravitas to Jackson, who was still best known to most as the child prodigy who fronted the Jackson 5.

Associated Press Writer Andrew Dalton contributed to this report.

AP Interview: UN faces war, rains in Yemen cholera spread

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — The head of the U.N. child agency says trying to slow the spread of cholera in war-ravaged Yemen is "a race between us, and the rains and the continuing destruction and the fighting."

Anthony Lake, executive director of UNICEF, tells The Associated Press on Thursday that efforts to ramp up the campaign against cholera are hampered by a shortfall in resources.

U.N. officials say about 400,000 cases of suspected cholera and close to 1,900 deaths have been recorded since April.

Yemen's civil war is a proxy conflict between regional powers Saudi Arabia and Iran, with Western involvement.

Lake says ordinary people should demand that their governments put an end to these conflicts and "then meet their responsibility to clean up the human suffering that is caused by these conflicts."

GOP eyes narrow bill to advance goal on "Obamacare" repeal

By ERICA WERNER, AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — They couldn't pass a repeal of "Obamacare," or find the votes for a White House-backed replacement. So now Senate Republicans are lowering their sights and trying to unite behind a so-called "skinny repeal" that would merely undo just a few of the most unpopular elements of Barack Obama's law.

The "skinny bill" is an admittedly lowest-common-denominator approach, and it may not even have the votes to pass, either. But as Republicans search for how to keep their years-long effort to repeal and replace "Obamacare" alive, they're coming to believe that the "skinny bill" may be the only option left.

"It still keeps it in play," said Sen. Steve Daines of Montana. "It's threading a needle at the moment, trying to get 51 in the United States Senate."

The strategy emerged after Republicans barely succeeded earlier this week in opening debate on health legislation in the narrowly divided Senate, winning the procedural vote to do so thanks only to Vice President Mike Pence breaking a 50-50 tie.

Hours of debate followed, as well a few amendment votes that starkly revealed Republicans' divisions. On Tuesday, on a 57-43 vote with nine GOP defections, the Senate rejected a wide-ranging proposal by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to erase and replace much of the Affordable Care Act. Then on Wednesday, a straightforward repeal measure failed 55-45 with seven Republicans joining Democrats in voting "no," even though nearly identical legislation had passed Congress two years earlier.

At that time, Obama was in the White House and vetoed the repeal bill. But now, with President Donald Trump sitting in the Oval Office and itching to sign it, Republican senators demonstrated they didn't have the stomach to go through with passing a measure that would end insurance coverage for more than 30 million Americans over a decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

In the wake of those two telling votes Republican senators have few options left, and that's led them to look to the "skinny repeal." The measure has not been finalized, but senators say it could eliminate Obamacare's two mandates — for individuals to carry insurance and for employers to offer it — along with

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an unpopular tax on medical devices, and perhaps contain a few other provisions.

The purpose of passing such legislation would be to get something, anything, out of the Senate, so that talks could begin with House Republicans who passed their own more comprehensive repeal-and-replace bill in early May. The House and Senate bills would need to be reconciled by a "conference committee" into one final piece of legislation that both chambers would have to pass again.

"We've got to move it along and get it to conference," said Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa.

A few GOP aides suggested that perhaps the House would pass the Senate's "skinny bill" as-is, which would allow Republicans to claim at least a partial victory and move on to other issues. With tax legislation and other priorities waiting in the wings, Republicans are eager to move along after spending the first six months of Trump's presidency trying unsuccessfully, so far, to fulfill their years of promises to repeal and replace "Obamacare."

However the House might be unwilling to agree to the "skinny bill" as-is. Conservatives were already ruling that out.

"There would not be enough votes to pass it and send it to the president," said Rep. Mark Meadows of North Carolina, head of the conservative Freedom Caucus. "But to use it as a vehicle to continue negotiations is certainly welcomed."

The behind-the-scenes maneuvering came as the Senate moved through 20 hours of debate on repeal legislation, with Democrats unanimously opposed to the GOP efforts. Under the complex rules governing how the legislation is being considered, the debate will culminate at some point Thursday afternoon or evening in a bizarre exercise called a "vote-a-rama" during which unlimited amendments can be offered by all sides in rapid succession.

The vote-a-rama will likely last into the wee hours of Friday morning, or until "people get tired," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

And by the time it's over, Republicans hope they will have found something, anything, that can get enough votes to pass.

"I think it is quite likely we will be here much of the night, if not all night," said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas. "And at the end of it hopefully we'll have a bill that can bring us together."

Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Amazon and Foxconn reflect a growing trend: Deliver it now

By PAUL WISEMAN and JOSH BOAK, AP Economics Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — In today's economy, speed is everything.

Amazon's plans to add 50,000 jobs at a dozen warehouses across the United States and Foxconn's decision to build a \$10 billion plant and hire up to 13,000 workers in Wisconsin aren't just feel-good stories of job creation. They reflect the pressures companies now feel to be as close to their customers as possible — a trend that's helping restore some American factories and jobs.

Computer advances increasingly let manufacturers customize orders and ship goods faster. In the new world, making products in faraway low-wage countries like China can be a disadvantage: It can take too long — weeks, months — to ship finished products to the United States.

"This is about customer proximity," said Michael Mandel, chief economic strategist at the Progressive Policy Institute. "You develop a sustainable and durable advantage against overseas competition."

Mandel said the growing trend would have emerged regardless of who occupied the White House. Still, President Donald Trump took the opportunity to take some credit Wednesday for the Foxconn announcement, saying it "definitely" happened because of his election and his pursuit of tax and regulatory cuts.

"This is a great day for American workers and manufacturing, and for everyone who believes in the concept and the label, 'Made in the USA,'" Trump said.

Amazon plans to make thousands of hiring offers in one day when it holds a job fair next week across the country. People offered jobs on the spot will pack or sort boxes and help ship them. Nearly 40,000

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of the 50,000 jobs will be full time, and most will count toward Amazon's previously announced goal of adding 100,000 full-time workers by mid-2018.

The move reflects Amazon's propulsive growth at a time when traditional retailers are closing stores and cutting jobs.

For Taiwan-based Foxconn, building a factory in Wisconsin brings it closer to U.S. buyers of its liquid-crystal display panels, which are used in televisions, computer screens and automotive dashboards. Foxconn intends to hire 3,000 workers initially and eventually perhaps employ as many as 13,000. It could also receive up to \$3 billion in state incentives over 15 years.

The company is best-known for assembling Apple iPhones in China, but its Wisconsin factory won't be building iPhones.

For years, the United States has lost factory jobs as manufacturing moved to low-wage countries, especially China. But America has been regaining some of its competitive edge.

The Reshoring Initiative, a nonprofit set up to restore American factory jobs, says that last year, for the first time in decades, the number of manufacturing jobs created by U.S. companies that moved operations back to the United States and by foreign companies investing in America exceeded the jobs lost by U.S. companies moving abroad.

Wages, rents and property prices have risen in China, thereby reducing the Chinese cost advantage. Machines increasingly do work once performed by people, which has reduced the importance of labor costs. And manufacturers more and more worry that supply chains that cross oceans can be disrupted by such unexpected shocks as earthquakes and other natural disasters, thereby delaying shipments to impatient buyers.

Still, the United States will remain somewhat dependent on foreign factories for basic parts that go into finished products. Trump has asserted that new factories in the United States will reduce the trade deficit, which dampens economic growth. But foreign-owned companies in the United States can easily widen the trade gap, according to analysis by Robert Scott, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank based in Washington.

"These plants are always magnets for imports," Scott said.

Scott estimates that roughly 40 percent of America's trade deficit in goods of \$751.5 billion in 2014 came from the U.S. subsidiaries of foreign companies.

For Amazon, the more workers it employs and the more warehouses it operates, the faster it can deliver books, smartphones and sneakers directly to American households.

As Amazon and other online retailers supplant physical stores as the primary source for American shoppers, fewer and fewer of the employees who stand between customers and their purchases are traditional cashiers and sales clerks. Rather, they're the people sorting boxes and driving forklifts in vast warehouses.

Consider that over the past five years, jobs at U.S. department stores have fallen nearly 12 percent. By contrast, jobs in warehouses have jumped 38 percent.

"We're in the middle of a really historic transformation of the job market right now," says Bernard Baumohl, chief economist at the Economic Outlook Group. "You have to broaden your view of what retail is these days."

Still, Gary Burtless, an economist at the Brookings Institution, says Amazon may struggle to hire all those new workers: The U.S. unemployment rate has already fallen to 4.4 percent, close to a 16-year low.

"Amazon is going to have to work a little harder than it would have three years ago to fill 50,000 slots," he says. "There's not a reserve army of unemployed" to draw on anymore.

Trump emboldens friendly foreign leaders, leaves foes wary

By The Associated Press

Are you a friend or foe? That seems to be uppermost in President Donald Trump's approach to foreign policy in the first six months of office.

The probe at home into Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election continues to be a thorn in his side, bedeviling Trump's apparent desire to have warm relations with Russia's Vladimir Putin, and the initial "bromance" with China's Xi Jinping also buckled under geopolitical and economic disagreements. But there are others who have been lavished with the president's favor.

Who is in the friend camp is clear from the president's foreign travels, actions and statements. To varying degrees, his support has emboldened favored countries to carry out contentious regional or domestic policies.

Some traditional U.S. foes, though, could find themselves in a more precarious position than they did under President Barack Obama, who generally avoided direct confrontation and even pursued diplomatic openings with Iran and Cuba.

Below, AP journalists assess the friend-or-foe dynamic as seen from key nations:

SAUDI ARABIA

In Trump Saudi Arabia trusts.

The ultraconservative Sunni kingdom played host to Trump's first overseas trip when it brought him and officials from other Muslim nations for an anti-terrorism conference in May.

Their embrace comes as no surprise as Trump long criticized the Iran nuclear deal, part of the reason for cold relations between the kingdom and President Barack Obama.

Trump also has been willing to overlook human rights concerns in his embrace of Mideast leaders, including Saudi King Salman and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

Trump sent U.S. special operations forces into Yemen to back the Saudi-led campaign in a January raid that killed some 30 people, including women, children and a Navy SEAL.

Trump also has written tweets against Qatar and openly criticized the U.S. ally, host of a major American military base, amid a Saudi-led effort to isolate the country. That's even as members of his administration try to mediate an end to the rift.

King Salman's 31-year-old son, the recently appointed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was one of the first foreign officials to rush to America to see Trump. He has met several times with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Now next in line to the throne, the crown prince likely hopes to trade on those ties in further cementing his interests in weaning the oil-rich kingdom from its crude-dependent economy as global energy prices remain low.

-Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

ISRAEL

To Trump, Israel definitely falls into the most-trusted-friend category.

From early in his campaign, Trump cast himself as an unconditional supporter of Israel who would have a far warmer relationship with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu than Obama did.

After repeated clashes with Obama, Israel's nationalist right had high expectations for Trump. His ambassador to Israel is David Friedman, a bankruptcy lawyer who has raised millions of dollars for the Beit El settlement. That community north of Jerusalem is in the heart of the occupied territory Palestinians want for an independent state.

A foundation run by the family of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner — the president's czar for Middle East peace efforts — also supported Beit El. Tax records show Trump himself donated money to a Jewish seminary in the settlement through his foundation.

Trump indicated his affinity by including Israel in his first overseas trip as president, where he was fawned

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over by his hosts. He speaks warmly about Netanyahu and has reportedly sided with him in spats with the Palestinians. He also encouraged Israelis by taking a tough stand on Iran.

At the same time, Trump has not made good on his campaign promise to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem and has spoken of pushing for the "ultimate deal," raising fears in Israel that it could be pressured into making unwanted concessions.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians have made efforts to get in Trump's good graces, with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas traveling to Washington to meet him and praise his leadership. But a new wave of violence over a disputed Jerusalem shrine, sacred to Muslims and Jews, is Trump's first experience of the decades-long conflict's realities. How his administration navigates it will be telling.

-Aron Heller in Jerusalem

POLAND

Trump lavished praise on Poland during a visit this month, hailing its struggles for freedom against past oppression and depicting the country — which strongly opposes taking any Muslim refugees — as a defender of Western civilization. He made no mention of rule of law or human rights, even though the country's populist ruling party has spent the past 20 months consolidating power in ways that have weakened checks and balances.

Within days of the visit, the Law and Justice party moved to pass legislation aimed at giving the government vast new powers over the courts. One bill called for the immediate dismissal of all Supreme Court judges, giving the justice minister power to replace them. Among other things, the change would have given the ruling party direct control over confirming election results, one of the Supreme Court's functions.

This week the country's president responded to days of mass nationwide protests by vetoing two of three bills on the judiciary, including the one on the Supreme Court. However, he left in place a third bill that gives the justice minister the power to name the heads of all the country's lower courts, which critics also see as unconstitutional.

"Trump's silence about the Polish government's problems with democracy and the rule of law encouraged Warsaw to pursue further measures, effectively ending judicial independence and separation of powers soon after the presidential visit," said Marcin Zaborowski, a political analyst affiliated with Visegrad Insight, a journal about politics in Central Europe.

-Vanessa Gera in Warsaw, Poland

IRAN

Trump hasn't yet torn up the Iran nuclear deal, which took the U.S. and other world powers years to negotiate and ended with Tehran accepting curbs on its contested nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

Whether that remains the case is an open question.

Days into the Trump presidency, then-national security adviser Michael Flynn warned Iran that it was being put "on notice" following a ballistic missile test.

That hasn't stopped Iran from continuing to develop its weapons programs. In the past six months, it has unveiled new arms, staged military drills and launched a sea-deployed ballistic missile with a reported 300-kilometer (185-mile) range.

Last month, an Iranian patrol boat shined a laser at a U.S. Marine Corps helicopter flying over the Strait of Hormuz — an incident deemed dangerous by the U.S. military.

Trump considered declaring Iran in breach of the nuclear deal this month but ultimately confirmed it was in compliance. He'll have to revisit the issue in three months.

The administration has slapped Iran with new sanctions, however, including 18 this month targeting Iranian individuals and groups for aiding its non-nuclear weapons programs.

And it recently came out with a new warning, saying Tehran faces "new and serious consequences" unless it frees all U.S. citizens held there. They include Princeton graduate student Xiyue Wang, whose arrest nearly a year ago only came to light this month when he was sentenced to 10 years behind bars.

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- Adam Schreck in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

THE KOREAS

There's not a lot of room for doubt on this one. North Korea is not only an enemy of the United States — a "sworn enemy" as the North Koreans put it — but the two are technically still at war, since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in what was supposed to be a temporary armistice.

Pyongyang made no secret of its anger at Washington's policy under Obama of keeping up sanctions and other pressure and refusing contacts. But in Trump's first six months, it seems to take even more umbrage at him — though his policy so far has been enunciated mostly just in chastising tweets.

The North is testing Trump in dramatic ways — most recently with its July 4 test of its first intercontinental ballistic missile.

Kim Jong Un's bold rush toward nuclear weapons and missiles capable of reaching the U.S. is in part intended to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul — and Trump isn't helping to counter that very well. Instead, he has stepped on Seoul's toes by accusing it of not carrying enough of its own defense burden, and by hurriedly installing a controversial anti-missile system in South Korea before conservatives there lost the presidency in elections this spring. The system is partially deployed, but a full rollout has been delayed under liberal President Moon Jae-in for an environmental review.

For South Korea, one of Washington's most loyal allies, knowing where the U.S. president stands is absolutely key to its national security policy.

But right now, Kim Jong Un might well be the easier of the two men for Seoul to predict.

-Eric Talmadge, Pyongyang

VENEZUELA

Things haven't been good between the U.S. and Venezuela since then-President Hugo Chavez called then-President George W. Bush "the devil" in a 2006 speech at the U.N.

Obama avoided confrontation with Venezuela, instead encouraging dialogue between the government and opposition. Trump is threatening to launch "strong and swift economic actions" if Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro moves ahead with the rewriting of the constitution, which Maduro's opponents fear would pave the way for a single-party, authoritarian state.

Those actions could include devastating sanctions on Venezuela's oil exports, or simply lengthening a list of top officials who can't do business with the United States. Maduro and his top aides insist they will go ahead with the election Sunday of a special assembly charged with the constitutional rewrite, a move that will reveal how tough Trump is willing to get.

The Trump administration has already imposed sanctions against Maduro's vice president and eight Supreme Court justices, with no measurable impact on the Venezuelan government's behavior. On Wednesday it targeted another 13 current or former top officials in Maduro's government.

The United States remains the primary source of hard currency keeping the Venezuelan government afloat, since Venezuela sends about half its total exports to the U.S. Restricting Venezuelan oil imports would undermine Maduro's government but would also increase hardship in the country and give Maduro an easier scapegoat for an already spiraling economic collapse.

Trump's continued use of sanctions against individuals may be a sign that Washington will stop short of a full-on economic confrontation, though Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin suggested more penalties could come if Maduro's government fails to change course.

-Michael Weissenstein in Caracas, Venezuela

Larry David says his blunt 'Curb' character is no Trump

By LYNN ELBER, AP Television Writer

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) — Larry David says his irascible, mouthy character on "Curb Your Enthusiasm" is "about a quarter-inch" away from David himself.

But David said he bears no resemblance to another blunt talker, President Donald Trump.

"I don't consider myself a (expletive)," he told a TV critics' meeting Wednesday, brushing off a reporter's question about whether Trump represented a rival as David's HBO comedy returns after a long absence.

Jeff Garlin, who co-stars on the comedy, chimed in.

"Our president is not funny, and Larry's funny. So I don't see the competition," Garlin said. "I think one is completely sad, and one you escape from the horribleness of the sad one."

"Curb Your Enthusiasm," which last aired six years ago, is back for a 10-episode ninth season starting Oct. 1. Besides Garlin, cast members include Cheryl Hines, Susie Essman and J.B. Smoove, with Elizabeth Banks, Bryan Cranston and Lauren Graham among the guest stars.

David was asked why he decided to bring the show back now.

"Why not?" he answered. "I'm not a miss-er, so to speak. I don't really miss things, people, that much. But I was missing it and I was missing these idiots," he said of the cast members who joined him to promote the show. "So I thought, what the hell."

He also tired of people asking him if the show was coming back — but he wouldn't put to rest questions about whether this would be its last season.

David spent a fair amount of time playing with reporters as he, sometimes, answered their questions.

Asked if the TV version of Larry David might eventually become lovable someday, David replied, sarcastically, "No, no he's not. But fascinating question."

Would his character eventually have to face everyone he had wronged? That apparent nod to the series ender of "Seinfeld," which David created with Jerry Seinfeld, induced real or feigned irritation.

"I guess that's a 'Seinfeld' reference? A 'Seinfeld' finale reference? What are doing? I braved traffic to get here," David said. "Shame on you."

David also will be seen on the upcoming season of PBS' genealogy series "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates Jr." In it, he finds out he has a family connection to Bernie Sanders, the senator and former presidential hopeful that David played on "Saturday Night Live."

There's a connection as well to Judith Sheindlin, TV's "Judge Judy," who makes an appearance on "Curb Your Enthusiasm." The reason he picked her and not another TV judge, David said, is he knew Sheindlin because she's part of his ex-wife's family.

Spinning Ohio State Fair ride breaks apart; 1 dead, 7 hurt

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A swinging and spinning amusement park ride called the Fire Ball broke apart on the opening day of the Ohio State Fair on Wednesday, hurtling people through the air, killing at least one and injuring seven others.

Three of the injured remained hospitalized in critical condition Wednesday night, authorities said at a late-night news conference.

"The fair is about the best things in life, and tonight with this accident it becomes a terrible, terrible tragedy," said Republican Gov. John Kasich.

The man who was killed was one of several people who were thrown when the ride malfunctioned, Columbus Fire Battalion Chief Steve Martin said earlier.

Dramatic video captured by a bystander shows the ride swinging back and forth like a pendulum and spinning in the air when it crashes into something and part of the ride flies off, throwing riders to the ground.

A company providing rides at the fair this year describes the Fire Ball as an "aggressive thrill" ride.

On its website, Amusements of America says that since its debut in 2002, the Fire Ball has become "one of the most popular thrill rides on the AOA Midway." The company description of the ride says it swings riders 40 feet (12 meters) above the midway while spinning them at 13 revolutions per minute.

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The company did not immediately return a phone message seeking comment.

"All of the rides at the fair are checked several times when they are being set up to ensure they are set up the way the manufacturer intended," said Director of Agriculture David Daniels, adding that the Fire Ball passed its inspections.

"We started out today with 11 rides that did not open because the inspection work was not done on them," said Daniels. Four rides will not be operating because they do not meet the mechanical test, he said. Kasich has ordered that all of the rides be shut down until additional safety inspections can be completed. The fair runs through Aug. 6.

Protesters gather against Trump ban on transgender troops

By **OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ, Associated Press**

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Demonstrators flocked to a military recruiting station in New York City and gathered at a plaza named for a San Francisco gay-rights icon on Wednesday to protest President Donald Trump's abrupt ban on transgender troops in the military.

A crowd of at least a few hundred people gathered around the U.S. Armed Forces recruiting station in Times Square. They held signs saying "Resist!" and listened to speakers who denounced the ban, which Trump announced on Twitter.

Demonstrator Yael Leberman says transgender people "are completely adequate to serve" and combat is "not about physical, it's about mental" abilities. She says it's unsurprising from the Republican president to say what he said or to see the pushback from a place as diverse as New York City.

It's unclear what the ban will mean for currently serving transgender soldiers.

Several hundred demonstrators gathered later Wednesday in San Francisco's Harvey Milk Plaza. They waved pink and blue flags, held signs reading "Trans lives are not a burden" and chanted "Stand up! Fight back!"

A transgender woman who identified herself only as Layla told the crowd she's tired of being told who she can or cannot be, and asked for others in the LGBT community to support trans people as they fight for respect.

Doug Thorogood and Nick Rondoletto, a couple from San Francisco, waved a rainbow flag and held a sign that read "The only reason transgenders are being banned from the military is for bigotry."

"Haven't transgender people gone through enough? I'm over it!" Thorogood said, as they marched with the crowd from the Castro neighborhood to City Hall.

"When (Trump) goes for the people with the least rights, I just can't sit back and let that happen," Rondoletto added.

At a smaller gathering at the Los Angeles LGBT Center in Hollywood, U.S. Army Reserve member and transgender man Rudy Akbarian, 27, said at first he thought the news of the President's order was a joke. The five-year military veteran said he was "heartbroken" to learn it was real.

"There are people who are retiring in the military, there are people who've done 18, 19 years and are about to retire and now it's all taken away from them," he said. "It's not fair."

"I know it's not over," he said. "I know we're not going to give up."

Associated Press writers Robert Jablon in Los Angeles and Deepti Hajela contributed to this report.

LGBT outrage over Trump ban on transgender military service

By **DAVID CRARY, AP National Writer**

NEW YORK (AP) — Most LGBT-rights activists never believed Donald Trump's campaign promises to be their friend. But with his move Wednesday to ban transgender people from military service, on top of other actions and appointments, they now see him as openly hostile.

Leaders of major advocacy groups depicted Trump's Twitter pronouncement as an appeal to the portion of his conservative base that opposes the recent civil-rights gains by the LGBT community.

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"His administration will stop at nothing to implement its anti-LGBTQ ideology within our government — even if it means denying some of our bravest Americans the right to serve and protect our nation," said Sarah Kate Ellis, president of the LGBT-rights group GLAAD.

Transgender service members have been able to serve openly since last year, after a move by then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter. Trump's vow to end that policy was the latest, and perhaps the most stinging, of a string of actions since his election that have dismayed supporters of LGBT rights.

Some examples:

— The administration rescinded federal guidance advising school districts to let transgender students use the bathrooms and locker rooms of their choice. It said state and local officials should decide the issue.

— Several of Trump's high-level appointees have solid records as opponents of LGBT-rights advances, including Vice President Mike Pence, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price.

— At Trump's direction, Sessions is developing new guidance on religious liberty for federal agencies that is expected to make it easier for people with religious objections to refuse to recognize LGBT rights.

— The Department of Justice on Wednesday filed an amicus brief in a case to which it's not a party, arguing that a federal civil-rights law doesn't cover sexual orientation. The case was filed in 2010, when a skydiving instructor sued his employer, saying he was fired for his sexual orientation in violation of the law.

— Six members of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS resigned, asserting that Trump "simply does not care" about combating HIV and AIDS as it continues to beset the LGBT community.

The Human Rights Campaign, a national LGBT-rights group, depicted the Republican president's tweets Wednesday as a "heinous and disgusting" attack on transgender service members.

"It is also the latest effort by Trump and Mike Pence to undo our progress and drag LGBTQ people back into the closet by using our lives as political pawns," said the group's president, Chad Griffin.

Trump's pronouncement was hailed by some conservatives who have long complained that the military was undermining its effectiveness by allowing gays, lesbians and transgender people to serve openly. Opponents also have contended that the military should not bear the cost of any medical procedures related to gender transition.

"Our troops shouldn't be forced to endure hours of transgender sensitivity classes and politically correct distractions like this one," said Tony Perkins, a former Marine who heads the conservative Family Research Council.

Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, denounced Trump's declaration as "simple bigotry."

"This attack has nothing to do with military readiness, reason or science," she said. "It is indefensible."

Among those dismayed by Trump's tweets was Lt. Cmdr. Blake Dremann, a transgender man who's served in the Navy for 11 years and received his latest promotion after the policy change last year.

"Trans service members are continuing to do our jobs," Dremann said. "People know who we are now and it becomes personal, especially when you've got families that are going to be affected by this."

Another active-duty transgender soldier, Army Capt. Jennifer Peace, said she was concerned how a possible ban would affect her, her family and other transgender service members.

"My command has told me in the past the only thing that we should discriminate on is job performance, and I hope that military leadership will handle this issue the same way," Peace said in an email.

Capt. Jacob Eleazer, a transgender man who serves in the Kentucky Army National Guard, said he was stunned by Trump's action.

"Fired by tweet. It was honestly pretty shocking," said Eleazer, who took the day off from his job as a therapist in Lexington, Kentucky, to assess the situation.

It's unclear whether Eleazer's career will be affected.

Eleazer, 31, has been in the military since 2006. In 2014, he told his superior officer he was transgender, and he got full support.

Attorney Sasha Buchert, a transgender woman who works for the LGBT-rights group Lambda Legal,

recalled feelings of fear and isolation while serving in the Marines in the 1980s, decades before her gender transition.

"It's not a question of whether transgender people will serve," she said. "It's a question of whether they'll be serving openly or will be hiding like they did in the old days."

Another transgender veteran, retired Army Col. Sheri Swokowski, said it's important for transgender people and their allies to push back against Trump's decree.

Swokowski, 67, of Windsor, Wisconsin, transitioned to female after retiring from the military in 2004.

"The military has taught us to fight and this administration shouldn't be surprised when we do," she said. "We need to impress upon the administration that we're not living in the dark ages."

Associated Press writers Dylan Lovan in Louisville, Kentucky, Jennifer McDermott in Providence, Rhode Island, and Tatiana Flowers in Denver contributed to this report.

AP Exclusive: Boy Scouts chief expected a fiery Trump speech

By DAVID CRARY, AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Boy Scouts of America anticipated President Donald Trump would spark controversy with a politically tinged speech at its national jamboree in West Virginia but felt obliged to invite him out of respect for his office, its leader said Wednesday in his first public comments on the furor over Trump's remarks.

"If I suggested I was surprised by the president's comments, I would be disingenuous," Boy Scouts of America president Randall Stephenson, who's also the CEO of AT&T, said in a phone call with The Associated Press.

Other U.S. presidents have addressed past jamborees with speeches steering clear of partisan politics. To the dismay of many parents and former scouts, Trump, a Republican, promoted his political agenda and assailed his enemies in his speech Monday evening, inducing some of the more than 30,000 scouts in attendance to boo at the mention of Barack Obama, his Democratic predecessor.

Stephenson noted that every U.S. president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt has been invited to address the jamboree and said the Boy Scouts leadership gave "a lot of thought about Donald Trump coming to speak."

"Anyone knows his speeches get highly political — we anticipated that this could be the case," Stephenson said. "Do I wish the president hadn't gone there and hadn't been political? Of course."

Hoping to minimize friction, the Boy Scouts of America, which is based in Irving, Texas, issued what Stephenson called "stringent guidelines" to adult staff members for how the audience should react to the speech.

"You can help make the president's visit a success by ensuring that any reactions to the president's address are, as we state in our Scout Law, friendly, courteous, and kind," the guidance said. "This includes understanding that chants of certain phrases heard during the campaign (e.g. 'build the wall,' 'lock her up') are considered divisive by many members of our audience, and may cause unnecessary friction between individuals and units.

"Please help us ensure that all Scouts can enjoy this historical address by making sure that your troop members are respectful not only of the president, but of the wide variety of viewpoints held by Scouts and Scouters in the audience tonight," the guidance said.

Stephenson, who was not in attendance at Trump's speech, said the guidance wasn't followed impeccably.

"There were some areas where perhaps they were not in compliance with what we instructed," he said. "There's probably criticism that could be leveled."

Stephenson has been a senior Boy Scout official through several of its recent controversies, including decisions to admit gay and transgender youths as scouts and to accept openly gay adults as unit leaders. He said he wasn't surprised by the negative reactions to Trump's speech.

"We anticipated there might be some people upset," he said.

Would the Scouts invite Trump back to address the next national jamboree if he wins re-election? "I don't see why we would break with tradition, whoever is holding office," Stephenson said. "We are not going to censor or edit the president of the United States. That's beyond our pay grade regardless of who it is."

The controversy occurred as AT&T, which is based in Dallas, is seeking the approval of Trump administration regulators for its proposed \$85 billion purchase of Time Warner.

Follow David Crary on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/CraryAP>

Israel removes railings, overhead bridge near holy site

By ARON HELLER and MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel removed railings and an overhead metal bridge it had recently installed near a contested Jerusalem holy site, meeting a demand by Muslim protesters and causing thousands of Palestinians to celebrate in the streets early Thursday.

Muslim leaders said they would decide later in the day whether worshippers could return to the shrine for prayers and end a crisis that Israel hoped it had resolved by making concessions at the site.

The head of the Supreme Islamic Committee, Ikrema Sabri, had said previously that worshippers would not return to the shrine until Israel removed the new railings and cameras it installed after a deadly attack there.

Sabri said that even after Israel removed metal detectors, more steps were required to restore calm. He said mass prayer protests would continue until the gates of the compound are opened, metal railings and an iron bridge removed and newly installed cameras removed.

"We will not enter the mosque until these things are implemented," Sabri told The Associated Press. "Now we are awaiting the response of the police."

The demands set off the prospect of a renewed showdown ahead of Friday prayers, when a large number of worshippers arrive for the centerpiece of the Muslim prayer week.

It was unclear whether Israel's removal of the railings and overhead bridge would meet the demands, but Palestinians danced, chanted "God is Great" and set off fireworks early Thursday.

Israel installed the new security measures earlier this month after Arab gunmen shot and killed two police officers from within the site. It said they were necessary to prevent more attacks, while Palestinians claimed Israel was trying to expand its control over the site. The issue sparked some of the worst street clashes in years and threatened to draw Israel into conflict with other Arab and Muslim nations.

Under intense pressure, Israel removed the metal detectors and said it planned to install sophisticated security cameras instead.

But Palestinian politicians and Muslim clerics say that isn't enough and are demanding Israel restore the situation at the shrine in Jerusalem's Old City to what it was before the July 14 attack.

Israel's decision to add security measures there triggered Muslim protests, and low-level clashes have continued in and around Jerusalem in the days since. The Red Crescent said 13 people were treated Tuesday night after being hit by rubber bullets during protests.

The continued standoff highlighted the deep distrust between Israel and the Palestinians when it comes to the shrine — the third-holiest in Islam and the most sacred in Judaism.

The 37-acre (15-hectare) compound, known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as the Temple Mount, has been a lightning rod for the rival religious and national narratives of the two sides and has triggered major confrontations in the past.

The latest development could put Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a tough spot, as he tries to tamp out a wave of unrest that has triggered international pressure while not appearing to his hard-line base as capitulating.

His government has faced a growing backlash at home for what critics said was hasty decision-making and embarrassing policy reversals. Even Israel Hayom, a free daily owned by Netanyahu's billionaire patron

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Sheldon Adelson, denounced Israel's response to the crisis as "feeble and frightened."

In an unprecedented headline, the paper — which has been an unequivocal source of support for the prime minister — led with "Netanyahu's demonstration of helplessness."

In a face-saving compromise, and after Netanyahu spoke to Jordan's King Abdullah II and others, Israel's security Cabinet announced on Monday that in place of the metal detectors, it would employ nonintrusive "advanced technologies" — reportedly smart cameras that can detect hidden objects. The new security system is said to be set up in the next six months at a cost of \$28 million.

Netanyahu appeared to be doubling back again Wednesday when he instructed police forces to conduct thorough inspections at the site.

Israeli police, meanwhile, acknowledged their forces have been preventing journalists from entering parts of Jerusalem's Old City. Reporters have said they were being blocked this week from covering the unrest around the shrine while tourists have been able to freely move about the city and film with their mobile phones.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said "journalists are being prevented from coming in those specific areas where there have been disturbances and riots." He said it was a decision made by the Jerusalem police district.

The Foreign Press Association derided the move, calling it "a kind of innovative censorship that is surprising in a country that prides itself on press freedom."

Israel has also found itself in a new scuffle with Turkey, whose President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been among its fiercest critics. On Tuesday, Erdogan accused Israel of using security measures as a pretext to take over holy sites in Jerusalem.

Israel's foreign ministry responded by calling the comments "delusional, baseless and distorted."

"The days of the Ottoman Empire are over," it said. "He who lives in a palace of glass would be better off not throwing stones."

Netanyahu's office also chimed in, saying it wondered what Erdogan would have to say to Kurds and residents of north Cyprus. "Erdogan is the last one who can preach to Israel," it said in a statement.

On Wednesday, Turkey's foreign ministry called the Israeli statements "arrogant."

Daraghmeh reported from Ramallah, West Bank.

Law drawing focus in Russia probe rarely ends in prosecution

By ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Criminal prosecutions are rare for people who fail to register as foreign agents, according to a top Justice Department official who testified Wednesday about an obscure law receiving new attention amid investigations into contacts between the Trump campaign and Russia.

Adam Hickey, a deputy assistant attorney general, told Senate lawmakers that the Foreign Agents Registration Act — a law aimed at ensuring transparency about lobbying efforts done in the U.S. at the direction of foreign governments or principals — contains multiple exemptions for registration and requires proof that someone intended to break the law by failing to disclose their work.

He said lawyers in a specialized Justice Department unit often prod someone to voluntarily register instead of seeking to charge them.

"The high burden of proving willfulness, difficulties in proving direction or control by a foreign principal and exemptions available under the statute make criminal prosecution for FARA violations challenging," Hickey said.

Nonetheless, he said, the Justice Department will not refuse to bring a case if there is evidence of intentional wrongdoing. It has brought four criminal prosecutions under the statute since 2007, all of which he said have resulted in convictions.

The law has been broadly discussed in the last year because of Justice Department investigations into Trump campaign associates and because of a watchdog report last year that said the statute had been

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weakly enforced for decades. That report, from the Justice Department's inspector general, found that the number of FARA registrations had declined in the last two decades and that prosecutions and civil enforcement actions were rare. The report made several recommendations for improvement.

Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort belatedly registered in June with the Justice Department for political consulting work he did for a Ukrainian political party before joining the Republican candidate's presidential bid. He acknowledged that he coached party members on how to interact with U.S. government officials.

Besides Manafort, Trump's former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, and his consulting firm registered in the weeks after his ouster from the administration for lobbying work that could have benefited the Turkish government.

Manafort had been invited to testify at Wednesday's hearing but he did not appear. Instead, he agreed Tuesday night to turn over documents and to continue negotiating about setting up an interview with the panel.

The committee also removed Donald Trump Jr. from the list of witnesses scheduled for Wednesday's public hearing.

The panel has sought to talk with Manafort about a June 2016 Trump Tower meeting in New York with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, among other issues including his foreign political work on behalf of Ukrainian interests.

On Tuesday Manafort met with Senate Intelligence Committee staff, providing his recollection of the Veselnitskaya meeting and agreeing to turn over contemporaneous notes of the gathering last year, according to people familiar with the closed-door interview. Manafort "answered their questions fully," said his spokesman, Jason Maloni.

Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner was also on Capitol Hill Tuesday for a second day of private meetings, this time for a conversation with lawmakers on the House Intelligence Committee.

Both Manafort and Kushner have been cooperating with the committees which, along with Special Counsel Robert Mueller, are probing Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election and possible collusion with Trump associates.

The two men have faced particular scrutiny about attending the Trump Tower meeting because it was flatly described in emails to Donald Trump Jr. as being part of a Russian government effort to aid Trump's presidential campaign.

Manafort's discussion with committee staff was limited to his recollection of the June 2016 meeting, according to two people familiar with the interview. Both demanded anonymity to discuss details because the interview occurred behind closed doors. Manafort had previously disclosed the meeting in documents he turned over to the committee. He has now provided the committee with notes he took at the time, one of the people said.

The other person said Manafort has also said he will participate in additional interviews with the Senate Intelligence Committee staff on other topics if necessary. Those meetings haven't yet been scheduled.

Kushner spent about three hours behind closed doors Tuesday with the House intelligence panel. Republican Rep. Mike Conaway of Texas, who is leading the committee's Russia probe, said he found Kushner to be "straightforward, forthcoming, wanted to answer every question we had." He said Kushner was willing to follow up with the committee if it has additional questions.

The committee's top Democrat, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, said the questions touched on "a range of issues the committee had been concerned about."

"We appreciate his voluntary willingness to come and testify today," Schiff added.

Associated Press writers Chad Day and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Venezuela leader's foes levy new sanctions and fresh strike

By MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN, Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Opponents of President Nicolas Maduro at home and abroad tried again Wednesday to pressure the socialist leader into halting his plans to rewrite Venezuela's constitution though there was no public sign their efforts were working.

The Trump administration announced sanctions on 13 current and former members of Maduro's administration, freezing their U.S. assets and barring Americans from doing business with them. The U.S. also joined with a dozen other regional governments in urging Maduro to suspend Sunday's election of a national assembly for rewriting the charter.

Far from derail Maduro, the Venezuelan leader appeared emboldened by the sanctions, praising those accused by the U.S. government of undermining the nation's democracy and abusing human rights.

"We don't recognize any sanction," he said. "For us, it's a recognition of morality, loyalty to the nation, and civic honesty."

Those moves came as a coalition of Venezuelan opposition groups organized a second national strike in a week. Highways were mostly empty and businesses shuttered across the country as millions of people observed the 48-hour strike and activists threw up roadblocks in many neighborhoods to keep others from getting to work.

By late afternoon, clashes between police and protesters erupted at some roadblocks in Caracas, and the chief prosecutor's office reported at least one person killed. That increased the official count of dead in nearly four months of demonstrations to at least 98.

Venezuela was less than four days from a vote that would start the process of rewriting its constitution by electing members of a special assembly to reshape the charter. The opposition is boycotting the vote, saying election rules were rigged to guarantee Maduro a majority in the constitutional assembly.

Maduro did not address the nation Wednesday but state-run television was filled with scenes of his backers exhorting the public to go to the polls Sunday.

Meanwhile, opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez called on Venezuelans to support the strike in his first direct public message since being moved from prison to house arrest this month. The 46-year-old former Caracas-area mayor, who was sentenced to 14 years in 2015 after being convicted of inciting violence during a previous spate of protests, also appealed to the military not to deploy for Sunday's election.

"We are on the brink of their trying to annihilate the republic that you swore to defend," Lopez said in a 15-minute video message. "I ask you not to be accomplices in the annihilation of the republic."

Three days of protests are planned leading up to Sunday's vote, starting with the strike and culminating Friday with a demonstration billed as a "takeover of Caracas."

"We have to do everything possible to halt the constitutional assembly," said Maria Medina, an office administrator who was waiting in line at a state-run bank that opened. "The only solution is a change of government."

Among those hit by the U.S. sanctions were Tibisay Lucena Ramirez, the president of the National Electoral Council and president of Venezuela's National Board of Elections; Elias Jose Jaua Milano, minister of education and head of the Presidential Commission for the National Constituent Assembly; Tarek William Saab Halabi, president of Venezuela's Republican Moral Council; and Maria Iris Varela Rangel, a member of Venezuela's Presidential Commission for the Constituent Assembly.

In addition, penalties will apply to several members of Venezuela's national guard, police and other security services, including Interior Minister Nestor Luis Reverol Torres, who was indicted last year by the U.S. Justice Department for his alleged role in an international cocaine distribution conspiracy.

The Trump administration has said it is considering further sanctions, including restrictions on Venezuelan oil imports, a potentially devastating blow to Venezuela's economy.

The U.S. also said it had determined that Venezuelan Vice President Tareck El Aissami, hit with U.S. sanctions in February, had "hundreds of millions of dollars" in assets that have been frozen due to the sanctions. The U.S. has accused El Aissami of playing a major role in global drug trafficking, a charge he

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denies. El Aissami is the most senior Venezuelan official ever targeted by the U.S.

The flagship airline in neighboring Colombia said it was suspending all flights to Venezuela, citing security concerns. Avianca joined a long list of air carriers that have suspended service to Venezuela as the country sinks further into economic and political chaos. June saw the last United Airlines departure from Caracas.

A top Cuban official said his country had no intention of trying to mediate a solution to Venezuela's crisis, rejecting the idea of what he called "foreign meddling" and voicing full support for Maduro, a key ideological and economic ally of the island's government.

"Those who from the outside try to give lessons on democracy and human rights while encouraging coup-mongering violence and terrorism should take their hands off that nation," Cuban Communist Party Second Secretary Jose Ramon Machado Ventura said at a ceremony marking the anniversary of a failed barracks uprising that is considered the beginning of Fidel Castro's revolution.

Associated Press writers Andrea Rodriguez in Havana and Joshua Lederman in Washington contributed to this report.

Demand overseas keeps Mustang on top despite lower US sales

By DEE-ANN DURBIN, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — On any given day this summer, you might find 97-year-old Lennart Ribring driving his 2016 Ford Mustang GT on a winding road near his home in Sweden. Or you might see Chris Fitzpatrick polishing his 1967 Mustang convertible in Auckland, New Zealand. Guo Xin might be working on a Mustang in his car repair shop in Beijing, while in England, a happy bride and groom drive off in a Mustang GT California Special.

More than 50 years after it was introduced, the world remains captivated by the Mustang. Ford will ship the quintessential American car to 140 countries in 2017.

"It has a mass appeal," says John Heitmann, a history professor at the University of Dayton and the author of "The Automobile and American Life." "Cars, historically, have been so closely tied to status and class, but the Mustang transcends so many different class distinctions."

Ford's growling pony car became the best-selling sports car in the world last year, with more than 150,000 sold, according to IHS Markit. Mustang sales are slipping in the U.S., where overall sales are softening. U.S. Mustang sales fell 13 percent last year, and they're down 29 percent so far this year.

But rising sales elsewhere could help the Mustang retain the global crown.

Mustang sales were up 40 percent in the first half of this year in China, where Guo owns three of them, including a 2005 GT convertible.

The former race car driver finds Mustangs tougher and more fun to drive than European or Japanese sports cars. The Mustang beat out two sleeker European rivals, the BMW 4 Series and the Porsche 911, to become No. 1.

"I like what is simple and rough in a Mustang," says Guo, who leads the Mustang Club of China, with more than 3,000 members.

The car's largest fan club, the Mustang Club of America, has around 12,000 members. But there are hundreds of smaller ones. The Icelandic Mustang Club boasts 200 members.

Fans have been importing individual Detroit-built Mustangs for decades, but Ford recently put in the engineering muscle to ensure that the cars could be sold in dealerships around in the world.

The sixth-generation Mustang, released in 2015, is the first that comes in both right-hand and left-hand drive versions. Its air conditioning system was built to withstand blowing sand in the Middle East, while its front end conforms to European pedestrian-safety regulations.

New markets for the Mustang this year include Brazil, Ivory Coast and Palau.

Ford's global push makes the Mustang more accessible to longtime fans like Fitzpatrick. When he was a teenager in New Zealand, American-made cars were expensive status symbols. To him, American cars meant muscle. European sports cars were smaller and less aggressive.

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"I always think of touring and power when I think of Mustang," says Fitzpatrick, who now owns two classic Mustangs.

Heitmann, the history professor, says the Mustang is one of the few cars that is appealing — and affordable — to nearly everyone. A base model with a V6 engine starts at \$25,000. Aficionados will pay more than double that for a Shelby GT350 version with a V8. Heitmann, 69, has owned two Mustangs in his lifetime, and has his eye on the 2018 model.

"It's democratic. A working-class person can drive this car to the plant, and a banker can drive it to the office. You can't do that with a Mercedes," he says.

Television and movies — like the 1968 thriller "Bullitt" — also cemented the Mustang as a global icon.

"If you ask practically anyone to name an American car, 90 percent of the time they will say 'a Mustang,'" says Frazer Rhodes of Halifax, England.

Rhodes bought a 2005 GT Convertible for his 30th birthday in 2008. After so many friends asked to use it for weddings, he founded a company that rents Mustangs for nearly 250 weddings per year. Couples — many of whom are heading to Las Vegas or Hawaii for their honeymoons — want a car that's cool, not the stuffy Rolls Royces their parents used, he says.

In the U.S., Mustang sales most recently spiked in 2015 when the newest generation was released. They totaled 122,349 that year, but have fallen ever since as that model ages, says Michelle Krebs, an executive analyst with Autotrader. Younger buyers are stretched financially and are less likely to splurge on a sports car, she said. And car buying is in decline among Baby Boomers, who have long fueled sales of Detroit's muscle cars.

But the Mustang will always have its fans. Ribring, the 97-year-old Swede, has been smitten with the car's design and performance since 1964.

"Given that there was no speed limit in Sweden during that time, there was only one option: Buy!" he says.

AP researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed.

Why you still can't ditch your cable box

By TALI ARBEL, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Not that long ago, the clunky cable box looked like it was on its way out. The federal government was pressuring cable companies to open up their near-monopoly on boxes to more competition, and industry leader Comcast promised apps that could render some boxes obsolete.

That was then. Today, the vast majority of customers still need to rent a box to get full service from cable providers, and those box-replacing apps remain elusive. Here's what happened.

DITCHING THE BOX

In 2015, tech companies and consumer advocates were pushing the Federal Communications Commission to open up the cable-box market. The goal was to let you buy a cable box the way you'd pick up a new smartphone, sparing you the expense of leasing them from cable companies for about \$6 and up a month.

The cable industry and Hollywood hated the FCC's February 2016 plan to "unlock the box." They pointed out that TV-watching apps were already available — more on that below — and laid out an industry proposal for new apps that could replace cable boxes.

Amid industry pushback, the FCC's proposed rules languished ahead of the 2016 election. Afterward, President Donald Trump's new FCC chairman, Ajit Pai, shelved them permanently.

The industry is no longer pushing its app proposal with the FCC, said Brian Dietz, a spokesman for the cable lobby group NCTA. And he noted that some cable and satellite companies have launched apps that let customers watch video without a cable box.

WHERE, OH WHERE, ARE THOSE APPS?

But most cable TV customers still need a box. The industry has little motivation to get rid of rented cable boxes or to keep its promises without pressure from regulators, said John Bergmayer, senior counsel of the public advocacy group Public Knowledge, in a filing to the FCC.

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In 2015, Comcast launched a box-free cable service in Boston called Stream, designed for phones, tablets and computers. At the time, the company said it would roll out to all users by early 2016.

Stream, however, remains limited to Boston and Chicago, although Comcast reportedly intends to re-launch it as a broader "Instant" service before the end of September. The company says net neutrality rules and regulators under the Obama administration hindered Stream's rollout. It wants the FCC to spike these rules, which bar internet providers from favoring their own content.

Comcast also said in April 2016 that it was working with Roku and Samsung to develop apps that, later that year, could replace cable boxes. And it did start testing a Roku app in January, although customers still need a cable box while the service is in "beta." One more drawback: Using the Roku app won't be free if customers want it to work with more than one TV.

The Samsung app, meanwhile, remains under development. Comcast wouldn't comment beyond blaming net neutrality for the delays.

In 2015, Charter and Time Warner Cable started offering apps that could replace cable boxes in some markets. Nearly two years later, Charter says it's now "testing" a cable-replacement app, Spectrum Stream. (Charter bought Time Warner Cable in 2016.) The app is available in New York City upon request; during a recent inquiry, a customer service rep pushed a more expensive traditional "triple play" TV, internet and phone package instead.

CABLE-BOX FREE TV GALORE

The cable lobby is right to point out that there are plenty of box-free TV apps available. They're just not really aimed at the 94 million traditional cable and satellite customers.

"Cord cutters" have lots of options for internet video beyond Netflix. Online-cable services from Dish, Sony, Hulu and YouTube let you watch live TV and record it for later. (AT&T's DirecTV Now's DVR hasn't launched yet.)

These services don't fully replace traditional cable service. Major channels aren't always available, there have been some service quality glitches, and they've only attracted an estimated few million subscribers.

To watch internet-based TV on a TV, you probably need a gadget like a Roku, a Chromecast stick or Apple TV. These don't have monthly fees like cable boxes do.

COMCAST: THE BUNDLE EFFECT

Even without these consumer-friendly apps, Comcast has been able to draw video customers via its upgraded cable-box system, X1, which has integrated Netflix and is expected to add YouTube. It is also a master at getting customers to pay for more than one service.

In the second quarter, Comcast lost 34,000 video customers, a deeper loss than last year. It added customers for the full year in 2016, its first annual increase in a decade. Overall, cable and satellite TV have lost 4 million customers over the past two years, says research firm SNL Kagan.

Comcast's internet customers rose 175,000. Revenue from the internet arm could get a further boost if Trump's FCC rolls back net neutrality rules, as expected. Comcast is also opening new lines of business, such as a new cellphone service that started in May.

The film and theme park businesses in the NBCUniversal arm also grew sharply during the quarter.

Net income rose 24 percent to \$2.51 billion, or 52 cents per share. Revenue increased 9.8 percent to \$21.17 billion.

Businesses, cities cashing in on total solar eclipse crowds

By ADRIAN SAINZ, Associated Press

BARTLETT, Tenn. (AP) — Millions of eyes will be fixed on the sky when a total solar eclipse crosses the U.S. in August, and it's likely many of them will be safely behind the special glasses churned out by a Tennessee company.

American Paper Optics ramped up production for this year's eclipse and expects to make 50 million paper and plastic eclipse glasses. John Jerit, the company's CEO and president, said they began preparing about two years ago. During his almost 27 years making safety glasses, he's only seen one total solar eclipse,

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in France in 1999, but will be going to Nashville for this one.

"It's a life experience," Jerit said during an interview at his company's office in the Memphis suburb of Bartlett. "When that two minutes is over, or however long you've got, the question that you really want to hear is, 'When is the next one?'"

His company is one of many businesses — hotels, campgrounds and stores — taking advantage of the total solar eclipse — when the moon passes between Earth and the sun. The moon's shadow will fall in a diagonal ribbon across the U.S., from Oregon to South Carolina. The rest of the U.S. will experience a partial eclipse, along with Canada, Central America and a bit of South America.

Cities and towns along the path of totality — where there will be about 2 ½ minutes of darkness — are gearing up for the crowds. St. Joseph, Missouri, population 76,000, is in a prime location and officials are bracing for tens of thousands of eclipse watchers to descend on the city, said Beth Conway, spokeswoman for the St. Joseph Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The city's restaurants, gas stations and stores are preparing for the onslaught — the city's largest arts and music festival with the nickname "Total Eclipse of the Arts" is scheduled on the weekend leading up to the eclipse on Monday, Aug. 21.

"This is essentially our Super Bowl," Conway said. "If we see anywhere near the amount of people that they're telling us, it will probably be the biggest event in our history."

The city has gotten into the act as well, selling eclipse glasses, posters and blue and yellow T-shirts decorated with a drawing of the city's skyline and an iconic railroad bridge, and with the slogan "Right in the Middle of it All."

Conway said a benefactor donated 100,000 safety glasses designed for the city and proceeds are going to local museums and charities.

Sales have been "amazing, phenomenal," she said. "It's just blown our minds."

At the Tennessee factory, a constant whirring sound fills the factory as large sheets of paper are fed into machines. One cuts out the eyeholes in the pre-printed frames, another inserts the protective film lenses. Then the glasses are punched out of the sheets and packaged.

About 50,000 glasses can roll off the assembly line per hour, Jerit said. Paper glasses cost about 20 to 25 cents to make, and they are sold to distributors for about 45 cents, but prices vary depending on order size. They're sold retail for about \$2. The plastic versions are about \$15.

Staring at the sun during an eclipse — or anytime — can cause eye damage. The only safe way is to protect your eyes with special filters in glasses or other devices. NASA lists four companies, including American Paper Optics, whose glasses meet international standards.

"It's eye protection for enjoyment," said Jerit, whose main business is making 3-D glasses.

Besides retail outlets, the company sells the glasses to cities, universities and space-related entities like NASA and the Adventure Science Center in Nashville. Some are custom-designed, like the ones for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital which are decorated with children's drawings. Under the wacky category: glasses to make the wearer look like an astronaut, space cowboy or a green alien.

Green Acres farm near Casper, Wyoming, is one of the many farms and parks welcoming eclipse watchers. The farm, which normally features a corn maze and other children's activities, has been turned into a campground with 300 campsites in prime eclipse viewing territory.

"We have people coming from Australia, Belgium, several from Canada. I have a guy from England coming that's seen 17 eclipses," said manager Dwain Romsa. "We're a little more remote than some areas. It takes more effort to travel here."

Associated Press writers Jim Salter in St. Louis and Kristin M. Hall in Memphis, Tennessee, contributed to this report.

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Asian shares gain on strong earnings, dovish Fed policy

By ELAINE KURTENBACH, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares were mostly higher Thursday, supported by strong corporate earnings and the Federal Reserve's decision to pause its slow-moving campaign to raise interest rates.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's Nikkei 225 gained 0.1 percent to 20,065.21 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng climbed 0.5 percent to 27,066.71. South Korea's Kospi added 0.2 percent to 2,439.39 and the S&P ASX 200 of Australia climbed 0.3 percent to 5,795.30. Taiwan's index climbed 0.9 percent after electronics maker Foxconn announced a \$10 billion investment in Wisconsin that is expected to create 3,000 jobs. The Shanghai Composite index slipped 0.3 percent to 3,237.04 and shares in Southeast Asia were mixed.

WALL STREET: U.S. stock indexes inched further into record territory Wednesday after AT&T, Boeing and others joined the parade of big companies reporting stronger profits than analysts expected. The Standard & Poor's 500 index edged up less than 0.1 percent to 2,477.83, adding a whisper to the record high set a day earlier. The Dow Jones industrial average gained 0.5 percent to 21,711.01, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.2 percent to 6,422.75.

FEDERAL RESERVE: Wrapping up a two-day policy meeting, the Federal Reserve said that it may begin paring the massive \$4.5 trillion balance sheet it built up following the financial crisis "relatively soon," which some analysts took to mean September. The Fed also said that inflation will likely remain below its target of 2 percent in the near term. Those comments caused Treasury yields to drop, with the 10-year yield falling to 2.29 percent from 2.33 percent late Tuesday. The two-year yield sank to 1.35 percent from 1.39 percent. Lower bond yields make dividends paid by stocks more attractive, and the biggest dividend payers picked up momentum following the Fed's announcement.

ANALYST VIEWPOINT: "The theme remains with earnings, propelling markets once again to fresh highs within the U.S. while the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting conclusion overnight provided another relief for equity markets. Asian markets are expected to ride on the positive leads and continue the climb in the day," Jingyi Pan of IG said in a commentary.

SAMSUNG'S STRENGTH: Despite the arrest of its chief in a corruption scandal and the recalls and discontinuation of fire-prone Galaxy Note 7 smartphones, Samsung Electronics reported record high quarterly earnings thanks to booming demand for memory chips. The South Korean company said its April-June net income was 10.8 trillion won (\$9.7 billion), up 85 percent from 5.8 trillion won a year earlier.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude fell back slightly after topping \$48 per barrel for the first time in seven weeks overnight. It slipped 6 cents to \$48.69 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange after surging 86 cents, or 1.8 percent, to \$48.75 per barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 7 cents to \$51.03 per barrel.

CURRENCIES: The dollar dipped to 110.86 Japanese yen from 111.17 yen on Wednesday. The euro rose to \$1.1759 from \$1.1637, and the British pound rose to \$1.3152 from \$1.3117.

___ AP Business Writer Stan Choe contributed from New York.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 27, the 208th day of 2017. There are 157 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 27, 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to assess the causes of urban rioting, the same day black militant H. Rap Brown told a press conference in Washington that violence was "as American as cherry pie. Americans taught the black people to be violent. We will use that violence to rid ourselves of oppression if necessary."

On this date:

In 1789, President George Washington signed a measure establishing the Department of Foreign Affairs, forerunner of the Department of State.

In 1866, Cyrus W. Field finished laying out the first successful underwater telegraph cable between North

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America and Europe (a previous cable in 1858 burned out after only a few weeks' use).

In 1880, British and Indian troops suffered a major defeat to Afghan forces during the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

In 1921, Canadian researcher Frederick Banting and his assistant, Charles Best, succeeded in isolating the hormone insulin at the University of Toronto.

In 1942, during World War II, the First Battle of El Alamein in Egypt ended in a draw as Allied forces stalled the progress of Axis invaders. (The Allies went on to win a clear victory over the Axis in the Second Battle of El Alamein later that year.)

In 1953, the Korean War armistice was signed at Panmunjom, ending three years of fighting.

In 1960, Vice President Richard M. Nixon was nominated for president on the first ballot at the Republican national convention in Chicago.

In 1974, the House Judiciary Committee voted 27-11 to adopt the first of three articles of impeachment against President Richard Nixon.

In 1980, on day 267 of the Iranian hostage crisis, the deposed Shah of Iran died at a military hospital outside Cairo, Egypt, at age 60.

In 1995, the Korean War Veterans Memorial was dedicated in Washington by President Bill Clinton and South Korean President Kim Young-sam.

In 1996, terror struck the Atlanta Olympics as a pipe bomb exploded at Centennial Olympic Park, directly killing one person and injuring 111. (Anti-government extremist Eric Rudolph later pleaded guilty to the bombing, exonerating security guard Richard Jewell, who had been wrongly suspected.)

In 2003, comedian Bob Hope died in Toluca Lake, California, at age 100.

Ten years ago: The House sent President George W. Bush legislation to intensify anti-terror efforts in the U.S., carrying out major recommendations of the independent 9/11 Commission (Bush signed the measure into law). Former Qwest Communications chief Joe Nacchio (NAH'-chee-oh) was sentenced to six years in prison for illegally selling \$52 million in stock while not telling investors that his telecommunications company faced serious financial risks. (Nacchio was released in September 2013 after serving 4 1/2 years.) Two Phoenix news helicopters collided and crashed while covering a police chase on live television, killing all four people on board.

Five years ago: Britain opened its Olympic Games in a celebration of Old England and new, even cheekily featuring a stunt double for Queen Elizabeth II parachuting with James Bond into Olympic Stadium. The International AIDS Conference closed in Washington, D.C. Tony Martin, 98, the romantic singer who appeared in movie musicals from the 1930s to the 1950s, died in Los Angeles.

One year ago: President Barack Obama, addressing cheering delegates at the Democratic convention in Philadelphia, implored Americans to elect Hillary Clinton to the White House, casting her as a candidate who believed in the optimism that drove the nation's democracy and warning against the "deeply pessimistic vision" of Republican Donald Trump. More than a year after Freddie Gray, a black man, suffered a broken neck in a Baltimore police van, the effort to hold six officers criminally responsible for his death collapsed when the city abruptly dropped all charges in the case.

Today's Birthdays: TV producer Norman Lear is 95. Actor Jerry Van Dyke is 86. Sportscaster Irv Cross is 78. Actor John Pleshette is 75. Actress-director Betty Thomas is 70. Olympic gold medal figure skater Peggy Fleming is 69. Singer Maureen McGovern is 68. Actress Janet Eilber is 66. Rock musician Tris Imboden (Chicago) is 66. Actress Roxanne Hart is 63. Country musician Duncan Cameron is 61. Comedian-actress-writer Carol Leifer is 61. Comedian Bill Engvall is 60. Jazz singer Karrin Allyson is 55. Country singer Stacy Dean Campbell is 50. Rock singer Juliana Hatfield is 50. Actor Julian McMahon is 49. Actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (NIH'-koh-lye KAH'-stur WAHL'-dah) is 47. Comedian Maya Rudolph is 45. Rock musician Abe Cunningham is 44. Singer-songwriter Pete Yorn is 43. MLB All-Star Alex Rodriguez is 42. Actor Seamus Dever is 41. Actor Jonathan Rhys (rees) Meyers is 40. Actor Blair Redford is 34. Actress Taylor Schilling is 33. Singer Cheyenne Kimball is 27. Golfer Jordan Spieth is 24. Actress Alyvia Alyn Lind is 10.

Thought for Today: "Diplomacy is the art of saying 'Nice doggie' until you can find a rock." — Will Rogers, American humorist (1879-1935).