

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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Senior Menu: Goulash, corn, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

8 a.m.: Faculty In-Service

10 a.m.: Cross Country at Redfield (note time change)

6 p.m.: Volleyball at Redfield

Pool Hours: Open Swim 1-4:50; Lap Swim 5-5:45; Aerobics 5:45-6:30; Open Swim 6:40-8:00.

1

Senior Menu: Breaded codfish, parsley buttered potatoes, coleslaw, orange sherbet, whole wheat bread.

Football: Sisseton, here, 7 p.m.

Pool Hours: Open Swim 1-4:50; Lap Swim 5-5:45; Aerobics 5:45-6:30; Open Swim 6:40-8:00.

Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Men's Bible Study at the Groton Dairy Queen, 6:30 a.m.

2

Heaven Bound Ministries: Worship in Pierpont at 5:30 p.m.

Soccer: Groton at Tea Area, Girls at 1 p.m., Boys at 3 p.m.

Catholic Parish: Mass at SEAS in Groton, 4:30 p.m.; Mass at St. Anthony, Bristol, 6 p.m.

Pool Hours: Open Swim 1-4:50; Lap Swim 5-5:45; Aerobics 5:45-6:30; Open Swim 6:40-8:00.



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GROTON KIWANIS CLUB

Twelve members and one guest were present at Wednesday's Kiwanis dinner meeting at the community center.

Reed Litch, first vice president; gave the program, with a slide show and talk on the district convention, which he and Lee Schinkel attended. The district is composed of Minnesota, and the two Dakotas. There are 139 clubs, with over four thousand members in the district.

The Groton club donated five boxes of diapers, for the project to help abused families, and the Salvation Army.

The district governor will visit the club on October 8, to install the new officers.

Lee introduced his guest, Kirsten Sombke. Kirsten's husband is Clint Sombke, and she is the new high school principal at GHS.

Kirsten thanked the club for their participation in the school's backpacks for kids program.

The club voted to give a monetary contribution to the city's upcoming pumpkin fest, as they did last year. Next week's program leader is LaVonne Helmer, followed by Tom Mahan.

South Dakotans Traveling over Labor Day, but not Far

AAA Survey Finds That "Home Sweet Home" Plays Big This Year

August 30, 2017 – According to a recent survey sponsored by AAA South Dakota, 58 percent of South Dakotans responding said they were traveling 50 miles or more from home over the upcoming long Labor Day weekend. However, 60 percent of those travelers said they were choosing to stay in-state.

"That's really the story within the story, the fact that there's plenty to do right here in the Rushmore State," said Marilyn Buskohl, spokesperson for AAA South Dakota. "We expect our state parks will be very busy."

The auto club survey went on to uncover that more than 47 percent of respondents are travelling with only one other person, and that dining and outdoor recreation are destination favorites. About 15 percent indicated they were planning a staycation at a resort or other property in their area. Others are indicated they are looking forward to visiting family and friends.

"The recent devastation of Hurricane Harvey in south Texas and the Gulf has already caused gas prices to rise across the nation as well as here in South Dakota, some two cents over the last week," said Buskohl.

"The storm, combined with Labor Day travel, is likely to cause gas prices to continue to rise with some estimates calling for between five to 15 additional cents at the pump."

Over the next days and weeks, refineries will begin the process of coming back online, causing this spike to begin to subside as infrastructure repairs are made. Fortunately, gasoline inventory levels remain strong nationwide, helping to mitigate steep price increases.

Those traveling by motor vehicles over Labor Day should know that as of today, our statewide average is \$2.39 per gallon for regular. Current gas price averages, city, state and national, are available at GasPrices.AAA.com.

Help Wanted

Full- or part-time for the following positions:
Healthcare workers for Nurse's-RN or LPN, and
Nursing Assistants, Dietary Cook and assistant,
and Housekeeper. (12 hour shifts/rotating weekends for
nurses and C.N.A.s)

Contact Jessica Lindskov or Nellie Peterson at 605-397-2365
or apply in person.

EOE/AA/M/F/V/D-Drug Free Workplace



GROTON
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER

1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton
605-397-2365

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All auto owners!
Save \$2-\$4 /tank
& grow your local economy
by choosing low carbon
Super Premium E30's
94 octane, more power,
same mileage, fewer
carbon deposits, lower
maintenance costs,
slashed benzene & related
genotoxic, carcinogenic
tailpipe emissions;
*see sdfu.org's E30 tab for
info, E30 prices\locations.

***Farmers Union's
PSA: Courtesy Merle
Anderson (Merle is 94
year old founder of Ace
and legendary ethanol
supporter... "because it is
the right thing to do")**



**Soup, Pie,
& Sandwich
\$2.00 per item**

**St. John's Lutheran Church
Groton, SD**

Thursday, September 14th

11:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

**Craft Items - Baked Goodies -
Garden Produce**

**Soups available:
Chili, Wild Rice,
Potato, Ham & Bean**

**For take-out orders, please call
397-2386 at 10:30 a.m. or after.**

**Coming up on
GDILIVE.COM**
Click on image

**Webster Scale Weekly Meeting
with the S.D. D.O.T.**

**Thurs., Aug. 31, 2017, 1 p.m.
Groton Community Center**

It's Football Action on GDILIVE.COM



Groton Area Tigers

VS



Sisseton Redmen

**Friday, Sept. 1, 2017 at 7 p.m.
Doney Field, Groton**

Click here for the program

An Open Letter to Farm Families, Our Employees, and Our Community Members:

As CEO of Wheat Growers, I have obligations to many different groups – members, employees and their families, citizens in communities we serve, our business partners, and my own family (just to name a few). It is my job every day to work with our Board and Management Team to manage and build a company that can serve the needs of each of these groups in the present, but to also be ready for the future. This is a responsibility that I take very seriously!

I have a quote that hangs on the wall in my office. It says, “The pace of change will never be as slow as it is right now.” How true this is in every aspect of our lives. The potential unification of North Central Farmers Elevator and Wheat Growers is change. It is change that is not about how we serve our members next season, but it is about how we make sure we can do that for generations to come.

I am a farm kid. I am a local co-op employee. I believe in the value of farms, farm families, and farm communities. I am a staunch advocate for the local cooperative’s role in helping those farm families succeed. I grew up in a farm family that looks much like the ones I now work for at Wheat Growers. We were members of our local cooperative. That cooperative declared bankruptcy in 2002. It is true that you don’t know what you have until it is gone.

Please help us keep a strong local cooperative in our communities. Please vote “yes” to unify North Central Farmers Elevator and Wheat Growers. Thanks for your consideration.

Chris Pearson, CEO
Wheat Growers

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Today in Weather History

August 31, 1977: High winds accompanying thunderstorms moved across the southern part of Brown County during the early morning hours. A barn was destroyed three miles west of Warner. Many trees were damaged in the Stratford area. A large, empty fuel tank, southeast of Watertown was folded inward by strong winds. High wind damage was also reported in Faulk and Day Counties.

August 31, 2013: Thunderstorms produced numerous reports of large hail and damaging winds in and near Sioux Falls on the evening of August 31st. Large hail broke windows and damaged many vehicles, as well as siding and roofs on the west side of Sioux Falls. One automobile dealer with a large temporary outdoor display reported four thousand vehicles were damaged. Estimated property damage was listed at four million dollars. Thunderstorm winds also destroyed several businesses, including a large retail store which was also struck by lightning. The large store lost part of its roof, while the stockroom of the same store and its contents were also damaged. A canopy type tent was destroyed, and a 20-foot retaining wall was blown down. The winds caused extensive tree damage, including several trees blown down, one of which blocked a major intersection when it fell.

1886: A magnitude 7.3 earthquake shook Charleston, South Carolina around 9:50 pm on this day. This earthquake is the most damaging quake to occur in the southeast United States. This earthquake caused 60 deaths and between 5 to 6 million dollars in damage to over 2,000 buildings in the southeastern United States. Click [HERE](#) for more information, including pictures, from the USGS.

1915 - The temperature at Bartlesville, OK, dipped to 38 degrees to establish a state record for the month of August. (The Weather Channel)

1922: An incredible hailstorm occurred near West Chester, PA dropped so much hail that fields were covered with up to two feet of drifted hail the next day.

1935: The most intense hurricane to make landfall was a modest tropical depression on this day. Called the Labor Day Hurricane, this storm went through phenomenal intensification to become a Category 5 hurricane by September 2nd.

1954 - Hurricane Carol swept across eastern New England killing sixty persons and causing 450 million dollars damage. It was the first of three hurricanes to affect New England that year. (David Ludlum)

1971 - The low of 84 degrees and high of 108 degrees at Death Valley, CA, were the coolest of the month. The average daily high was 115.7 degrees that August, and the average daily low was 93.4 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1984 - Lightning ignited several forest fires in Montana, one of which burned through 100,000 acres of timber and grassland. (The Weather Channel)








1987 - Eight cities in Washington and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date, including Eugene OR and Portland OR with afternoon highs of 102 degrees. The high of 102 degrees at Portland smashed their previous record for the date by twelve degrees. Frost was reported in South Dakota. Aberdeen SD established a record for the month of August with a morning low of 32 degrees, and Britton SD dipped to 31 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - August ended on a relatively mild and tranquil note for most of the nation. Forest fires in the northwestern U.S. scorched 180,000 acres of land during the last week of August. (The National Weather Summary)


1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front spread severe weather from Minnesota to Indiana through the course of the day and night. Thunderstorms in Minnesota produced baseball size hail near Saint Michael and Hutchinson, and drenched Moose Lake with nine inches of rain in six hours. Tucson AZ hit 100 degrees for a record 79th time in the year, surpassing a record established the previous year. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Patchy Fog then Sunny	Partly Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 82 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 85 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 89 °F

Today






Breezy with Highs
70s far East, Near 90
West

Tonight/Friday



Breezy, Isolated to
Scattered Showers
Lows around 60-65F
Highs 70s East, near 90
West

 National Weather Service Aberdeen SD   Updated: 8/31/2017 3:06 AM Central

Published on: 08/31/2017 at 3:09AM

Mainly dry and breezy today for the region. A front may bring showers to the area tonight and Friday. Severe weather is NOT expected.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 83.1

Low Outside Temp: 59.3

High Gust: 12

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 98° in 1921

Record Low: 32° in 1987

Average High: 78°F

Average Low: 52°F

Average Precip in Aug: 2.43

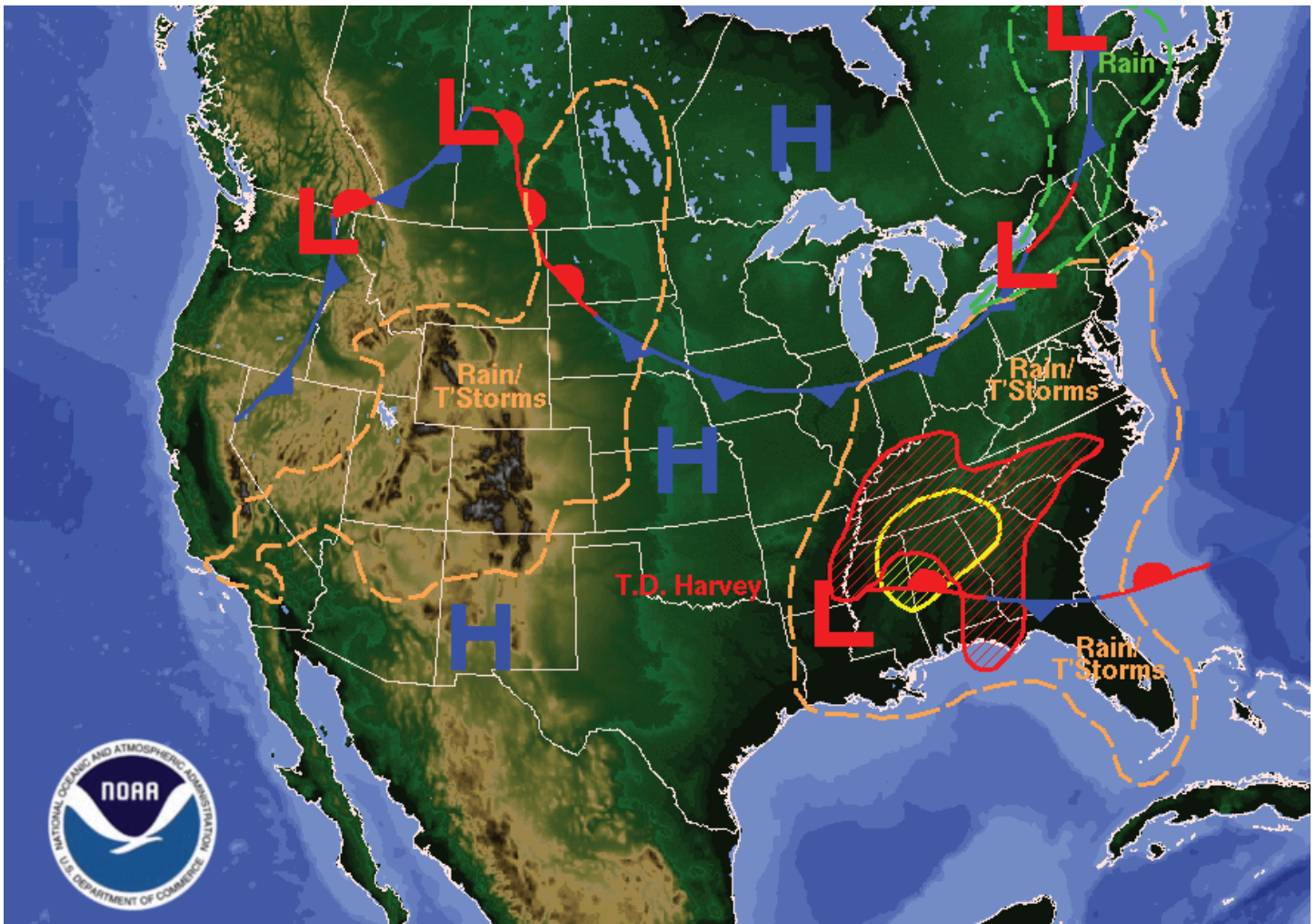
Precip to date in Aug: 2.17

Average Precip to date: 16.29

Precip Year to Date: 9.52

Sunset Tonight: 8:12 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:55 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Aug 31, 2017, issued 3:52 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Hamrick with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain

Rain and T'Storms

Rain and Snow

Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)

Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)

Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)

Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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WAITING FOR RESULTS

Fast food restaurants and high speed internet access have conditioned us to rush our way through life. We resent deeply having to stand in a grocery line, wait for someone to answer a phone call or return a message. If it isn't instant, it isn't worth "my" time.

But there is value in waiting on some things. Especially for God to work in our lives. It was for David. It certainly is for us.

"I waited patiently for the Lord," he said. We do not know what David was waiting for or the problems he was facing. It may be that this time of waiting for a response from God was different from the other times he looked to God for help. But it does not matter. There are many instances in the Psalms when he called on God and He responded immediately and rescued him. But this time, however, was different. He not only waited – but he waited patiently. His anxiety did not overpower him. His needs or wants were not driving him to distraction or irrational behavior. No, his mind was focused on God's love, grace, mercy and wisdom. From times past he knew God would respond.

And the results of his patience were, as we would say today, unreal. "He turned to me...He heard me... He lifted me...He set my feet on a rock...He gave me a firm place to stand!" From adversity to abundance!

In humility and submissiveness he waited for God. He knew that God had the answer that was in his best interest: God wanted to "make him a man after My own heart."

Prayer: May we learn from David, Lord, to wait on You patiently, knowing that You are at work in us, for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
07-08-14-15-16
(seven, eight, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen)
Estimated jackpot: \$569,000

Hot Lotto
06-14-23-31-37, Hot Ball: 9
(six, fourteen, twenty-three, thirty-one, thirty-seven; Hot Ball: nine)
Estimated jackpot: \$9.93 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$53 million

Powerball
19-28-43-67-69, Powerball: 7, Power Play: 2
(nineteen, twenty-eight, forty-three, sixty-seven, sixty-nine; Powerball: seven; Power Play: two)
Estimated jackpot: \$53 million

Casino owned by actor closes in South Dakota

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — A casino owned by actor and director Kevin Costner has shut down after operating for 26 years in the western part of South Dakota.

Midnight Star in Deadwood permanently closed its doors Tuesday, leaving about 40 full- and part-time employees of the casino looking for work, the Rapid City Journal reported .

The closure comes four years after Costner put up 1,000 acres (405 hectares) he owned near Deadwood on the market for \$14 million. A hotel management company, Deadwood Hospitality Resort LLC, paid about \$7.5 million last year for just over 100 acres of that property.

No planned sale of the Midnight Star has been announced.

Costner opened the venue in 1991 because of his "deep love for Deadwood and the Black Hills of South Dakota and their historical importance in our country's story," he said. "I hoped that resurrecting and restoring the famed Phoenix Block Building would allow it, as the Midnight Star, to also become a part of the famed Deadwood story. ... I was enormously proud of what the Midnight Star became."

The casino was decorated with Costner's movie memorabilia, and the venue also had a sports bar, gaming hall and Jakes, a fine dining restaurant. The space proved successful until age and increased competition from the gaming boom in the 1990s and 2000s left Midnight Star out of the spotlight.

"So it is with a heavy heart that I have to say that today (Tuesday) the lights of the Midnight Star will go out for the last time," Costner said. "I will be eternally grateful for the dedication and hard work of all of the management and staff at the Midnight Star."

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Utilities finish last piece of CapX2020 power grid expansion

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Xcel Energy and Otter Tail Power say they've completed a 70-mile power line in South Dakota that's the last piece of a major expansion of the upper Midwest power grid called CapX2020.

The new 345-kilovolt line connects a new substation near Big Stone City with an existing substation in Brookings in eastern South Dakota.

In the announcement Wednesday, the Minnesota-based utilities say eight wind projects and a natural gas power plant are waiting to connect to the line.

CapX2020 is an initiative of 11 utilities in Minnesota, the Dakotas and Wisconsin to expand and upgrade the regional power grid to handle the increasing supply of wind and solar power. It includes 800 miles of transmission lines altogether, representing a \$2 billion investment.

South Dakota man sentenced to 87 years on sex abuse charges

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man has been sentenced to 87 years in prison on sexual abuse charges.

Forty-three-year-old Christian Thomas, of Plankinton, was convicted in May on 26 counts, including rape, sexual contact with a child under 16, and possession of child pornography.

Authorities say the charges stem from incidents that involved two minor victims.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley says the horrific facts in the case justify the lengthy sentence, which he says is needed to protect the public.

South Dakota Civil Air Patrol sending aircraft to Texas

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Civil Air Patrol is sending two aircraft with flight crews to Texas to help the Federal Emergency Management Agency with disaster recovery operations related to Hurricane Harvey.

The three-person flight crews will consist of a mission pilot, mission scanner and aerial photographer..

The aircraft will be used for aerial photographic surveys of the severely affected Gulf Coast region to assist FEMA and other emergency management officials to assess the extent of the damage.

North Dakota bighorn hunting licenses reduced this year

By BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota wildlife officials are reducing the number of bighorn sheep hunting licenses available this year as they continue to see the effects of disease on the western herd.

The Game and Fish Department is making five of the once-in-a-lifetime licenses available, three fewer than last year. The decision came after the agency's annual summer survey found 83 rams in the western Badlands, 21 fewer than in 2016.

The 20 percent decline in rams — which hunters seek for their trophy horns — is tied to an outbreak of bacterial pneumonia that surfaced in 2014 and killed dozens of sheep, Big Game Management Biologist Brett Wiedmann said.

North Dakota canceled its fall bighorn hunting season in 2015 for the first time in more than three decades. Game and Fish reinstated hunting last year after the deaths tapered off, and no adult bighorns within the herds that were exposed to disease three years ago showed clinical signs of pneumonia this summer.

However, poor lamb survival is typical in sheep populations that have been exposed to pneumonia, and the number of lambs counted last spring was the lowest in recorded history.

"Very few yearling rams were observed" this summer, Wiedmann said.

Future lamb crops could be critical to the continuation of hunting.

"It's kind of a year-by-year thing," Wiedmann said. "As it stands now I foresee us having a hunting season next year. If we get to the point where (lamb) recruitment doesn't keep up with (hunter) harvest, then we'll have to take another look."

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The fact that herds affected by disease in 2014 showed better lamb production this year provides some optimism, Big Game Management Supervisor Bruce Stillings said.

Another positive is that drought this summer isn't having any impact on the herd because bighorns thrive in dry climates, according to Wiedmann.

Bighorn hunting is big in North Dakota. More than 13,200 hunters have applied this year for licenses that are distributed through a lottery drawing in September, according to Game and Fish Licensing Manager Randy Meissner.

Each year, the Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation auctions one North Dakota license to raise money for sheep management. This year's winning bid was \$104,000.

The bighorn hunting season opens Nov. 3 and closes Dec. 31.

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

UFO enthusiasts heading to Wyoming for upcoming rendezvous

DEVILS TOWER, Wyo. (AP) — Just like in the science-fiction movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," UFO enthusiasts are being drawn to a strange geological formation in Wyoming.

Devils Tower played a key role in the well-known UFO film that came out 40 years ago this year. The first Devils Tower UFO Rendezvous will be held at the site from Sept. 14-16.

The formation is actually the solidified core of an ancient volcano.

Experts on UFOs will speak at the convention.

Organizer Brian Olson tells KOTA-TV (<http://bit.ly/2vKw5j4>) that there's a fun side, too, with plans for a parade, live music and barbecue cook-off.

Devils Tower stands more than 800 feet (243 meters) tall and can be seen for miles.

Bond denied for teen accused in fatal park shooting

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A judge has denied bond for an 18-year-old man charged with fatally shooting another teen at a Sioux Falls park.

Dylan Holler made an initial appearance at the Lincoln County Courthouse Wednesday where Judge Doug Hoffman decided he was too much of a flight risk and a danger to the community to set a bond amount.

Holler is charged with first-degree murder, robbery and aggravated assault in what police say was a drug deal that turned into a robbery and deadly altercation in Bakker Park Monday night. Holler is accused of shooting a 17-year-old boy once in the chest.

Authorities say Holler, the victim and two other males were in a vehicle together when an argument started over drugs. Police say the four got out of the vehicle and continued a fight which ended with gunfire.

Turner County voters reject new animal feedlot rules

PARKER, S.D. (AP) — Voters in Turner County have quashed an attempt to ease rules for animal feedlots. County commissioners passed an ordinance in June that removed the need for a local permit and a public notice to neighbors for certain large cattle, hog or chicken feedlots.

Opponents referred the ordinance to a public vote, and 68 percent of the 2,100 voters in Tuesday's election favored overturning the new rules.

Pierre getting baseball team in start-up Expedition League

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Pierre is getting a baseball team in the Expedition League starting up next year.

The Rapid City-based league will be a summer collegiate wood bat baseball league with teams throughout the Great Plains. Its inaugural 2018 season is to feature 10 teams.

Pierre's team will play in Hyde Stadium. The City Commission on Tuesday authorized a five-year lease agreement.

League President Steve Wagner told the Capital Journal that Pierre's team will be named with colors selected and a logo designed by the end of September.

The league also has facility leases signed in Brandon, Manitoba; Minot, North Dakota; and Gering/Scottsbluff and Hastings in Nebraska. Agreements are pending are in Dickinson, North Dakota, and the South Dakota cities of Aberdeen, Spearfish and Rapid City. Casper, Wyoming, might also get a team.

Voters in the Freeman School District approve 5-year opt-out

FREEMAN, S.D. (AP) — Voters in the Freeman School District have narrowly passed an opt-out of the state property tax freeze.

The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan reports that the proposed opt-out of \$600,000 annually for five years got 52 percent approval in Tuesday's election. Just over 700 people voted.

Superintendent Kevin Kunz says the district has had to deficit spend because of declining enrollment and reduced state aid.

The district currently operates with a \$250,000 annual opt-out that was passed in 2001 and runs indefinitely. The newly approved opt-out runs from 2018-2022.

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

2 explosions rock flooded Houston-area chemical plant

By GREGORY BULL, EMILY SCHMALL and REESE DUNKLIN, Associated Press

CROSBY, Texas (AP) — A Houston-area chemical plant that lost power after Harvey engulfed the area in extensive floods was rocked by two explosions early Thursday, the plant's operator said.

Arkema Inc. said in a statement on its website that the Harris County Emergency Operations Center reported two explosions and black smoke coming from the plant at about 2 a.m.

Authorities have not released information on how dangerous the explosions were or whether they sparked a fire at the Arkema plant in Crosby, Texas. An AP photographer at a roadblock about 2 miles (3 kilometers) from the scene could see no sign of a blaze at the chemical plant as the sun rose Thursday morning.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office said in a tweet that a deputy was taken to the hospital after inhaling fumes. Nine other deputies drove themselves to the hospital as a precaution.

The Harris County Fire Marshal's Office said there had been "a series of chemical reactions" at the plant and advised people to stay away from the area.

A plant spokeswoman said late Wednesday that the flooded facility had lost power and backup generators due to the flooding, leaving it without refrigeration for chemicals that become volatile as the temperature rises. The plant is about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northeast of Houston.

"The fire will happen. It will resemble a gasoline fire. It will be explosive and intense in nature," spokeswoman Janet Smith told The Associated Press late Wednesday.

There was "no way to prevent" the explosion, chief executive Rich Rowe said earlier Wednesday.

Arkema manufactures organic peroxides, a family of compounds used for making a variety of products including pharmaceuticals and construction materials.

"As the temperature rises, the natural state of these materials will decompose. A white smoke will result, and that will catch fire," Smith said. "So the fire is imminent. The question is when."

Harvey struck Southeast Texas last week, slamming into the coast as a Category 4 hurricane, then weakening to a tropical storm that dumped record amounts of rain on the state, in particular the Houston area. The storm was downgraded to a tropical depression late Wednesday.

The company shut down the Crosby site before Harvey made landfall last week, but a crew of 11 had stayed behind. That group was removed and residents living within a 1.5-mile (2.4-kilometer) radius were told to evacuate Tuesday after the plant lost power.

Harris County Fire Marshal spokeswoman Rachel Moreno said late Wednesday that the 1.5-mile radius was developed in consultation with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and other subject-matter

experts.

"The facility is surrounded by water right now so we don't anticipate the fire going anywhere," Moreno said.

The plant falls along a stretch near Houston that features one of the largest concentrations of refineries, pipelines and chemical plants in the country.

Arkema was required to develop and submit a risk management plan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, because it has large amounts of sulfur dioxide, a toxic chemical, and methylpropene, a flammable gas. The plans are supposed to detail the effects of a potential release, evaluate worst-case scenarios and explain a company's response.

In its most recently available submission from 2014, Arkema said potentially 1.1 million residents could be impacted over a distance of 23 miles (37 kilometers) in a worse case, according to information compiled by a nonprofit group and posted on a website hosted by the Houston Chronicle.

But, Arkema added, it was using "multiple layers of preventative and mitigation measures" at the plant, including steps to reduce the amount of substances released, and that made the worst case "very unlikely."

Daryl Roberts, the company's vice president of manufacturing, technology and regulatory services in the Americas, did not dispute that worst-case scenario but said that assumed all the controls in place failed and strong winds blew directly toward Houston, the nation's fourth-largest city.

"We have not modeled this exact scenario but we are very comfortable with this 1.5-mile radius," Roberts told the AP. He added that it mostly resembled less serious scenarios that would affect a half-mile radius and a few dozen people.

Roberts said the vessels containing the organic peroxide are equipped with controls to slow the release of chemicals. He said the chemicals will quickly vaporize because of the water, reducing the size and scope of the fire.

Schmall and Dunklin reported from Dallas. Associated Press writer Claudia Lauer in Dallas contributed to this report.

Sign up for AP's daily newsletter showcasing our best all-formats reporting on Harvey and its aftermath: <http://apne.ws/ahYQGtb>

Iraqi PM declares Tal Afar town 'fully liberated' from IS

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's prime minister is declaring the town of Tal Afar "fully liberated" from the Islamic State group after a nearly two-week operation.

Haider al-Abadi said Thursday that Iraqi troops "eliminated and smashed Daesh terrorists" in al-Ayadiah district, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) northwest of Tal Afar, where the militants fled last week. Daesh is the Arabic acronym for IS.

Al-Abadi says with Tal Afar liberated, all of Nineveh province — the first area IS militants captured in a 2014 blitz — "is in the hands of our brave troops."

Iraqi officials often declare areas liberated before the fighting has completely ended, and the militants have been known to carry out surprise counterattacks.

IS stills control the northern town of Hawija as well as towns in western Iraq near Syria.

AP Exclusive: China accuses outspoken tycoon in US of rape

By GERRY SHIH, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Escalating efforts to repatriate one of the ruling Communist Party's most wanted exiles, Chinese police have opened an investigation on a new allegation, rape, against New York-based billionaire Guo Wengui, who has been releasing what he calls official secrets ahead of a pivotal party leadership conference.

Two Chinese officials with direct knowledge of the investigation told The Associated Press that police

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are requesting a second Interpol arrest notice for Guo, 50, for the alleged sexual assault of a 28-year-old former personal assistant.

Guo and his representatives did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

The rape allegation represents a new element in the sprawling case that Chinese prosecutors are building against the real estate tycoon, who is being investigated for at least 19 major criminal cases. Allegations against him include bribing a top Chinese intelligence official, kidnapping, fraud and money laundering.

The Associated Press reviewed documents related to the rape investigation and confirmed their contents with Chinese official sources in Beijing, who requested anonymity to discuss an ongoing case. The Chinese officials' disclosures to the AP — an unusual move given the political sensitivity of Guo's case in China — underscores Beijing's urgent effort to not only bring a fugitive to heel on criminal charges but also silence a potent irritant in the run-up to a key Communist Party congress during which political stability and the stifling of any challenges to the party head, President Xi Jinping, are paramount.

Although the United States does not have an extradition agreement with China, Beijing hopes that a mounting body of evidence could sway the U.S. government against extending the exiled businessman's visa, which is believed to expire in October, the Chinese officials said.

Senior U.S. and Chinese officials have discussed the allegations against Guo, according to a third person with direct knowledge of the talks. The Chinese officials are asking the U.S. to cancel Guo's visa, according to the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to disclose the discussions.

It's unclear what steps Washington plans to take, if any. The White House would not comment on the matter.

The Guo saga highlights how China's efforts to repatriate elite Chinese seeking refuge on American soil have become increasingly contentious in the bilateral relationship. The U.S. government has often refused Beijing's demands to extradite corruption suspects, citing flimsy evidence and China's opaque justice system. But the U.S. has sent back two Chinese fugitives in the past three months, including one suspected of rape.

In recent months, Guo has become a widely followed — and, in the eyes of China's leadership, highly destabilizing — social media presence by serving up sensational, if mostly unverifiable, tales of corruption and scandal within the Communist Party's innermost sanctum, including among Xi's closest allies.

In a daily stream of Twitter posts and YouTube videos tracked by Chinese who follow political gossip, Guo has revealed what he claims are everything from top leaders' secret homes in California to their bank account information and hidden stakes in business empires. He has vowed to continue airing the party's secrets until China unfreezes his assets and releases his relatives who have been seized by authorities, he says, as leverage against him.

Pressure on Guo has been building since April when Interpol issued a "red notice" seeking his arrest on corruption-related charges. Chinese authorities later sentenced several of his employees for fraud in June.

Police in central China opened the rape investigation July 5 after a former employee came forward, the officials said.

In interviews with police, the woman described how she was plucked from her human resources position at Guo's real estate company in Hong Kong in 2015 and sent overseas to become his personal assistant. The woman, whose identity is being withheld by the AP, said that over the next two years, she was raped several times in New York, London and the Bahamas by Guo, who she said demanded sex from female employees as a test of their loyalty.

At times, she said, she languished in virtual detention after Guo's staff confiscated her smartphone, computer, passport and keys and forbade her from leaving her room in his luxury apartment in the high-end London neighborhood of Belgravia. To prove her case, the woman surreptitiously met a lawyer friend in London earlier this year to give a written statement about her ordeal and kept her underwear, pregnancy tests and abortion pills as evidence, according to police documents.

In a brief phone interview with the AP arranged by Chinese officials, the woman confirmed the account and described fleeing Guo's apartment to the Chinese Embassy in London in April to apply for a new

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passport before returning to China. She said she was speaking of her own volition and that police had assured her she could bring charges against Guo without facing repercussions for having worked for a highly sought-after fugitive.

"I just want him to face justice for what he did to me," she said.

Calls to Guo's mobile phone since Tuesday evening in New York rang unanswered. Guo also did not respond to multiple requests for comment sent by an AP reporter to his WhatsApp mobile messaging account since Tuesday. Lawyers representing him at the New York firm Boies Schiller Flexner did not respond to requests for comment.

In April, Guo told AP he believed the Interpol notice issued at the time amounted to "state intimidation" and that China had submitted bogus documents to the international police organization.

Interpol declined to comment about the latest warrant China is seeking for Guo's arrest, referring questions to national authorities as is the policy in ongoing investigations.

Born into poverty in central China, Guo transformed himself from a humble gasoline speculator into a real estate mogul who jet-setted with the likes of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Key to his spectacular rise, according to investigative profiles in Chinese media, was an ability to befriend officials in China's powerful security apparatus who helped him intimidate business rivals, secure deals and gain insights into the secret lives of the Chinese elite.

In one instance, according to these reports, Guo won the rights to build the iconic Pangu tower in 2006 as part of Beijing's Olympics development project by working with Ma Jian, who later became China's chief of counterintelligence, to obtain a sex tape of a Beijing vice mayor who had blocked Guo's initial bid.

In 2015, anti-corruption investigators detained Ma and later accused him of accepting \$8.8 million in bribes from Guo, who fled the country. Prior to that, Guo had enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with China's intelligence service, even helping to repatriate overseas fugitives, he later said in his YouTube videos.

Guo in 2015 hired American private investigators to fan out across the U.S. to look for Ling Wancheng, the fugitive brother of a disgraced top aide to a former Chinese president who possibly sought to defect, a person involved in that search effort told the AP. The person was legally barred from discussing the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Months later, Chinese agents arrived in the U.S. to search for Ling in a covert operation that angered U.S. officials, underscoring how the issue of politically connected Chinese fleeing to the U.S. has strained relations.

"With political cases such as Ling Wancheng and Guo Wengui, the U.S. seems reluctant to send them back because both have valuable classified information about the top echelons of the party," said Willy Lam, an expert on Chinese politics at Chinese University of Hong Kong. "This phenomenon is a big plus for the CIA and FBI."

Lam said that although it is unlikely that Washington would send Guo back given his intelligence value, President Donald Trump "could potentially play the 'fugitive card' to put pressure on Beijing to make concessions on issues ranging from trade to North Korea."

The prospect of becoming a bargaining chip has worried Guo, according to a leaked audio recording of a meeting he held earlier this year with former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, who offered to lobby the Trump administration for a visa extension.

A spokeswoman for Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, the law firm where Johnson is partner, said a meeting between Guo and Johnson "several months ago about a possible representation appears to have been recorded and released," but the firm ultimately did not take on Guo as a client.

"I want to help you," Johnson says in the edited recording that recently surfaced online. "I am the only member of Barack Obama's Cabinet that has met with Donald Trump."

In the recording, Johnson suggests Guo meet with FBI agents and consider donating to human rights organizations to strengthen his case to remain in the U.S. After Guo expresses concern that Trump had already "made a deal" with the Chinese, Johnson and an unidentified woman who appears to be a Guo

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adviser quickly assure him that Trump would not give him up.

"He would be violating your rights," Johnson says, while the adviser points out that Guo, who goes by the name Miles Kwok, should also consider his membership in a Trump resort in Florida as a factor working in his favor.

"Miles is a member of Mar-a-Lago," she says, before Guo bursts into laughter.

AP writers Lori Hinnant in Paris and Julie Pace in Washington contributed to this report.

Houston-area floodwaters recede but dangers still loom

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and JUAN A. LOZANO, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Major dangers for the U.S. Gulf Coast area loomed after an explosion at a Texas chemical plant early Thursday and the threat of major flooding further east near the Texas-Louisiana line as Harvey's floodwaters began receding in the Houston area after five days of torrential rain.

Beaumont and Port Arthur, Texas, struggled with rising water as the area was pounded with what remained of the weakening storm, while Houston's fire department said it would begin a block-by-block search Thursday of thousands of flooded homes. Assistant Fire Chief Richard Mann said the searches were to ensure "no people were left behind."

The confirmed death toll climbed to at least 31, including six family members — four of them children — whose bodies were pulled Wednesday from a van that had been swept off a Houston bridge into a bayou.

"Unfortunately, it seems that our worst thoughts are being realized," Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said after the van that disappeared over the weekend was found in 10 feet of muddy water.

The Houston-area chemical plant that lost power after Harvey engulfed the area in extensive floods was rocked by two explosions early Thursday, the plant's operator said. The Arkema Inc. plant had been left without refrigeration for chemicals that become volatile as the temperature rises.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office said in a tweet that a deputy was taken to the hospital after inhaling fumes. Nine other deputies drove themselves to the hospital as a precaution.

The company shut down the Crosby site before Harvey made landfall last week, but a crew of 11 had stayed behind. That group was removed and residents living within a 1.5-mile (2.4-kilometer) radius were told to evacuate Tuesday after the plant lost power.

Another threat was emerging east of Houston where weather conditions deteriorated close to the Louisiana line.

Beaumont and Port Arthur worked to evacuate residents after Harvey completed a U-turn in the Gulf of Mexico and rolled ashore early Wednesday for the second time in six days. It hit southwestern Louisiana as a tropical storm with heavy rain and winds of 45 mph.

When Harvey paid its return visit to land, it hit near Cameron, Louisiana, about 45 miles from Port Arthur.

Port Arthur found itself increasingly isolated as floodwaters swamped most major roads out of the city.

More than 500 people — along with dozens of dogs, cats, a lizard and a monkey — took shelter at the Max Bowl bowling alley in the city, said the establishment's general manager, Jeff Tolliver.

"The monkey was a little surprising, but we're trying to help," he said.

Floodwaters also toppled two oil storage tanks in South Texas, spilling almost 30,000 gallons of crude. It was not immediately clear if any of the spilled oil was recovered. More damage to the oil industry infrastructure is expected to emerge as floodwaters recede.

Forecasters downgraded Harvey to a tropical depression late Wednesday from a tropical storm but it still has lots of rain and potential damage to spread, with 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) forecast from the Louisiana-Texas line into Tennessee and Kentucky through Friday. Some spots may get as much as a foot, raising the risk of more flooding.

For much of the Houston area, forecasters said the rain is pretty much over.

"We have good news," said Jeff Lindner, a meteorologist with the Harris County Flood Control District. "The water levels are going down."

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Houston's two major airports were up and running again Wednesday. Officials said they were resuming limited bus and light rail service as well as trash pickup.

At Hermann Park, south of downtown, children glided by in strollers and wagons, joggers took in mid-day runs and couples walked beside cascading fountains and beneath a sparkling sun. People pulled into drive-thru restaurants and emerged from a store with groceries.

At the same time, many thousands of Houston-area homes are under water and could stay that way for days or weeks. And Lindner cautioned that homes near at least one swollen bayou could still get flooded.

Officials said 911 centers in the Houston area are getting more than 1,000 calls an hour from people seeking help.

Altogether, more than 1,000 homes in Texas were destroyed and close to 50,000 damaged, and over 32,000 people were in shelters across the state, emergency officials reported. About 10,000 more National Guard troops are being deployed to Texas, bringing the total to 24,000, Gov. Greg Abbott said.

In Orange, Texas, about 30 miles east of Beaumont, residents of a retirement home surrounded by thigh-deep water were rescued by National Guardsmen and wildlife officers, who carried them from the second floor and put them aboard an airboat.

Harvey initially came ashore as a Category 4 hurricane in Texas on Friday, then went back out to sea and lingered off the coast as a tropical storm for days, inundating flood-prone Houston.

Harvey's five straight days of rain totaled close to 52 inches, the heaviest tropical downpour ever recorded in the continental U.S.

Associated Press writers Frank Bajak, Matt Sedensky and Michael Graczyk in Houston; Diana Heidgerd and David Warren in Dallas; Seth Borenstein in Washington; Paul J. Weber in Austin, Texas; and Tammy Webber in Chicago contributed to this report.

Sign up for AP's daily newsletter showcasing our best all-formats reporting on Harvey and its aftermath: <http://apne.ws/ahYQGtb> .

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. HARVEY STILL POSING THREAT TO TWO-STATE BORDER

Major dangers for the U.S. Gulf Coast area loom with the threat of major flooding further east near the Texas-Louisiana line. Two explosions, meanwhile, rocked a flooded chemical plant near Houston.

2. HARVEY STRAINING TWO TEXAS LEADERS

The hurricane's devastation is testing Houston Democratic Mayor Sylvester Turner and Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, whose personal styles are as divergent as their politics.

3. AP: LOBBYIST IN TRUMP TOWER MEETING SPOKE TO GRAND JURY

A grand jury used by Special Counsel Robert Mueller heard secret testimony from a Russian-American lobbyist who attended a June 2016 meeting with Trump's eldest son, the AP learns.

4. HOW SYRIANS ARE ADAPTING TO EXILE IN JORDAN

Zaatari's 80,000 residents try to cope by making the most of their tough situation and one man teaches art as a way of helping children cope with the trauma of war.

5. AP: CHINA ACCUSES OUTSPOKEN TYCOON OF RAPE

The ruling Communist Party is intensifying efforts to repatriate one of its most wanted exiles ahead of a pivotal leadership conference, accusing U.S.-based billionaire Guo Wengui of sexual assault.

6. JUDGE BLOCKS TEXAS' 'SANCTUARY CITIES' LAW

The legislation would have let police officers ask people during routine stops whether they're in the U.S. legally and threatened sheriffs with jail time for not cooperating with federal immigration authorities.

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7. HEY, DON'T TOUCH MY DEDUCTION

To slash taxes, Trump and congressional Republicans say they'll curb expensive deductions and credits to allow more revenue to flow to the government — a move likely to meet resistance.

8. 'I THINK SHE TOUCHED SO MANY PEOPLE'

Admirers of Princess Diana place floral tributes, photos, candles and personal messages at the gates of Kensington Palace on the 20th anniversary of her death.

9. IN VERMONT, IT'S NO LAUGHING MATTER

Nitrous oxide — yes, laughing gas — is starting to turn up again in ambulances in some rural areas where medical workers with clearance to provide more traditional painkillers often aren't on board.

10. COLLEGE FOOTBALL OWNS LABOR DAY WEEKEND

A five-day football holiday, Week 1 features an unprecedented opener between No. 1 Alabama and No. 3 Florida State.

Harvey death toll surpasses 30; more fatalities expected

By TAMARA LUSH and JUAN A. LOZANO, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Now that the sun is finally shining and the murky, brown floodwaters are slowly receding in much of the Houston area, grim reality is setting in.

Harvey is about to release its dead.

In Texas, the official death toll surpassed 30 on Wednesday and was expected to climb as authorities investigated several other deaths to determine whether they were storm-related. Officials fear that the number of fatalities will climb sharply in coming days as neighbors, emergency workers and family members search for the missing — and discover the bodies of people trapped in waterlogged homes or encased in underwater graves inside cars. And the death toll might rise even further in the recovery phase, from car crashes, carbon monoxide poisoning or other accidents during cleanup.

"Historically all estimates of deaths are wrong in the beginning," said Craig Fugate, who was the Federal Emergency Management Agency director from 2009 until earlier this year.

Already, the nation is shocked by the horrors revealed as the storm moves out of the area and east toward Louisiana and points north.

The first confirmed fatality came early: A man in the Gulf coastal city of Rockport was killed in a fire late Friday as the storm raged ashore.

On Wednesday, officials located a submerged van that seven members of a Houston family had been traveling in when it was swept off a bridge and into a storm-ravaged bayou. Samuel Saldivar told police he was trying to bring his elderly parents and his brother's four grandchildren to safety from their flooded home on Sunday when the van he was driving was tossed by a strong current into the bayou as it crossed the bridge. He escaped through a window but the six others were trapped when the van's partially submerged sliding door wouldn't open.

Also Wednesday, authorities said 65-year-old Donald Rogers and his 58-year-old wife, Rochelle, drowned when they were swept away by a current after driving their pickup truck into floodwaters in a rural area southwest of Houston. Fort Bend County Sheriff's Maj. Chad Norvell said the couple was on the phone with 911 asking for help when the line went silent. When officers found the truck, it was completely submerged.

On Tuesday afternoon, a 3-year-old girl was found alive in a rain-swollen canal, clinging to the body of her drowned mother in Beaumont, Texas. A second woman was confirmed dead in Beaumont on Wednesday.

Earlier Tuesday, the body of 61-year-old Houston Police Sgt. Steve Perez was found in his car. He'd been swept down a flooded road as he drove to his precinct, determined to serve his community.

Eleven other confirmed deaths, some of which were listed on a Harris County database, showed people were found floating in waters — some in homes or businesses, others near cars. Among those victims was Ruben Jordan, a high school basketball coach, who was last seen late Saturday helping people through floodwaters. His family was informed on Monday that he had died in the floods.

"The sad thing is, of the deaths we've seen, we're going to see more, unfortunately," said Jeff Schle-

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gelmilch, the deputy director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University. "That number doesn't stop moving up until we're well into the recovery phase."

No official number of the missing has been released, and a spokesman for the Harris County Sheriff's Office, where Houston is located, said there isn't a specific strategy in place to look for additional bodies.

"We are going to go out and try to find any potential victims that may be there," said the spokesman, Jake Smith. "We are also encouraging the public if they come across anything, we strongly urge them to call 911 if they find a body or a potential victim."

Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo said the department had received 47 missing persons reports since Harvey inundated the city and 27 of those individuals have been located.

Photos with pleas for help have been posted on social media, cut-and-pasted and retweeted by thousands of people as desperate family members seek loved ones they fear may be dead — but who may only have a cellphone without power. The uncertainty is terrifying.

One of the worries, said Schlegelmilch, is that many of the severely flooded neighborhoods weren't in evacuation areas.

Additionally, the people most likely to be found dead are the elderly, the infirm and the people who were isolated from others — along with folks who didn't have the means or wherewithal to flee. Sometimes it's a matter of having the strength to wade through floodwaters a few blocks to safety, or to pull one's self up onto a roof.

"Those who are the most vulnerable when the sky is blue, they are also the most vulnerable when the sky is gray," Schlegelmilch said.

Fugate, the former FEMA head, said it's also common for people to die during the recovery phase, when stress levels are high and people aren't making clear-headed decisions.

"Stay safe, stay home, stay off the roads if you can. Don't go sightseeing," he warned.

Still, experts say there is some good news: They don't expect the death toll from Harvey to come anywhere close to that of Katrina, when 1,800 people died. Many of those flood-related fatalities came when a levee broke and water inundated New Orleans. People were stranded in extreme heat and the federal response was slow. Emergency managers learned painful lessons during Katrina, and have put those lessons to use in this storm.

Residents of New Orleans during Katrina saw top-to-bottom failures at every level, experts said.

During Harvey, "state and local officials and FEMA were mobilizing, water rescue teams were prepared, in anticipation of this," said Fugate, adding that safe shelters were almost immediately in place for Texas residents, unlike New Orleans. "That provided faster rescues."

One other thing seems to have helped Houston in its time of need: the residents themselves.

"Neighbors helping neighbors," Fugate said. "That will keep the death toll down."

Follow Tamara Lush on Twitter at [Http://twitter.com/tamaralush](http://twitter.com/tamaralush)

Push to simplify taxes is on but don't touch some deductions

By MARCY GORDON, AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans have pledged to overhaul the nation's complex tax code. To slash taxes, they say they'll curb a web of expensive deductions and credits to allow more revenue to flow to the government.

Problem is, they're likely to run into a wall of resistance from people and groups drawn together by a singular warning: Don't touch my deduction.

Major cherished tax breaks — from deductions for mortgage interest and charitable donations to incentives for 401(k) contributions — have deep-pocketed supporters and lobbyists who are sure to fight to preserve those benefits. They add up to hundreds of billions of dollars in lost potential revenue that could otherwise go to rebuilding roads and bridges or social programs or even to help finance broader tax cuts for people and companies.

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"On every single item, there's a group out there ready to battle," says Thomas Cooke, a professor and tax expert at Georgetown University.

This makes the outlook thorny for a tax rewrite effort this fall, a Trump priority that Republicans consider a political imperative looking ahead to next year's midterm elections. The collapse of GOP health care legislation raises the stakes for taxes, with Trump's team talking about action by year's end.

The president and the GOP agree on the broad goals: Simplifying the tax code, lowering the rate for corporations from the current 15-35 percent range, and bringing relief for the middle class. But details have to be filled in.

"First, we need a tax code that is simple, fair and easy to understand," Trump said Wednesday at a rally in Missouri. "That means getting rid of the loopholes and complexity that primarily benefit the wealthiest Americans and special interests."

Among the seemingly unassailable benefits, the most cherished may well be the deduction of interest paid on mortgages. Touted as a pillar in the promotion of homeownership, the benefit cost the government an estimated \$77 billion in the budget year that ended last Sept. 30, according to Congress' Joint Committee on Taxation.

The benefit allows homeowners to deduct up to \$1 million in interest payments on a primary (and a secondary) residence. It is fiercely defended by the National Association of Realtors, which spent \$64.8 million on lobbying on various issues last year including the mortgage deduction, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Roughly 28 million Americans deduct mortgage interest from their income taxes, with the biggest concentrations in the high housing-cost states of California, New York, New Jersey, Virginia and Maryland, according to the Tax Policy Center, a joint venture of the Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution.

House Republicans say they've got a more efficient way to encourage home buying. Under their plan, the standard deduction would be increased from the current \$12,600 for married couples filing jointly, for example, to \$24,000. They argue that a majority of homeowners would no longer choose to itemize deductions and claim the mortgage-interest benefit. They'd be better off using the bigger standard deduction.

Another possibility is halving the mortgage deduction to \$500,000. That would surely set up a pitched battle.

Other highly popular benefits:

—Employees' earnings from defined-contribution retirement plans such as 401(k)s aren't taxed until retirement; pay-ins by both employers and employees also receive tax-preferred status. That cost \$82.7 billion in the most recent budget year.

Among the ideas circulating among some Republicans is reversing that by taxing investment earnings upfront, not upon retirement; or reducing the limits on pre-tax contributions.

With about 55 million U.S. workers holding some \$5 trillion in their 401(k) accounts, the plans have become a touchstone of retirement security for the middle class.

A coalition of groups representing employers, consumers and the financial industry recently expressed concern to the powerful chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. With lawmakers looking for revenue sources to offset prospective tax cuts, "Any changes to the retirement system made solely for short-term budgetary gains, and not for policy reasons, could hurt Americans' long-term retirement security," the Save Our Savings coalition said in a letter to Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah.

—Deductions for donations to charitable, religious and other nonprofit organizations. Estimated cost: \$41.5 billion. Americans are generous, House Republicans note, and charitable giving should be encouraged with a tax incentive. But only 25 percent of taxpayers benefit from the deduction because the rest don't itemize. The solution is to make the charitable deduction more efficient by simplifying taxpayers' compliance and record-keeping, the Republican plan says.

Under the plan, all itemized deductions would be eliminated except for two: mortgage interest and charitable donations.

—Tax-free employer-paid health insurance premiums and other medical expenses, including long-term

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care insurance, clocking in at \$143.8 billion. Employees aren't taxed on the benefits, while employers can deduct them as a business expense.

—Tax credit for children under age 17, \$55 billion. An individual can claim a \$1,000 credit for each qualifying child. The credit starts phasing out for single filers earning over \$75,000 a year and for joint filers earning over \$110,000.

Some lawmakers have proposed increasing the credit to \$2,500, by combining the exemption for dependents and the child care credit. Organizations including the Child Poverty Action Group and the National Association for the Education of Young Children have stressed the importance of using tax policy to help children and families. They express concern that such benefits for children could get caught up in the Republicans' drive to eliminate "special interest" loopholes in the tax overhaul.

Rep. Kevin Brady, the Texas Republican who heads the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, acknowledged in a recent speech, "The fight will get tough."

Week 1 preview: 'Bama-FSU; Action Jackson; Sumlin vs Mora

By RALPH D. RUSSO, AP College Football Writer

College football owns Labor Day weekend and has turned it into five-day football holiday.

Sure, it would be nice to have a few more of these enticing neutral site games played on campuses instead of NFL stadiums. Looking at you Alabama, Florida State, Michigan and Florida. And for every juicy nonconference opener, there are a lot of likely mismatches. Some will provide a surprise or two, but most will be lopsided tuneups for the name-brand schools.

Still, the season is here. Well, it was sort of here last Saturday, but now it is REALLY here. From Thursday through Monday, fans can plan their days around watching college football games.

Here are five things to watch for in Week 1.

BEST GAME

No. 1 Alabama vs. No. 3 Florida State at Atlanta's new stadium, the home of this season's national title game. The top-ranked team in the country has never started a season against a more highly ranked team than No. 3, making Tide-'Noles unprecedented in college football history.

Nick Saban's Crimson Tide has routinely turned these neutral site openers into routs, but Florida State is probably the best team Alabama has opened against. The Seminoles have a potentially nasty defense led by preseason All-Americans Derwin James at safety and Tavarus McFadden at cornerback. Alabama has some reloading to do on defense, but quarterback Jalen Hurts is back after a brilliant freshman season.

The last time the No. 1 team in the AP preseason poll lost its opener was 1990 when No. 16 BYU upset Miami.

HEISMAN WATCH

It is always fun to see what players emerge as Heisman Trophy contenders in September. Many fade away by mid-October. Denard Robinson did this a couple times during his time at Michigan.

Last season Lamar Jackson of Louisville proved to have staying power. A brilliant first month carried him all the way to the Heisman, even though there were some stumbles late.

Only one Heisman winner has repeated: Ohio State's Archie Griffin in 1975. Jackson hasn't been getting a ton of love this offseason, but he can provide a reminder as to why he won the Heisman last year against a Purdue defense that will be hard-pressed to stop him at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

NUMBERS TO KNOW

3 — Georgia Tech has won three straight games against SEC teams, and five of its last six going back to 2015. The Yellow Jackets open Monday night against No. 25 Tennessee at the Mercedes-Benz Dome in Atlanta.

10 — No. 7 Oklahoma has the longest current winning streak in the country. The Sooners should not have much trouble making it 11 against UTEP, but a trip to No. 2 Ohio State lies ahead.

10 — Fresno State will try to break the longest current losing streak in FBS against Incarnate Word in coach Jeff Tedford's debut.

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27 — Florida's winning streak in season openers, the longest current streak of its kind in college football. The No. 17 Gators put that on the line against No. 11 Michigan in Arlington, Texas.

UNDER THE RADAR

Eastern Washington at Texas Tech.

Buckle up. The Eagles have been one of the top teams in FCS, with an offense that has routinely lit up FBS defenses in recent seasons. Texas Tech has been perpetually deficient on defense under coach Kliff Kingsbury, but the Red Raiders can score. Last year, they lost five games in which they scored at least 37 points. EWU quarterback Gage Gubrud could have a huge game.

HOT SEAT WATCH

Texas A&M starts the season at UCLA on Sunday night, and the losing coach will immediately face a frustrated fanbase.

Aggies coach Kevin Sumlin has been rattling off solid seasons for the last four years, but solid might not be enough to solidify his status with athletic director Scott Woodward. Bruins coach Jim Mora's program has never quite reached the promise of his first few seasons, and is coming off an ugly 4-8 record in 2016. The return of quarterback Josh Rosen from injury means much more is expected of UCLA in 2017.

Follow Ralph D. Russo at www.Twitter.com/ralphDrussoAP

More AP college football: www.collegefootball.ap.org and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

2M Muslims gather near Mecca for peak of hajj pilgrimage

By OMAR AKOUR and AHMED HATEM, Associated Press

MOUNT ARAFAT, Saudi Arabia (AP) — With their palms facing the sky in supplication, and many with tears in their eyes, around 2 million people from around the world gathered Thursday in an effort to start anew, erase past sins and beg God for forgiveness and guidance in the peak day of the hajj pilgrimage.

From dawn until dusk, the massive crowd of people will be gathered here in Mount Arafat to spend the day in supplication and contemplation. It is here, on this mountain surrounded by desert, where the Prophet Muhammad delivered his final sermon more than 1,400 years ago.

"We hope that Allah will forgive our sins, and we hope to have a new start with our God," said Khaled Ahmed, a 47-year-old pilgrim from Egypt.

In his sermon, the prophet called on his followers to repay their debts, beware of Satan, perform five daily prayers, fast during the month of Ramadan and give to charity. He also called on those with the means to perform the hajj once in a lifetime. He also reminded worshippers of the rights that women have, and said that no ethnic group or race has superiority over another except in piety and good action.

During the hajj, pilgrims are expected to shed symbols of materialism, though the trip itself can be quite expensive for most. Male pilgrims are required to wear seamless, white terrycloth garments for the entirety of the hajj. Women wear loose clothing, cover their hair and forgo makeup and nail polish to achieve a state of humility and spiritual purity.

The large crowds gathered from more than 160 countries around the world, dressed in nearly identical white garments, are meant to symbolize unity among Muslims, humility and equality before God. The rich and poor among men are to dress the same while performing the rites of hajj.

The hajj is required of all Muslims once in a lifetime. The physically demanding journey tests pilgrims' patience as they withstand long waits and thick crowds on their path to achieving spiritual purification and repentance.

Noura Sulieman, a pilgrim from the Philippines, said she'd been to the hajj many times before and was here again to pray for her family.

"I came here to Arafat to pray for my family, for my daughter, and my son, and all my family, and all the Philippines Muslims, and all Muslims in all countries," she said. "God willing, Allah will accept our pilgrimage."

Muslims believe the rites trace the footsteps of the prophets Ibrahim and Ismail — Abraham and Ishmael

in the Bible.

The movement of such a large and diverse crowd of people in a short period of time in limited spaces is a logistical challenge for the Saudi government. Authorities have deployed more than 100,000 security forces to secure the hajj and assist pilgrims. Additional doctors, nurses, ambulances and mobile health centers are also deployed in the areas of hajj.

Many begin their pilgrimage by traveling to Medina, the site of both the Prophet Muhammad's first mosque and where he is buried.

The rites of the hajj, however, begin in Mecca, the site of Islam's holiest place of worship. There, pilgrims circulate the cube-shaped Kaaba and kneel in prayer facing it. The Kaaba represents the metaphorical house of God and the oneness of God in Islam. Observant Muslims around the world face toward the Kaaba during the five daily prayers.

After Mecca, pilgrims spend the day in Mount Arafat before heading to an area called Muzdalifa. There, they will pick up pebbles for a symbolic stoning of the devil and a casting away of sins that takes place in the Mina valley for three days.

Male pilgrims will shave their hair and women will cut a lock of hair in a sign of renewal for completing the hajj. Around the world, Muslims will mark the end of hajj with a celebration called Eid al-Adha.

Grim reality in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey: More dead

By TAMARA LUSH and JUAN A. LOZANO, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Now that the sun is finally shining and the murky, brown floodwaters are slowly receding in much of the Houston area, grim reality is setting in.

Harvey is about to release its dead.

In Texas, the official death toll surpassed 30 on Wednesday and was expected to climb as authorities investigated several other deaths to determine whether they were storm related. Officials fear that the number of fatalities will climb sharply in coming days as neighbors, emergency workers and family members search for the missing — and discover the bodies of people trapped in waterlogged homes or encased in underwater graves inside cars. And the death toll might rise even further in the recovery phase, from car crashes, carbon monoxide poisoning or other accidents during cleanup.

"Historically all estimates of deaths are wrong in the beginning," said Craig Fugate, who was the Federal Emergency Management Agency director from 2009 until earlier this year.

Already, the nation is shocked by the horrors revealed as the storm moves out of the area and east toward Louisiana and points north.

The first confirmed fatality came early: A man in the Gulf coastal city of Rockport was killed in a fire late Friday as the storm raged ashore.

On Wednesday, officials located a submerged van that seven members of a Houston family had been traveling in when it was swept off a bridge and into a storm-ravaged bayou. Samuel Saldivar told police he was trying to bring his elderly parents and his brother's four grandchildren to safety from their flooded home on Sunday when the van he was driving was tossed by a strong current into the bayou as it crossed the bridge. He escaped through a window but the six others were trapped when the van's partially submerged sliding door wouldn't open.

Also Wednesday, authorities said 65-year-old Donald Rogers and his 58-year-old wife, Rochelle, drowned when they were swept away by a current after driving their pickup truck into floodwaters in a rural area southwest of Houston. Fort Bend County Sheriff's Maj. Chad Norvell said the couple was on the phone with 911 asking for help when the line went silent. When officers found the truck, it was completely submerged.

On Tuesday afternoon, a 3-year-old girl was found alive in a rain-swollen canal, clinging to the body of her drowned mother in Beaumont, Texas. A second woman was confirmed dead in Beaumont on Wednesday.

Earlier Tuesday, the body of 61-year-old Houston Police Sgt. Steve Perez was found in his car. He'd been swept down a flooded road as he drove to his precinct, determined to serve his community.

Eleven other confirmed deaths, some of which were listed on a Harris County database, showed people

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were found floating in waters, some in homes or businesses, others near cars. Among those victims was Ruben Jordan, a high school basketball coach, who was last seen late Saturday helping people through flood waters. His family was informed on Monday that he had died in the floods.

"The sad thing is, of the deaths we've seen, we're going to see more, unfortunately," said Jeff Schlegelmilch, the deputy director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University. "That number doesn't stop moving up until we're well into the recovery phase."

No official number of the missing has been released, and a spokesman for the Harris County Sheriff's Office, where Houston is located, said there isn't a specific strategy in place to look for additional bodies.

"We are going to go out and try to find any potential victims that may be there," said the spokesman, Jake Smith. "We are also encouraging the public if they come across anything, we strongly urge them to call 911 if they find a body or a potential victim."

Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo said the department had received 47 missing persons reports since Harvey inundated the city and 27 of those individuals have been located.

Photos with pleas for help have been posted on social media, cut-and-pasted and retweeted by thousands of people as desperate family members seek loved ones they fear may be dead — but who may only have a cellphone without power. The uncertainty is terrifying.

One of the worries, said Schlegelmilch, is that many of the severely flooded neighborhoods weren't in evacuation areas.

Additionally, the people most likely to be found dead are the elderly, the infirm and the people who were isolated from others — along with folks who didn't have the means or wherewithal to flee. Sometimes it's a matter of having the strength to wade through flood waters a few blocks to safety, or to pull one's self up onto a roof.

"Those who are the most vulnerable when the sky is blue, they are also the most vulnerable when the sky is grey," Schlegelmilch said.

Fugate, the former FEMA head, said it's also common for people to die during the recovery phase, when stress levels are high and people aren't making clear-headed decisions.

"Stay safe, stay home, stay off the roads if you can. Don't go sightseeing," he warned.

Still, experts say there is some good news: They don't expect the death toll from Harvey to come anywhere close to that of Katrina, when 1,800 people died. Many of those flood-related fatalities came when a levee broke and water inundated New Orleans. People were stranded in extreme heat and the federal response was slow. Emergency managers learned painful lessons during Katrina, and have put those lessons to use in this storm.

Residents of New Orleans during Katrina saw top-to-bottom failures at every level, experts said.

During Harvey, "state and local officials and FEMA were mobilizing, water rescue teams were prepared, in anticipation of this," said Fugate, adding that safe shelters were almost immediately in place for Texas residents, unlike New Orleans. "That provided faster rescues."

One other thing seems to have helped Houston in its time of need: the residents themselves.

"Neighbors helping neighbors," Fugate said. "That will keep the death toll down."

Follow Tamara Lush on Twitter at [Http://twitter.com/tamaralush](http://twitter.com/tamaralush)

Houston sees glimmer of hope after Harvey but threats loom

By **NOMAAN MERCHANT** and **JUAN A. LOZANO**, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Harvey's floodwaters started dropping across much of the Houston area and the storm weakened slightly Wednesday but major dangers remained for the U.S. Gulf Coast area, including the threat of an explosion at a stricken Texas chemical plant and major flooding further east near the Texas-Louisiana line.

The scope of the devastation caused by the hurricane came into sharper focus, meanwhile, and the murky green floodwaters from the record-breaking, 4-foot deluge of rain began yielding up more bodies

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as predicted.

The confirmed death toll climbed to at least 31, including six family members — four of them children — whose bodies were pulled Wednesday from a van that had been swept off a Houston bridge into a bayou.

“Unfortunately, it seems that our worst thoughts are being realized,” Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said after the van that disappeared over the weekend was found in 10 feet of muddy water.

As the water receded, Houston’s fire department said it would begin a block-by-block search Thursday of thousands of flooded homes. Assistant Fire Chief Richard Mann said the searches were to ensure “no people were left behind.”

While conditions in the nation’s fourth-largest city appeared to improve, another crisis related to Harvey emerged at a chemical plant about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northeast of Houston. A spokeswoman for the Arkema Inc. plant in Crosby, Texas, said late Wednesday that the flooded facility had lost power and backup generators, leaving it without refrigeration for chemicals that become volatile as the temperature rises.

“The fire will happen. It will resemble a gasoline fire. It will be explosive and intense in nature,” said Janet Smith, spokeswoman for the French company.

The last of the plant’s employees evacuated on Tuesday and residents within 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) were told to leave.

Arkema submitted a plan to the federal government in 2014 outlining a worst-case scenario that said potentially 1.1 million residents could be affected by such an event over a distance of 23 miles, according to information compiled by a nonprofit group. But the company said Wednesday that a worst-case scenario was “very unlikely.”

Another threat was emerging east of Houston where weather conditions deteriorated close to the Louisiana line.

Beaumont and Port Arthur, Texas, struggled with rising floodwaters and worked to evacuate residents after Harvey completed a U-turn in the Gulf of Mexico and rolled ashore early Wednesday for the second time in six days. It hit southwestern Louisiana as a tropical storm with heavy rain and winds of 45 mph.

Forecasters downgraded Harvey to a tropical depression late Wednesday from a tropical storm but it still has lots of rain and potential damage to spread, with 4 to 8 inches forecast from the Louisiana-Texas line into Tennessee and Kentucky through Friday. Some spots may get as much as a foot, raising the risk of more flooding.

For much of the Houston area, forecasters said the rain is pretty much over.

“We have good news,” said Jeff Lindner, a meteorologist with the Harris County Flood Control District. “The water levels are going down.”

Houston’s two major airports were up and running again Wednesday. Officials said they were resuming limited bus and light rail service as well as trash pickup.

At Hermann Park, south of downtown, children glided by in strollers and wagons, joggers took in mid-day runs and couples walked beside cascading fountains and beneath a sparkling sun. People pulled into drive-thru restaurants and emerged from a store with groceries.

At the same time, many thousands of Houston-area homes are under water and could stay that way for days or weeks. And Lindner cautioned that homes near at least one swollen bayou could still get flooded.

Officials said 911 centers in the Houston area are getting more than 1,000 calls an hour from people seeking help.

In Houston’s flooded Meyerland neighborhood, hundreds of families emptied their homes of sodden possessions under a baking sun as the temperature climbed into the 90s. They piled up couches, soggy drywall and carpets ripped out of foul-smelling homes where the floodwaters had lingered for more than 24 hours.

The curbs were lined with the pickup trucks of cleanup contractors and friends.

For Harry Duffey, a 48-year-old computer security specialist, this was flood No. 3 in as many years. Just before the flood, he got a notice that his flood insurance premium had nearly doubled to \$5,300 a year.

“Everywhere we look this water has cost me money after money after money. It just does not end,” he said. But he said he has no intention of moving: “This is in my blood. This is where I’m from.”

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Altogether, more than 1,000 homes in Texas were destroyed and close to 50,000 damaged, and over 32,000 people were in shelters across the state, emergency officials reported. About 10,000 more National Guard troops are being deployed to Texas, bringing the total to 24,000, Gov. Greg Abbott said.

Confirmed deaths from the storm include a married couple who drowned after their pickup truck was swept away while they were on the phone with a 911 dispatcher asking for help, officials said.

Others among the dead include a woman whose body was discovered floating in Beaumont, a man who stepped on a live electrical wire in floodwaters, and a woman who died after she and her young daughter were swept into a drainage canal in Beaumont. The child was rescued clinging to her dead mother, authorities said.

When Harvey paid its return visit to land overnight, it hit near Cameron, Louisiana, about 45 miles from Port Arthur.

Port Arthur found itself increasingly isolated as floodwaters swamped most major roads out of the city.

More than 500 people — along with dozens of dogs, cats, a lizard and a monkey — took shelter at the Max Bowl bowling alley in Port Arthur after firefighters popped the lock in the middle of the night, said the establishment's general manager, Jeff Tolliver.

"The monkey was a little surprising, but we're trying to help," he said.

In Orange, Texas, about 30 miles east of Beaumont, residents of a retirement home surrounded by thigh-deep water were rescued by National Guardsmen and wildlife officers, who carried them from the second floor and put them aboard an airboat.

Harvey initially came ashore as a Category 4 hurricane in Texas on Friday, then went back out to sea and lingered off the coast as a tropical storm for days, inundating flood-prone Houston.

Harvey's five straight days of rain totaled close to 52 inches, the heaviest tropical downpour ever recorded in the continental U.S.

Associated Press writers Frank Bajak, Matt Sedensky and Michael Graczyk in Houston; Diana Heidgerd and David Warren in Dallas; Seth Borenstein in Washington; Paul J. Weber in Austin, Texas; and Tammy Webber in Chicago contributed to this report.

This version of the story corrects the last name of the Arkema spokeswoman to Smith from Hill.

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Source: Lobbyist in Trump Tower meeting spoke to grand jury

By CHAD DAY and ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A grand jury used by Special Counsel Robert Mueller has heard secret testimony from a Russian-American lobbyist who attended a June 2016 meeting with President Donald Trump's eldest son, The Associated Press has learned.

A person familiar with the matter confirmed to the AP that Rinat Akhmetshin had appeared before Mueller's grand jury in recent weeks. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the secret proceedings.

The revelation is the clearest indication yet that Mueller and his team of investigators view the meeting, which came weeks after Trump had secured the Republican presidential nomination, as a relevant inquiry point in their broader probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

The meeting included Donald Trump Jr.; the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner; and his former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort. Emails released by Trump Jr. show he took the meeting expecting that he would be receiving damaging information about Hillary Clinton as part of what was described to him as a Russian government effort to aid the Trump campaign.

The Financial Times first reported Akhmetshin's grand jury appearance. Reached by the AP, Akhmetshin

declined comment. Peter Carr, a spokesman for Mueller, also declined comment Wednesday night.

The confirmation of Akhmetshin's grand jury testimony comes after he spoke at length about his involvement in the Trump Tower meeting in an interview with the AP last month.

Akhmetshin, a former Soviet military officer who served in a counterintelligence unit, is also a well-known Washington lobbyist. He has been representing Russian interests trying to undermine the story of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who died in a Russian prison and is the namesake of a U.S. sanctions law.

Akhmetshin has been reported to have ties to Russian intelligence but he has denied that, calling the allegations a "smear campaign."

Mueller and his team first signaled their interest in the Trump Tower gathering last month by contacting an attorney for at least some of the Russians who attended.

The meeting at issue was disclosed earlier this year to Congress and first revealed by The New York Times.

Trump Jr. has offered evolving explanations for the circumstances of the meeting, initially saying that the purpose was to discuss adoption and later acknowledging that he anticipated receiving information that he thought could be damaging to Clinton.

In addition to Akhmetshin, other attendees at the meeting included Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, music publicist Rob Goldstone — who helped arrange the gathering — and a translator. Ike Kaveladze, who also goes by the name Irakly Kaveladze, also attended the meeting. Kaveladze works for a Russian developer who once partnered with Trump to bring the Miss Universe pageant to Moscow.

An email exchange posted to Twitter by Trump Jr. showed him conversing with Goldstone, who wanted him to meet with someone he described as a "Russian government attorney," who supposedly had dirt on Clinton as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

"If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer," Trump Jr. wrote in one email response.

Associated Press writer Desmond Butler contributed to this report.

Harvey horror: Shivering girl, 3, clinging to drowned mom

By JAMIE STENGLE, Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A shivering 3-year-old girl found clinging to the body of her drowned mother in a rain-swollen canal in Southeast Texas was likely saved by her mom's effort to carry her child to safety from Harvey's floods, police said Wednesday.

Beaumont police identified the mother as Colette Sulcer, 41, and said her daughter was being treated for hypothermia but doing well. When rescuers found the mother and daughter, the girl was on her mother's back, holding on, said Police Officer Haley Morrow.

"I envision what I would do if that was me in that situation and that's what I would do: I would put my child on my back and try to swim to safety or whatever," Morrow said.

Sulcer's vehicle got stuck Tuesday afternoon in the flooded parking lot of an office park just off Interstate 10, said Capt. Brad Penisson of the fire-rescue department in Beaumont. Squalls from Harvey were pounding Beaumont with up to 2 inches (5 centimeters) of rain an hour with 38 mph (60 kph) gusts, according to the National Weather Service.

A witness saw the woman take her daughter and try to walk to safety when the swift current of a flooded drainage canal next to the parking lot swept them both away, Penisson said.

Morrow said the woman's actions probably saved her little girl's life. "When they found her she was still up out of the water," Morrow said.

A police and fire-rescue team in a boat caught up to them a half-mile downstream from Sulcer's vehicle, according to Penisson. Rescuers pulled them into the boat just before they would have gone under a railroad trestle where the water was so high that the boat could not have followed. First responders lifted the child from her mother's body and tried to revive the woman, but she never regained consciousness.

A citizen allowed first responders to load the mother and daughter into his truck and he brought them to a waiting ambulance, Morrow said.

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The child was taken to the Christus St. Elizabeth Hospital in Beaumont, and was expected to be released Wednesday. Officer Carol Riley said the girl was doing "very well" and was chatty.

"Everybody at the hospital and the officers just fell in love with her," Riley said.

More than two dozen people have been killed by Harvey since Friday, when it made landfall in Texas as a Category 4 hurricane. Harvey has since weakened to a tropical depression.

Associated Press writer Terry Wallace contributed to this report.

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Federal judge blocks Texas' tough 'sanctuary cities' law

By PAUL J. WEBER and WILL WEISSERT, Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal judge late Wednesday temporarily blocked most of Texas' tough new "sanctuary cities" law that would have let police officers ask people during routine stops whether they're in the U.S. legally and threatened sheriffs with jail time for not cooperating with federal immigration authorities.

The law, known as Senate Bill 4, had been cheered by President Donald Trump's administration and was set to take effect Friday. It was widely viewed as the toughest immigration measure in the nation since Arizona passed what critics called a "Show Me Your Papers" law in 2010, which was later partially struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Orlando Garcia in San Antonio was handed down as anxieties about immigration enforcement in Texas have again flared in the wake of Tropical Storm Harvey. Houston officials have sought to assure families fleeing the rising floodwaters in the nation's fourth-largest city that shelters would not ask for their immigration status.

Houston police Chief Art Acevedo, an outspoken critic of the law, got word of the decision while standing inside a downtown convention center where about 10,000 people have sought shelter. He high-fived another officer.

"We needed a break. That's a break for us," said Acevedo, whose department has conducted thousands of high-water rescues and lost one officer who died in floodwaters as he tried to drive to work.

The measure sailed through the Republican-controlled Legislature despite months of protests and opposition from business groups, which worried that it could cause a labor-force shortage and send a negative economic message. Leading the lawsuit were Texas' largest cities — including Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin — in a state where the Hispanic population has grown at a pace three times that of whites since 2010.

Garcia wrote in his 94-page ruling that Texas' law was pre-empted by existing federal statute and therefore unconstitutional.

The judge noted that when it was being considered in public legislative hearings, only eight people testified in favor of it while 1,600 "showed up to oppose it." He also wrote there "is overwhelming evidence by local officials, including local law enforcement, that SB 4 will erode public trust and make many communities and neighborhoods less safe" while adding that "localities will suffer adverse economic consequences which, in turn, will harm the state of Texas."

"The court cannot and does not second guess the Legislature," Garcia wrote. "However, the state may not exercise its authority in a manner that violates the United States Constitution."

Garcia's order suspends the law's most contentious language while suggesting that even parts of the law that can go forward won't withstand further legal challenges.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who signed the law in May, said Texas would appeal immediately and

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expressed confidence that the state would eventually prevail. He also again took a swipe at the elected Democratic sheriff of Travis County, Sally Hernandez, who had announced on the day of Trump's inauguration that her Austin jails would no longer automatically honor all detainer requests made by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement.

"Today's decision makes Texas' communities less safe. Because of this ruling, gang members and dangerous criminals, like those who have been released by the Travis County Sheriff, will be set free to prey upon our communities," Abbott said in a statement.

The U.S. Department of Justice, which has made "sanctuary cities" a new priority under the Trump administration, had joined Texas in defending the law in court. U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has threatened to pull federal money from jurisdictions that hinder communication between local police and immigration authorities and has praised Texas' law.

The law had sought to fine law enforcement authorities who fail to honor federal requests to hold people jailed on offenses that aren't immigration related for possible deportation. It also would have ensured that police chiefs, sheriffs and constables could face removal from office and even criminal charges for failing to comply with such federal "detainer" requests.

Opponents of the law told Garcia that his ruling could determine if other states pursue copycat measures, while the Texas attorney general's office argued that the new law had fewer teeth than the Arizona measure.

Since January, the bill has elevated political tensions in Texas, and it boiled over in May when Republican state Rep. Matt Rinaldi told Democrats that he had called federal immigration agents to report protesters in the Capitol who he said were holding signs that said they were not legal citizens. A Democrat whose district is near the U.S.-Mexico border admitted confronting and pushing Rinaldi, who has acknowledged telling him that he would "shoot him in self-defense."

Associated Press Writer Nomaan Merchant in Houston contributed to this report.

Follow Paul J. Weber on Twitter: www.twitter.com/pauljweber

Harvey repeats devastation back on shore in Texas, Louisiana

By JEFF AMY and ADAM KEALOA CAUSEY, Associated Press

ORANGE, Texas (AP) — A weaker Harvey replicated its devastating roll Wednesday, returning to shore with a deluge of rain that inundated homes and highways and left police and government officials struggling to pluck people from the water.

The Texas-Louisiana border bore the brunt of Harvey's second coming, this time as a tropical storm before it was downgraded Wednesday night to a tropical depression. It caused a repeat of the flooding endured by Houston, its suburbs and nearby beach towns when it made first landfall last week as a Category 4 hurricane before meandering back to the Gulf of Mexico. It has dumped up to 50 inches of rain in spots, leaving more than 20 dead.

But as Houston got its first glimpses of sunlight in days, areas to the east that had already seen rain were waking up to even more — and to waterlogged homes.

Orange, Texas, resident Mike Henry said he went to bed Tuesday with water only in his yard. He woke up to rain falling so hard it sounded like a "power washer." And then it quickly started seeping into his house.

"I kept marking it on the wall, every 15 minutes," Henry said. It leveled off at 1 foot (30 cm).

A neighbor delivered him, his longtime girlfriend, Rose Marie Carpenter, and her dog, Maggie May, to dry ground — first in a truck, and then in a boat. They were trying to figure out what to do next as they waited along Interstate 10, where ambulances were taking the medically fragile to Louisiana. But many on the freeway didn't want to head there because they wouldn't take dogs. Carpenter uses a wheelchair, and Henry said he wasn't sure where they would go.

Some motorists were stranded along elevated I-10 for nearly 24 hours after they pulled off the freeway, but couldn't re-enter when the ramps flooded. In Orange, more than two dozen vehicles —including a

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news truck — clustered around a closed convenience store when they could not return to the freeway. Erin Gaudet of nearby Beaumont, Texas, said she went home to pick up her kitten, then they spent the night in her SUV. She said she plans to name the kitten Harvey.

Police in Beaumont and Port Arthur, Texas, were recruiting anyone with boats to help check neighborhoods for potential rescues, with one meeting point for available vessels at a Walmart. Authorities said that instead of calling 911, many people were trying to seek help via social media, adding to the chaos.

But Anna McKay, of Orange, said she tried calling 911 for help, and nobody answered. Neighbors helped bring her and 12 other people who had sought refuge in her home to a Baptist church on higher ground. There, people were planning to cook food they salvaged from their freezers after homeowners shut off their own power to avoid fires.

Florida Wildlife Commission agents and soldiers with the Louisiana Army National Guard evacuated eight residents and three employees from the Golden Years retirement home in Orange. Most of the gray brick structure is one story, although staff took residents to a small second-story area as the water on the ground floor rose to thigh level.

"I was just wondering if it was going to get any higher," said resident Madison Selph, 87. He said he could tell water had stopped rising by looking at a shed across the parking lot.

Rescuers carried the residents out one-by-one, floating them to high-clearance National Guard trucks on an airboat. Three who were too weak to stand were lifted onto a mattress in the back of a truck. The other five got their pajama bottoms wet as they were helped into a second truck, shivering in the still-gusty wind as they sat on metal benches.

"It's cold and I don't know where I'm going," a female resident said at one point, as the truck growled and jolted along a flooded Texas highway.

The storm came ashore again before dawn Wednesday just west of Cameron, Louisiana, bringing maximum sustained winds near 45 mph (72 kph), the U.S. National Hurricane Center said. Harvey had dumped rain as it lingered over Texas for days.

Low-lying southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana are far more rural than the 6-million-plus Houston area and are home to many of the nation's oil refineries, including the biggest in the U.S. in Port Arthur. Motiva Enterprises closed the refinery because of flooding. Port Arthur found itself increasingly isolated as floodwaters swamped most major roads out of the city and spilled into a storm shelter with about 100 people inside.

Follow Jeff Amy on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/jeffamy> and Adam Kealoha Causey at <https://twitter.com/akcausey>.

Causey reported in Dallas. Associated Press writers Josh Replogle in Beaumont; Michael Kunzleman in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Emily Schmall and Claudia Lauer in Dallas contributed to this report.

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House GOP eyeing \$1B disaster funds cut to finance wall

By ALAN FRAM and ANDREW TAYLOR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is promising billions to help Texas rebuild from Harvey-caused epic flooding, but his Republican allies in the House are looking at cutting almost \$1 billion from disaster accounts to help finance the president's border wall.

The pending reduction to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster relief account is part of a massive spending bill that the House is scheduled to consider next week when lawmakers return from their August recess. The \$876 million cut, which is included in the 1,305-page measure's homeland security section, pays for roughly half the cost of Trump's down payment on the U.S.-Mexico border wall

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that the president repeatedly promised Mexico would finance.

It seems sure that GOP leaders will move to reverse it next week as floodwaters cover Houston, the nation's fourth-largest city, and tens of thousands of Texans have sought refuge in shelters. There's only \$2.3 billion remaining in federal disaster coffers.

The disaster relief cut was proposed well before Harvey and the politically bad optics are sure to lead lawmakers to do an about face, though that would create a money crunch in homeland security accounts.

The FEMA cut is the handiwork of House Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J. — the major force behind a \$50 billion-plus 2013 Superstorm Sandy recovery package — and Rep. John Carter, whose home state of Texas is suffering badly from Harvey.

"Circumstances have changed significantly since the bill was drafted earlier this summer," Appropriations Committee spokeswoman Jennifer Hing said Wednesday. "Given the current situation, the committee is reassessing the issue."

Harvey aid is a fresh addition to an agenda already packed with must-do tasks and multiple legislative deadlines: Passing a stopgap spending bill to avert a government shutdown; increasing the government's borrowing authority to prevent a market-quaking default on U.S. obligations; and paving the way for a GOP rewrite of the U.S. tax code.

Trump is slated to meet with congressional leaders next Wednesday. The meeting follows a recess that has seen Trump lambast several top Republicans, especially Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., after the collapse of the GOP health care bill in his chamber. That has wounded the president's relationship with his own party, and the coming weeks should offer a test of how much clout he has with fellow Republicans.

"You're not going to bully United States senators, this isn't the Apprentice," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., referring to Trump's star turn on the reality television show. "You can't look at them and say you're fired, you're going to need their vote and you oughtta remember that they're going to be at the table in every major deal you need for the next three years. So I just don't think that's a productive way to proceed."

McConnell is scheduled to attend next Wednesday morning's White House meeting, according to congressional aides. Also going are House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., the aides said.

"We expect to hear their proposal for getting done all that we have to get done in September," said Schumer spokesman Matt House.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn, the chamber's No. 2 Republican, is pressing for an emergency infusion of disaster aid pending estimates of longer-term rebuilding costs.

Despite Trump's promise at a rally in Phoenix last week to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border even "if we have to close down our government," congressional Republicans are optimistic of averting a politically damaging shutdown after the fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

For one thing, most Republicans, including Trump, want to move on to a sweeping revamp of the tax code, and a shutdown debacle would only make tax legislation more difficult. A tax overhaul, cutting rates for individuals and businesses while erasing numerous tax breaks and loopholes, is difficult enough as it stands.

Like the failed push to repeal former President Barack Obama's health care law, the tax effort is likely to encounter strong Democratic opposition and divisions among Republicans, leaving its fate uncertain.

The massive, ongoing flooding caused by Harvey means that officials still don't know how much aid the metropolis will need to recover, but it's expected to be many billions of dollars. A possible outcome is one or even two infusions of immediate aid next month, with a longer-term recovery package coming by year's end.

Congressional correspondent Erica Werner contributed to this report.

Rollie Massimino, who led Villanova to '85 NCAA title, dies

By TIM REYNOLDS, AP Basketball Writer

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Rollie Massimino, who led Villanova's storied run to the 1985 NCAA championship and won more than 800 games in his coaching career, died Wednesday after a long battle with cancer. He was 82.

Massimino's death was announced by Keiser University, where he was still the men's basketball coach. He spent the final days of his life in hospice care.

Best known for that national title at Villanova, Massimino also coached at Stony Brook, UNLV and Cleveland State. He spent the last 11 years of his life at Keiser, where he started the program and turned it into an NAIA power.

"We are so truly honored to have shared this time with him and take some degree of comfort in knowing the positive impact he has had on college students for the last four decades remains immeasurable," Keiser Chancellor Arthur Keiser said.

Massimino faced numerous health issues in recent years yet never stopped coaching. And even though he left Villanova 25 years ago, he was still considered family by the Wildcats and coach Jay Wright.

"If not for Rollie Massimino, I'm not even a part of this," Wright once said. "If not for the Big East, Rollie Massimino is not Rollie Massimino. I know it. He knows it. And if not for the Big East, no one knows about Villanova."

Wright was given a championship ring from 1985, and Massimino was given a championship ring from 2016. Wright wasn't working at Villanova during the first title season; Massimino wasn't officially there for the second one. But Wright worked Massimino's camps in the mid-1980s before coming to Villanova, so that made him part of the family.

Massimino went out of his way to take care of those he considered family. So Wright got that 1985 ring. And the only moment when Wright teared up at Villanova's 2016 ring ceremony was when he handed Massimino his piece of championship jewelry.

"When you're a young coach and you grow up in Philly, Rollie Massimino is a legend to you," Wright said.

Roland Vincent Massimino was born Nov. 13, 1934, in New Jersey, played his college basketball at Vermont and got his master's degree from Rutgers. His first head coaching job was at his alma mater, Hillside High School, in 1962. His college coaching career started at Stony Brook in 1969, and after two seasons he became an assistant at Penn — under Chuck Daly.

Massimino and Daly would remain close until Daly's death in 2009. Like Daly, Massimino was always dapper on the sidelines. So when Daly died, Massimino took Daly's collection of sharp dress shoes and wore a pair in every game he coached for the remainder of his life.

"Chuck is always with me," Massimino said earlier this year.

After one season at Penn, Massimino took over at Villanova. He spent 19 seasons there, best remembered by the 1985 NCAA title run that was anything but easy — for many reasons.

Villanova needed a last-second stop just to escape over Dayton (a game played at Dayton, no less) in the first round, went scoreless for the first eight minutes of the second half and somehow still beat top-seeded Michigan in the second round, and toppled Maryland in the regional semifinal — winning those three games by a combined nine points. And to get to the Final Four, Villanova erased a halftime deficit against North Carolina.

That game with the Tar Heels was the one where Massimino gave what those linked to that '85 team still call "the pasta speech" at halftime.

"He looked at all of us and threw his coat down," Chuck Everson, who played on that team, said Wednesday. "He said, 'If I knew it was going to come down to this, I'd rather have a bowl of pasta with clam sauce and a lot of cheese on it.' Everybody was looking at him like, 'What the heck does this have to do about playing?' What he was saying was just go out and have some fun. Do something you like. Play. Everybody's eyes exploded."

Villanova dominated that second half. Pasta was had afterward.

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The Wildcats downed Memphis State in the national semifinals. That left a Villanova vs. Georgetown showdown, an all-Big East final. The Hoyas won both regular-season matchups between the rivals, but Villanova shot a staggering 79 percent in the title game and pulled off a 66-64 upset when it mattered most.

"Even though his 1985 team beat us, I have always had nothing but great respect and admiration for him," said Georgetown coach Patrick Ewing, who starred on the Hoyas' 1985 team.

Villanova missed six shots from the field in the game, going 22 for 28.

"This is the greatest thing to ever happen to me," Massimino said that night.

Massimino spent two seasons at UNLV, seven more at Cleveland State and the last 11 at Keiser (which was called Northwood when he started). Keiser went to the NAIA national tournament nine times in his 11 seasons.

He was coaching until the very end, stomping on the sideline when angry with referees, doing the same pregame rituals this season as he did 30 years ago at Villanova. A leather desk chair was wheeled to the sideline for each practice for him to use if he needed a rest; most days, that chair went completely unoccupied.

"Some days, we do take him for granted," Keiser guard Andrija Sarenac said earlier this year. "But then you see him on TV so much, you see all these videos made about him, the movies about Villanova and everything, and it just hits you. You realize that he's a legend. I mean, your coach is a walking legend. With the energy and everything he comes in with, it's inspiring."

It only seemed like Massimino knew everyone. He dined with Frank Sinatra, got to be a Dodgers batboy under Tommy Lasorda and loved Perry Como. The '85 Villanova team would gather annually with Massimino, grown men sleeping on air mattresses scattered all over the coach's home while dining on his favorites — tons of pasta, tons of eggplant, all the while toasting the past and the future.

He was a finalist for enshrinement in the Basketball Hall of Fame this year. Massimino is survived by his wife, five children and 17 grandchildren. Funeral arrangements were not immediately announced.

"People say I've given a lot to basketball," Massimino told AP earlier this year. "Let me tell you something: Basketball has given a whole lot more to me."

More AP college basketball news: <http://collegebasketball.ap.org>

US clears breakthrough gene therapy for childhood leukemia

By LAURAN NEERGAARD, AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Opening a new era in cancer care, U.S. health officials on Wednesday approved a breakthrough treatment that genetically engineers patients' own blood cells into an army of assassins to seek and destroy childhood leukemia.

The Food and Drug Administration called the approval historic, the first gene therapy to hit the U.S. market. Made from scratch for every patient, it's one of a wave of "living drugs" under development to fight additional blood cancers and other tumors, too.

Novartis Pharmaceuticals set the price for its one-time infusion of so-called "CAR-T cells" at \$475,000, but said there would be no charge for patients who didn't show a response within a month.

"This is a brand new way of treating cancer," said Dr. Stephan Grupp of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, who treated the first child with CAR-T cell therapy — a girl who'd been near death but now is cancer-free for five years and counting. "That's enormously exciting."

CAR-T treatment uses gene therapy techniques not to fix disease-causing genes but to turbocharge T cells, immune system soldiers that cancer too often can evade. Researchers filter those cells from a patient's blood, reprogram them to harbor a "chimeric antigen receptor" or CAR that zeroes in on cancer, and grow hundreds of millions of copies. Returned to the patient, the revved-up cells can continue multiplying to fight disease for months or years.

It's a completely different way to harness the immune system than popular immunotherapy drugs called "checkpoint inhibitors" that treat a variety of cancers by helping the body's natural T cells better spot

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tumors. CAR-T cell therapy gives patients stronger T cells to do that job.

"We're entering a new frontier in medical innovation with the ability to reprogram a patient's own cells to attack a deadly cancer," said FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb.

The first CAR-T version, developed by Novartis and the University of Pennsylvania, is approved for use by several hundred patients a year who are desperately ill with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, or ALL. It strikes more than 3,000 children and young adults in the U.S. each year and while most survive, about 15 percent relapse despite today's best treatments.

In a key study of 63 advanced patients, 83 percent went into remission soon after receiving the CAR-T cells. Importantly, it's not clear how long that benefit lasts: Some patients did relapse months later. The others still are being tracked to see how they fare long-term.

Still, "a far higher percentage of patients go into remission with this therapy than anything else we've seen to date with relapsed leukemia," said Dr. Ted Laetsch of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, one of the study sites. "I wouldn't say we know for sure how many will be cured yet by this therapy. There certainly is a hope" that some will be.

Most patients suffered side effects that can be grueling, even life-threatening. An immune overreaction called "cytokine release syndrome" can trigger high fevers, plummeting blood pressure and in severe cases organ damage, side effects that require sophisticated care to help patients without blocking the cancer attack. The FDA designated a treatment for those side effects Wednesday.

"This is remarkable technology," said Dr. Mikkael Sekeres of the American Society of Hematology. But, he cautioned that CAR-T "isn't a panacea."

Among concerns, sometimes leukemia can develop resistance, and sometimes patients worsen while waiting for their new cells, said Sekeres, who directs the Cleveland Clinic's leukemia program and wasn't involved with CAR-T testing.

"Unfortunately leukemia grows so rapidly that it can evade even the smartest of our technologies," he added.

To better ensure patient safety, the FDA is requiring Novartis to offer CAR-T therapy only through medical centers specially trained and certified to handle the complicated treatment. Novartis expects to have 32 centers around the country, mostly in large cities, running by year's end, with the first 20 offering care within the next month.

Patients' collected immune cells will be frozen and shipped to a Novartis factory in New Jersey that creates each dose, a process the company says should take about three weeks. The \$475,000 price tag doesn't include the cost of needed hospitalizations, travel to a certified hospital and other expenses.

On a conference call Wednesday, Novartis executives said the company is working with the Medicaid program and private insurers and expects broad coverage, and will offer some financial assistance with such things as copay and travel costs. But they didn't promise all patients would be able to get the therapy.

For some patients, the new CAR-T therapy might replace bone marrow transplants that cost more than half a million dollars, noted Grupp, who led the Novartis study.

"I don't want to be an apologist for high drug prices in the U.S.," Grupp stressed. But if it's the last treatment they need, "that's a really significant one-time investment in their wellness, especially in kids who have a whole lifetime ahead of them."

"This is a turning point in the fight" against ALL, said Penn's Dr. Carl June, who pioneered the therapy.

But he and other researchers say thousands more patients eventually may benefit. Kite Pharma's similar CAR-T brand, developed by the National Cancer Institute, is expected to win approval later this year to treat aggressive lymphoma, and Juno Therapeutics and other companies are studying their own versions against blood cancers including multiple myeloma.

Scientists around the country also are trying to make CAR-T therapies that could fight more common solid tumors such as brain, breast or pancreatic cancers — a harder next step.

"Although narrow in scope, today's FDA ruling is a milestone," said Dr. David Maloney of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, whose team has worked with Juno and is researching CAR-T in a

variety of cancers. "Approvals are an important step, but they're just the beginning."

AP Medical Writer Linda A. Johnson in Trenton, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

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Trump pushes tax overhaul to 'bring back Main Street'

By CATHERINE LUCEY and KEN THOMAS, Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (AP) — President Donald Trump launched his fall push to overhaul the nation's tax system by pledging Wednesday that the details-to-come plan would "bring back Main Street" by reducing the crushing tax burden on middle-class Americans, making a populist appeal for a proposal expected to heavily benefit corporate America.

Trump said his vision for re-writing the tax system, a key campaign pledge, would unlock stronger economic growth and benefit companies and workers alike. He promised it would be "pro-growth, pro-jobs, pro-worker and pro-American."

True to form for the president, Trump dangled the prospect of the "biggest ever" tax cut and warned that without it, "jobs in our country cannot take off the way they should. And it could be much worse than that."

Trump, who rarely travels to promote his policy agenda, chose to debut his tax overhaul pitch before employees at a manufacturing plant in Springfield, Missouri, a community known as the birthplace of Route 66, one of the nation's original highways, and one known as America's Main Street.

"This is where America's Main Street will begin its big, beautiful comeback," the president declared.

After eight months without any major legislative victories and after a significant defeat on health care, Trump and Republican congressional leaders face mounting pressure to notch some significant achievements before next year's midterm elections. But the tax overhaul effort already is facing political headwinds.

The White House and Republican lawmakers have not finalized details of the plan, and the push comes as Congress returns to face an intense September workload filled with must-do items such as raising the debt limit, funding the government and providing assistance for the Harvey recovery effort.

While the White House has been designing a tax plan aimed at appealing to Republicans, Trump sought to cast the effort in bipartisan terms. He called on members of both parties to work with him on a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver real tax reform for everyday hard-working Americans."

"I am fully committed to working with Congress to get this job done — and I don't want to be disappointed by Congress, do you understand?" Trump said. "Do you understand? Congress. I think Congress is going to make a comeback."

The president used the official White House event to inject an overtly political message aimed at Missouri Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill, a top Republican target in next year's midterm elections.

"We must lower our taxes, and your senator, Claire McCaskill, she must do this for you. And if she doesn't do it for you, you have got to vote her out of office," Trump said, drawing out each of the last five words for emphasis.

Even before Trump took the stage, Democrats eagerly laid down their own markers for what the tax plan should look like.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer outlined a series of conditions, telling reporters the tax cuts should not go to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans. He added that the plan should not increase the budget deficit and should be written by both parties — not just Republicans like the GOP's failed health care effort.

"If the president wants to use populism to sell his tax plan, he ought to consider actually putting his money where his mouth is" and cut taxes for the middle class, not the richest Americans, Schumer said.

The Trump administration released a one-page set of goals in April for its tax overhaul, followed by a joint statement in July with congressional leaders.

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In an interview with the Financial Times last week, Gary Cohn, a top Trump economic adviser, said the White House and Republican leaders had agreed on a "good skeleton" for the plan, and said the tax-writing committee in the House would be drafting legislation while the White House tries to sell it.

Cohn, who recently publicly denounced the president's response to the racial violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, traveled to Missouri with the president and was standing to the side of the stage. But he was not among a number of administration officials whom Trump publicly thanked in his opening remarks.

The White House played down the omission, saying White House staff members typically aren't recognized in prepared remarks, only Cabinet members.

Trump said he would like to see the top corporate tax rate drop from 35 percent to 15 percent. But it's not clear that the top rate will go that low in the plan or what kind of tax break a typical taxpayer would see.

With his promises to the middle class, Trump is essentially betting that the benefits of tax cuts for businesses will flow directly to workers, rather than ending up in the pockets of top executives and wealthy investors.

His administration has asserted that high corporate tax rates primarily hurt workers, since companies can stash their money overseas in countries with lower tax rates.

Trump's Treasury Department cited a 2006 Congressional Budget Office study to back the claim that workers mostly bear the brunt from corporate taxes, as well as research by Kevin Hassett, the economist picked to lead the White House Council of Economic Advisers.

But Treasury officials concluded in a separate 2012 analysis that only 18 percent of corporate taxes' costs fell on labor. This would suggest that Trump's plan is more likely to bolster stock prices and CEO pay than trickle down to worker's salaries.

Thomas reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Josh Boak in Washington contributed this report.

Pentagon: US troop total in Afghanistan larger than reported

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon is poised to have roughly 15,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan in the coming months, as defense officials on Wednesday finally acknowledged the actual number of American forces in the country after long camouflaging the total in misleading accounting measures and red tape.

Senior Defense officials for the first time said there are about 11,000 U.S. forces currently deployed to Afghanistan — thousands more than the 8,400 that were allowed under the previous administration's troop cap. Military officials have long quietly acknowledged there were far more forces in the country than the cap allowed, but commanders shuffled troops in and out, labeled many "temporary," and used other personnel accounting tactics to artificially keep the public count low.

The officials, however, refused to provide similar details for Iraq and Syria, where there also are thousands more than the Pentagon publicly admits.

Chief Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said that while the same "principles of transparency" will apply in Iraq and Syria, those countries have their own interests. There have long been political sensitivities within the Iraq government about the number of American troops on the ground, and those concerns raise questions about whether the Pentagon will be less candid about force numbers there to avoid conflicts.

Based on troop caps instituted by the Obama administration, the number of U.S. forces in Iraq has consistently been reported as 5,262, but officials say there are actually more than 7,000. And there are at least 1,500 U.S. troops in Syria — three times the 503 that the Pentagon will acknowledge. White said details on troop numbers in Iraq and Syria would be announced in the future.

The troop numbers announcement comes as the Pentagon is preparing to deploy several thousand more Americans to Afghanistan, in order to expand the training and advising of Afghan forces and beef up counterterrorism operations against the Taliban and al-Qaida-linked groups in the country. Officials have

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said the U.S. will send as many as 3,900 more troops to the war — which would bring the number of publicly recognized troops there to about 15,000. The officials were not authorized to discuss the future deployments publicly so spoke on condition of anonymity.

Lt. Gen. Frank McKenzie, director of the Joint Staff, said providing more truthful numbers “is an attempt to actually clarify a very confusing set of reporting rules that has the unintended consequence of forcing commanders to make readiness tradeoffs as they deploy their forces.”

As an example, Gen. John Nicholson, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, noted earlier this year that when Obama ordered the cut in troops to 8,400, commanders had to hire contractors to do jobs that American forces would normally do. So, an aviation brigade that deployed to Afghanistan was able to bring its helicopters, pilots and staff, but the mechanics had to be left behind at Fort Riley, Kansas. The contractors hired to replace the mechanics, Nicholson said, cost “tens of millions of dollars” and hurt the unit’s overall military readiness.

White and McKenzie said there have been no final decisions about future deployments to Afghanistan, but those should be coming soon. Others have said that some small numbers of troops have moved into the country from nearby within the region, but there have not been any new deployment orders for forces based further away, such as the U.S.

Officials said that once Mattis makes his decision, a few hundred troops could be ready to deploy quickly — within days, while others could take several weeks to get into Afghanistan.

In the close to 16 years since the United States went to war in Afghanistan, the number of American troops initially grew in spurts, as U.S. leaders wavered about how much focus to put on the war. President Barack Obama came into office saying he would give the war there the attention it required, and the number of American troops on the ground spiraled by mid-2010 to 100,000.

Over time, as the public grew weary with the wars, Obama began to steadily withdraw troops. By March 2015, there were fewer than 10,000 there and Obama announced plans to drop the number to 5,500 by the end of 2016. He later agreed to a compromise that set the cap of 8,400 through the end of his presidency.

Since taking office President Donald Trump has moved to give his military commanders more control over the day-to-day operations of the wars. Allowing Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to determine troop deployments is one example of that.

Trump sows confusion by rejecting idea of North Korea talks

By **MATTHEW PENNINGTON**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — True to form, President Donald Trump sowed policy confusion with a tweet.

Declaring Wednesday that “talking is not the answer” on North Korea, Trump’s message appeared to clash with efforts by his Cabinet members to safeguard the possibility of a diplomatic solution as Kim Jong Un’s military races toward mastering a nuclear-tipped missile that can reach America.

The president’s morning tweet came a day after a highly provocative North Korean missile test that flew over Japan, a close American ally, potentially endangering civilians on the ground. On Wednesday, Kim called for more weapons launches in the Pacific.

“The U.S. has been talking to North Korea, and paying them extortion money, for 25 years. Talking is not the answer!” Trump tweeted.

The statement raised fresh uncertainty about the Trump administration’s strategy for North Korea. How the U.S. plans address the North’s growing nuclear capabilities is of increasing urgency not just in North-east Asia, but also in the United States. Last month, the isolated, communist country tested for the first time a missile that could potentially strike the U.S. mainland.

Trump didn’t spell out what he meant by “extortion,” but he appeared to be referring to the \$1.3 billion the U.S. has provided in aid to North Korea since 1995. Most of that has been food and fuel.

Criticism of past administrations’ failures to halt North Korea’s march toward nuclear weapons has been a recurrent theme from Trump. However, his comment overlooked that fact there’s been virtually no U.S. aid to North Korea since early 2009. Talks also have been in limbo for years. The last formal negotiation

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between Washington and Pyongyang on the nuclear issue occurred in 2012.

Eliminating the possibility of new negotiations could limit U.S. options. It also risks increasing the chance of military confrontation between nuclear-armed powers.

Within hours of Trump's tweet, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis appeared to contradict him.

"We're never out of diplomatic solutions," Mattis said as he met with his counterpart from South Korea for talks on military readiness.

The U.S.-allied government supports, in theory, greater diplomatic outreach to Pyongyang. If war were to ever break out, millions of South Koreans would immediately find themselves within range of the North's large conventional weapons arsenal.

In Geneva, Robert Wood, the U.S. ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, sought to explain the president's tweet.

Trump was expressing his frustration at North Korea's "dangerous and provocative threats," Wood said. But like Mattis, he said the U.S. remained willing to discuss the North's denuclearization.

"The United States is open to trying to deal with this question diplomatically, but the other side is not," Wood told reporters.

It's not the first time Trump has complicated his administration's national security message via social media.

Last month, as aides worked to defuse tensions between Qatar and its Arab neighbors, Trump blindsided them by tweeting that Qatar funded terrorism. The gas-rich monarchy hosts 11,000 U.S. troops.

Trump also surprised officials with tweets on Russia and banning transgender people in the military.

Supporters of U.S. engagement with North Korea argue that periods when the U.S. is talking and providing aid to the country have proved the most successful in curbing its weapons development. In the past five years, without formal talks, the North's technological strides have been most rapid.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson last week hinted at possible direct talks if North Korea demonstrated its sincerity by stopping weapons tests. The U.S. also has been maintaining a diplomatic back channel with North Korea.

The immediate outlook for diplomacy, however, appears bleak.

On Wednesday, North Korea's Kim called for more weapons launches into the Pacific Ocean. The Korean Central News Agency said the launch that overflowed Japan was of an intermediate-range missile that the North first successfully tested in May and threatened to fire into waters near Guam earlier this month. It described the launch as a "muscle-flexing" countermeasure to U.S.-South Korean military drills that conclude Thursday.

Trump offered a surprisingly subdued, initial response to the Japan overflight Tuesday, without any of the bombast of earlier this month when he warned the North of "fire and fury" if its threats persist. He said "all options are on the table," a standard formulation signaling Washington hasn't ruled out military action.

While the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday condemned the launch as "outrageous," there was no move to impose more sanctions.

At the disarmament body in Geneva, North Korean diplomat Ju Yong Chol said the council's statement revealed Washington's "evil intention to obliterate the DPRK's sovereignty and rights to existence and development."

Associated Press writers Jamey Keaten in Geneva, and Jill Colvin, Robert Burns and Bradley Klapper in Washington contributed to this report.

US airstrikes block evacuation of Islamic State militants

By **BASSEM MROUE** and **JOSH LEDERMAN**, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — U.S. airstrikes blocked the advance of an Islamic State convoy carrying militants toward Iraq on Wednesday, derailing a Hezbollah-negotiated deal that removed the extremists from the Lebanon-Syria border, where they have been for years.

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The airstrikes came amid U.S. criticism of the deal, reflecting a growing outrage within the Trump administration over the decision to give the militants safe passage from the battlefield instead of killing them, and Iran-backed Hezbollah's leading role in it.

The developments also were an embarrassment for the U.S.-backed Lebanese military, which agreed to the deal and had declared victory over the militants.

U.S. officials said the airstrikes to disrupt the fleeing militants were intended to send a strong signal that the deal, while helping to clear IS from the border, undermined a broader U.S.-led strategy for defeating the group in Syria and Iraq.

More than 48 hours after they left the Syria-Lebanon border for eastern Syria, the buses carrying 300 militants and almost as many of their relatives were stuck in a desert area on the outskirts of the largely IS-held Deir el-Zour province near the frontier with Iraq.

It is not clear how the standoff will be resolved. Syrian activists say alternate routes are being considered to bring the militants to Boukamal, an IS-controlled town on the Iraqi border, according to the agreement.

But officials of the U.S.-led coalition said they will continue to monitor the convoy and aren't ruling out more airstrikes.

"Irreconcilable (IS) terrorists should be killed on the battlefield, not bused across Syria to the Iraqi border without Iraq's consent," according to a tweet from Brett McGurk, the top U.S. envoy for the anti-Islamic State coalition.

The evacuation deal followed separate but simultaneous weeklong offensives by the Lebanese army on one side of the border and by the Syrian government and Hezbollah on the other. Hezbollah has thousands of fighters shoring up the forces of President Bashar Assad.

Iraq also reacted angrily to the evacuation, with its president saying that moving the militants to the Iraqi-Syrian border was an "insult."

Later Wednesday, the coalition said its warplanes struck a small bridge and cratered a road to hinder the convoy without targeting the evacuees. Airstrikes also hit a separate group of IS militants traveling to meet the convoy, according to Col. Ryan Dillon, a coalition spokesman.

Responding to the criticism but not addressing the airstrikes, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said in a statement that negotiating with the militants was the "only way" to resolve the "humanitarian and national" issue of finding the remains of nine Lebanese soldiers that the militants kidnapped in 2014.

Hezbollah is a significant player in Lebanon with government ministers and lawmakers, while the role of its fighters also has been growing in Syria.

The Syrian government, backed by Russian air power and Iranian-organized militias including Hezbollah, has focused its military campaign in recent weeks on Deir el-Zour, where government troops have been besieged for years in the provincial capital.

Dillon criticized Moscow and Damascus for allowing the buses of militants to travel through territory they control.

"To say they are serious about defeating IS looks suspect right now," Dillon told The Associated Press.

Nasrallah, in his third statement on the issue in a week, said his fighters are battling alongside the Syrian troops to oust IS militants from the area where the others are headed.

"We transported those defeated militants from one front we fight in to another front we also fight in," he said.

Unease has been growing in the Trump administration about Lebanon's campaign against IS on its border because of the apparent coordination between Lebanon's military and Hezbollah. Lebanon maintains it's an independent operation.

In parts of Syria that have been freed from IS control, there is a growing influence by Hezbollah, and that has raised concerns about a stronger Iranian hand in Syria and the potential for Hezbollah to use the territory as a base to attack Israel.

But Lebanon's move to halt the fight after IS was squeezed into a small sliver on the border and then let the militants flee has further alarmed Washington. President Donald Trump has placed a particular

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emphasis on killing IS members while faulting former President Barack Obama for being too willing to let the militants regroup elsewhere.

The U.S. said it wasn't consulted as part of Lebanon's deal with IS, Hezbollah and the Syrian government, and it wouldn't have agreed to it if asked.

"We have obvious concerns, however, for any action that provides ISIS capabilities to shift its forces and thus put more civilians in harm's way," said Edgar Vasquez, a regional spokesman for the U.S. State Department.

Still, U.S. officials pushed back on speculation in Lebanon that the U.S. might cut aid or other help to Lebanon's armed forces, saying no such halt was being considered. U.S. officials said Lebanon's military, which enjoys broad confidence from the public, was the only institution stable and credible enough to hold together the country's delicate political situation. The U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to talk to reporters.

Lebanon's military has defended the agreement.

Army commander Gen. Joseph Aoun said that as the offensive against IS was underway, the Lebanese mediator called him to say the extremists accepted a cease-fire in return for information about the fate of the missing soldiers.

"I had one of two choices. Either to go on with the battle and not know the fate of the soldiers, or give in and know the fate of the soldiers," he said. Remains of several people have been uncovered in the border area, and DNA tests are underway to determine whether they belong to the missing soldiers. Lebanese officials say they are almost sure they are.

Officials said there could be a silver lining for the coalition: While the IS militants had been holed up in a mountainous region of the Lebanon-Syria border where they were difficult to target, the evacuation deal means they will relocate to desert areas where coalition forces can strike them more easily.

Lederman reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Zeina Karam and Sarah El Deeb contributed from Beirut.

US economic growth revised up to 3 percent in Q2

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy rebounded sharply in the spring, growing at the fastest pace in more than two years amid brisk consumer spending on autos and other goods.

The gross domestic product, the broadest measure of economic health, grew at an annual rate of 3 percent in the April-June quarter, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday. It was the best showing since a 3.2 percent gain in the first quarter of 2015.

The result is a healthy upward revision from the government's initial estimate of 2.6 percent growth in the second quarter. The growth rate in the January-March quarter was a lackluster 1.2 percent.

Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said he believed that the strength in consumer spending should result in an "even stronger hand-off" for growth going into the current quarter. He predicted GDP would grow close to 3 percent this quarter.

President Donald Trump hailed the latest figures, declaring "we are really on our way." Trump said if the economy is able to sustain growth at a 3 percent rate, it would create 12 million new jobs and \$10 trillion in new economic activity over the next decade.

"I happen to be one that thinks we can go much higher than 3 percent. There is no reason why we shouldn't," Trump told a crowd in Missouri where he was campaigning for support for the administration's tax plan that would cut rates for individuals and businesses.

During last year's campaign, Trump pledged to boost economic growth to 4 percent or better.

The budget the president released in May projects GDP growth will rise to 3 percent over the next four years and remain at that level for the rest of the decade. However, private economists and the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office believe that forecast is unrealistic. CBO is forecasting average growth of just

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1.9 percent over the next decade.

For the second quarter, the government estimated that consumer spending grew at a 3.3 percent rate, the best showing in a year and up from an initial estimate of 2.8 percent growth. Much of the strength came from a sharp upward revision in spending on autos, which the government initially estimated as declining in the spring.

Investment by businesses also improved to growth of 6.9 percent, reflecting higher spending on structures, equipment and intellectual property.

Spending by governments, which had grown 0.7 percent in the initial estimate, was revised to a decline at a 0.3 percent rate. The downgrade reflects a 1.7 percent fall in spending by state and local governments.

This was the second of three estimates the government will provide for second quarter growth. Even with the upward revision, the weak start to the year means that growth over the past six months has averaged 2.1 percent, the same modest pace seen for the recovery that began in mid-2009.

Many economists had been forecasting growth in the current July-September quarter would be around 3 percent. Some are now saying that the devastation from Hurricane Harvey could shave about a half-percentage point off growth this quarter. However, analysts believe the pace of growth will bounce back once the rebuilding begins and oil refineries get back to full production, bringing down prices.

For the entire year, Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, is forecasting growth of 2.1 percent. That would mark an improvement over last year when the economy grew a meager 1.5 percent, the poorest showing since 2009 when GDP shrank by 2.9 percent.

Zandi is forecasting that growth in 2018 will be an even stronger 2.8 percent. But he said 0.4 percentage point of that forecast reflects an assumption that the Trump administration will win a tax cut package that will take effect in early 2018. The economy will also be boosted by higher spending on the military and infrastructure projects, he said.

"For the first time since the Great Recession ended in mid-2009, the economy is not facing any significant headwinds," Zandi said.

Trump to Harvey victims: 'All of America' grieving with you

By KEN THOMAS and DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump set aside his focus on talking up Harvey recovery efforts to speak directly to the suffering of victims, saying "all of America is grieving with you."

Trump's Wednesday remarks on the ravages of the hurricane came at the top of an address in Springfield, Missouri, about the tax code. The president sought to reassure those who had lost loved ones and property. "We are here with you today, we are here with you tomorrow, and we will be with you every single day after to restore, recover and rebuild," he said.

Earlier Wednesday, Trump tweeted that on his Tuesday trip to Texas he had witnessed "first hand the horror & devastation" wrought by Harvey. He wrote that after seeing the widespread damage, "my heart goes out even more so to the great people of Texas!"

But Trump saw little damage during his visit to Corpus Christi — mostly boarded-up windows, downed tree limbs and fences askew. And that was through the tinted windows of his SUV as his motorcade took him from the airport to a firehouse in a city already nearly back to normal.

The president deliberately kept his distance from the epicenter of the damage in Houston to avoid disrupting recovery operations. Trump also visited Austin during Tuesday's trip, when he met with officials at the state emergency operations center.

Gov. Greg Abbott, R-Texas, said Trump showed "genuine compassion" on the short flight to Austin as they watched video footage of the flooding in Houston. "The president was heartbroken by what he saw," Abbot said.

But Ari Fleischer, who served as press secretary to former President George W. Bush, said there was something missing from Trump's remarks in Corpus Christi: "empathy for the people who suffer."

Trump plans to return to the region Saturday to survey the damage and meet with some victims, ac-

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According to White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

Trump pledged that his administration would work tirelessly to help the region recover.

"We are going to get you back and operating immediately," Trump told a crowd outside a Corpus Christi fire station about 30 miles from where the storm made landfall Friday.

Trump was eager to get the federal disaster response right. But he missed clear opportunities to strike a sympathetic note for the multitudes suffering. The president did not mention those who died in the storm or those forced from their homes. He basked in the attention of cheering supporters outside the fire station where officials briefed him on the recovery.

"What a crowd, what a turnout," Trump declared before waving a Texas flag from atop a step ladder positioned between two firetrucks. "This is historic. It's epic what happened, but you know what, it happened in Texas, and Texas can handle anything."

Trump is clearly determined to seize the moment and show a forceful response to Harvey, mindful of the political opportunities and risks that natural disasters pose for any president. Trump has been dogged by low approval ratings and self-created crises.

It has long been presidential practice to avoid visiting the most devastated areas of a natural disaster while recovery is still in the early stages, to avoid getting in the way or diverting critical resources. In Texas, residents seemed to understand.

Before Trump landed in Texas, Louis Sirianni arrived at his beach house in Rockport, about 20 miles outside Corpus Christi, to assess damage. Sirianni said he appreciated Trump's gesture and understood why there were no plans to take him into the hardest-hit area.

"He'd see enough if he came along here in a helicopter," Sirianni said on a balcony accessible only by a 12-foot aluminum extension ladder.

The president, during his stop in Austin, said it was a "sad thing" that the recovery would be a "long-term" operation.

His largely upbeat reassurances about a speedy recovery, though, stood in contrast to the more measured assessments coming from emergency management officials. There's a long, difficult road ahead in recovering from a storm whose flooding has displaced tens of thousands, those officials have cautioned.

Trump's promise of swift action on billions of dollars in disaster aid is at odds with his proposed budget. It would eliminate the program that helps Americans without flood insurance rebuild their homes and cuts grants to help states reduce the risk of flooding before disaster strikes.

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Andrew B. Taylor in Washington and Kelly P. Kissel in Rockport, Texas, contributed to this report.

On Twitter follow Ken Thomas at <https://twitter.com/KThomasDC> and Darlene Superville at <https://twitter.com/dsupervilleAP>

For complete Harvey coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/tag/HurricaneHarvey>

Officials grappling with Confederate names on public schools

By **JESSE J. HOLLAND**, Associated Press

With a new school year dawning, education officials are grappling with whether to remove the names, images and statues of Confederate figures from public schools — especially since some are now filled with students of color.

The violence at a white nationalist rally over a Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville, Virginia, is giving school officials a new reason to reconsider whether it's appropriate for more than 100 schools to be named after Confederate generals and politicians from the Old South.

"It does not make sense to have schools named after individuals who were directly connected to that dark past, and force kids in Dallas, a majority minority population, to walk into these schools every day

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and have to face this past every single day," said Miguel Solis, former board president and current board member of the Dallas Independent School District.

Dallas, along with other cities, began moving to change Confederate names and imagery after white nationalist and Confederate enthusiast Dylann Roof murdered nine black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015.

But the reviews gained momentum after the Aug. 12 protest by white supremacists in Charlottesville, which left one counter-protester dead.

"We don't tolerate hate or discrimination of any form, and we are committed to providing an educational environment where all students can feel safe and welcomed at school," said Superintendent Aurora Lora in Oklahoma City, where there are four schools named after Confederate generals.

"We want to think about the people our buildings are named after and whether they represent the values we as a district have at this time," Lora said.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are at least 109 public schools named after Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis or other Confederate icons in the United States. Of those, "27 have student populations that are majority African-American, and 10 have African-American populations of over 90 percent," according to the SPLC's 2016 report.

Several school names were changed, or new schools were built and named after Confederates "during the era of white resistance to equality," the SPLC report said.

Solis said he has support for his effort to change school names in Dallas, but "that's not to say that there haven't been people who have been very upset because they believe either the history needs to be preserved, or they align the philosophy of the Confederacy or neo-Nazis."

The South has the majority of Confederate-named public schools in the country.

In Falls Church, Virginia, the school board has voted to rename J.E.B. Stuart High School. Stuart was a slaveholding Confederate general who was mortally wounded in an 1864 battle. In Montgomery, Alabama, the school board is looking at moving Lee's statue from the front of majority-black Robert E. Lee High School.

In Arlington, Virginia, Robert E. Lee's hometown, there is a move now to rename Washington-Lee High School. "It is time to talk about the values these names reflect and the messages we are sending to our children," Barbara Kanninen, Arlington school board chair, said in a statement.

At some schools, the push for change starts with the students. In Greenville, South Carolina, student Asha Marie started a Change.org petition to rename Wade Hampton High School. Hampton was a Confederate cavalry commander during the Civil War and was later elected governor of South Carolina and criticized the Reconstruction era which put black leaders in political office.

"Racism, bigotry, and a blatant lack of patriotism," she wrote in her petition. "These are not values of South Carolinians and should not continue to be enshrined in a place of learning."

But another student, Austin Ritter, started a counterpetition to keep the name. "There is no need to change the school's name," Ritter wrote. "Changing the name of this school will also change its history. It will change everything the school has stood for. Everything the school has done."

At others, alumni and outsiders are the ones sounding the call.

The debate over the Stuart name change in Falls Church kicked off in earnest in 2015 when actress Julianne Moore, who attended Stuart in the '70s, and Hollywood producer Bruce Cohen, a Stuart alumnus, launched a petition demanding the name change. In Alabama, it was a community activist who suggested moving the Lee statue out from in front of Robert E. Lee High School.

Changing a school's name is not cheap. In Oklahoma City, Lora said it could be \$50,000 or more to change signage, letterhead, business cards and more for each school; Other school officials have quoted higher and lower figures.

"You can make any excuse you want to try and stop something like this and dollars are what a lot of people lead with," said Solis, who called it a "hollow argument."

Instead, people should get creative, he said, for example, in Texas possibly renaming schools currently

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named after Robert E. Lee after golfer Lee Trevino, allowing them to keep the "Lee" identity.

In Arlington, there has been some talk among some at Washington-Lee High School about possibly changing Robert E. Lee out of the school name to be replaced by his father, Revolutionary War Major-General Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, who also was a Virginia governor and congressman, unofficial school historian John Peck said. Or perhaps rededicating the school to an ideal and de-emphasizing the namesakes, he said.

"Keep the names, but take the namesakes out," said Peck, who said the school's basketball team was the first integrated team to win Virginia's state basketball title in 1966. "Take Washington out, take Lee out. They don't seem to mean all that much to the alumni who really, really cherish the school's legacy itself as built up by the students and the faculty over the years."

Jesse J. Holland covers race and ethnicity for The Associated Press in Washington. Contact him at jholland@ap.org, on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/jessejholland> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/jessejholland>.

Fox hires conservative commentator Lahren

NEW YORK (AP) — Fox News Channel has hired conservative commentator Tomi Lahren, who has hosted shows on The Blaze and One America News Network along with working for a political action committee supporting President Donald Trump.

The network said on Wednesday that Lahren will have a "signature role" on a digital product under development and be a commentator on the network's opinion programming. Her primary home will be on Sean Hannity's show, where she was to debut on Wednesday.

Lahren, who is 25, has quickly achieved a high profile in the conservative movement following her graduation from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She has more than 4 million Facebook followers, and she produces her own videos with commentary on politics and culture.

AP Was There: A sea of tears for Princess Diana's funeral

By MAUREEN JOHNSON, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Princess Diana's funeral, held less than a week after her shocking death in a high-speed Paris car crash, drew more than a million people to London. Millions more watched on TV.

Nearly two decades after its original publication, The Associated Press is making available correspondent Maureen Johnson's Sept. 6, 1997, report on the event.

With timeless splendor, a sea of tears and a brother's rage, Britain bade farewell today to its "Queen of Hearts," a million mourners or more seeing Diana, Princess of Wales, to her final rest after a life of golden days, heartache and too few years.

"All over the world she was a symbol of selfless humanity," said her brother, Charles.

But the ninth Earl Spencer was bitter, too, in his eulogy from the pulpit of Westminster Abbey, taking aim at a gossip-hungry press that may have contributed to Diana's death, and vowing to keep the royal family from smothering her sons in "duty and tradition."

Hushed throngs strained to see the stately procession bearing Diana's coffin to the abbey funeral, as it passed at "dead march" step through corridors of humanity massed in central London to bid godspeed to the much-loved but star-crossed princess.

At the funeral's end, just after noon, the nation fell silent in a one-minute tribute, as echoes absorbed the final strains of the abbey choir's "Come, enjoy rewards and crowns I have prepared for you."

A motorcade then carried the princess's remains north on a 75-mile route to her ancestral home, Althorp Park, where a grave awaited on a quiet, wooded island in the estate grounds.

The hearse was quickly blanketed with flowers tossed from the grieving crowds. As it entered Althorp, police shut the estate's gates, and Diana's family took her into the privacy she had often craved - a burial

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service attended by a few Spencers, her former husband, Prince Charles, and her beloved sons. The Spencer family said no details of the burial would be made public.

Charles and his sons left Althorp at about 6 p.m. (1 p.m. EDT), police said. They were believed to be going to Charles' home, Highgrove, in Gloucestershire in western England.

Within Westminster Abbey's hallowed and soaring walls, black-clad ranks of royals, glittering rows of celebrities, and hundreds of ordinary people whose lives felt her human touch had gathered to hear words of praise and prayer for Diana, killed at age 36 last Sunday in a Paris automobile crash many blame on pursuing photographers.

"Although a princess, she was someone for whom, from afar, we dared to feel affection," said Westminster's dean, The Very Rev. Dr. Wesley Carr.

But along with his own paean of love and prayer, Diana's brother delivered an indictment of the media, in a eulogy that drew long applause in the abbey and across London, where hundreds of thousands watched the funeral on giant TV screens.

"She talked endlessly of getting away from England, mainly because of the treatment that she received at the hand of the newspapers," said Earl Spencer, 33, holding his tone of rage under steely control.

Spencer also alluded to his sister's troubled years within the royal family, which took away Diana's "Her Royal Highness" title when she was divorced last year from Prince Charles.

She was "someone with natural nobility who was classless, who proved in the last year she needed no royal title to generate her particular brand of magic," he said.

The earl vowed he would protect Diana's sons, Prince William, 15 and second in line to the British throne, and Prince Harry, 12, from the press and from being swallowed by the "duty and tradition" of royalty.

Amid the sorrowful tones of Bach, Verdi and Purcell in the abbey, the 2,000 mourners also heard a gentle pop hymn from Diana's friend Elton John, a song that left her boys in tears.

"Goodbye England's rose," he sang, "... your candle's burned out long before your legend ever will."

The ceremonies today, a day when this nation shut down as for the death of a true monarch, will help make the legend of Diana.

Six gleaming black horses had pulled a gun carriage bearing the coffin down the city's boulevards and avenues in the cool sunshine. Slowly striding behind on the last mile of the 3 -mile journey were her adored sons, heads bowed; their father, Prince Charles; their grandfather Prince Philip; and the earl.

Hundreds of representatives of the charities Diana championed trailed behind, some in wheelchairs, some in nurses' whites.

The coffin was shrouded in the royal flag and topped with white lilies, tulips and roses, one wreath each from her brother and her sons. A card propped atop the casket read simply, "Mummy."

Sobs and anguished cries of "Diana!" were heard. Some in the throng, often 50 deep, tossed flowers as the cortege passed. "No one can hurt you now," a banner read. "Just feel the love."

As the cortege passed Buckingham Palace, before the men joined the procession, the royal family, led by the queen, bowed their heads.

Police estimated many more than 1 million people lined the sidewalks and filled London's parks to watch the requiem on TV screens. But silence reigned, seldom broken by more than the clop of hooves and the bell's sad call.

Uncounted millions of others around world watched on television as the British people buried the earl's daughter and former kindergarten teacher who became perhaps the most-photographed woman on Earth.

In the six days since the princess's death, there has been a remarkable outpouring of public grief. Diana's astonishing popularity, which had troubled the royal family in life, was now humbling it in death.

"They (the royals) must get closer to the people to survive," said Doreen Duffell, who joined a subdued throng before the procession. "Di was the only one who showed expression in her face. The expressions of the others hardly ever change."

That very sentiment had led Queen Elizabeth II on Friday to shatter royal protocol by making her first live, televised address since the early days of her 45-year reign to pay tribute to her former daughter-in-law, describing her as a "remarkable person" whose memory would be cherished.

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Diana herself had once said she aspired most of all to be "a queen in people's hearts." And on Saturday, the multitudes crowned her - mourners pinning simple playing cards to the chests.

Among the 2,000 guests gathered for the 45-minute funeral were first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, royalty from across Europe, celebrity friends of Diana from the worlds of entertainment and fashion - including movie stars Tom Cruise and Tom Hanks, and opera's Luciano Pavarotti - and many others who had known her kindness.

Pool television cameras were operated under instructions not to show the royal family during the service.

The mixture of old and new at the royal church - solemn choral music, Diana's favorite hymn, "I Vow To Thee My Country," and Elton John's song, originally written for Marilyn Monroe and reworked for Diana - reflected her life and passions.

Hugh Mulligan, an AP special correspondent who was inside the abbey, said he was reminded of covering Charles and Diana's wedding in St. Paul's Cathedral when he saw designer David Emanuel weeping openly at John's song.

Then, in 1981, Diana emerged from a glass coach to march up the aisle in an ivory taffeta dress of his design, trailing a 25-foot train, to become the Princess of Wales. Today it was just as glorious, with crowds in the streets and sunshine slanting through stained-glass windows, but the muffled bells were tumbling out a dirge from their tall towers.

That "fairy-tale" marriage, between an awkwardly beautiful young woman just out of her teens and a prince 12 years her senior, deteriorated year by year. Diana complained he was cold and the royal family unfeeling. Charles' friends said she was a moody, difficult wife. Both eventually admitted to extramarital affairs.

But, meanwhile, the free-spirited, radiant Princess of Wales had won a rapt following worldwide, people who admired her style and spunk.

In the year since her divorce, which the queen had demanded, Diana seemed to be rebuilding her life. Then, last Sunday, it all ended in the twisted wreckage of a Mercedes sedan in a Paris tunnel, when she was killed her with her new beau, Dodi Fayed, and their driver in a high-speed flight from paparazzi photographers.

Many blamed the photographers. Later it was also reported by prosecutors that a blood test showed the driver was legally drunk.

At least six photographers and one press motorcyclist are under formal investigation in Paris on possible charges of manslaughter and failure to aid accident victims.

Even to the end, fame dogged the former Diana Spencer.

She originally was expected to be buried in the village church at Great Brington, near Althorp Park, where 20 generations lie at rest. But instead a site within the estate was chosen, for fear the hamlet would become overrun with sightseers and tourists.

Posts, tweets spread widely as the Harvey missing are sought

By ANDREW DALTON, Associated Press

Photos with pleas for help in finding the missing from Hurricane Harvey are being posted, cut-and-pasted and retweeted by thousands of people as desperate family members seek loved ones who they fear might be dead, but may only have a dead phone.

No official number of the unaccounted-for had been released Tuesday night amid the vast uncertainty of the storm's fourth day, with authorities saying the 18 deaths confirmed so far could surge in the days to come.

Pictures and pleas for dozens of toddlers, brothers and grandfathers are circulating on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

The posts appeared to be getting results, though not always good news.

"Pleaseeeee," read the Instagram posting seeking 8-month-old Paige Booth, showing the baby sitting on a couch with a pacifier.

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Her mother and grandmother were evacuating from their Houston home Monday and holding her above their heads as the water rose to their chests and a current pushed them along.

"It was raining bad, and the water was high," the mother, Bajauh Henix, said.

They handed the baby off to a police officer on a personal watercraft, who took the infant to higher ground and handed her to a family in a black pick-up truck, said Kennesha Grand, the girl's grandmother.

But when Grand and Henix reached the area where the child was supposed to be, no one there knew her whereabouts.

Once they reached a shelter, they posted photos of the baby on Instagram and elsewhere. "Everyone started posting, and it started spreading," Grand said.

After nearly four hours, the mother got a phone call from a family. They had Paige, who was returned by a police officer, completely unfazed by the ordeal.

"She was sweet. She was dry. She was fed," Grand said. "She didn't miss us."

Another search that took hold on social media lasted far longer, and it lacked the happy ending.

Ruben Jordan, 58, a former football and track coach from a Houston-area high school, had been sought since he disappeared on Saturday night.

"Please help," the digital flier linked on Facebook and Twitter posts said. "His family is desperately awaiting any information ... He was helping rescue people from high water when last seen."

People who spread the post praised the coach.

"Coach Jordan ... had a tremendous positive impact on my twin sons," Lee Jackson, an Austin writer, said when sharing the post, "he still keeps up with them. They love him."

But after 48 hours of searching, his two adult children and the rest of his family learned from the Friendswood police department Monday that he had died, said Sandra Jordan Washington, his former wife.

Another missing man, 25-year-old Omar Rosales, worked part time at Wal-Mart and with his meager wages he decided to forgo a cellphone so he could pay for car insurance.

That made him unreachable for 17 hours after Harvey began, his mother, Lydia Rosales, said. His sister posted on Instagram on Sunday, hoping to find him.

Omar Rosales found that rising waters kept him from getting home when he got off work Saturday night. He finally parked in a lot, but rising waters forced him to drive further and at last his car stalled for good as he coasted into a gas station.

There, a man let him use his cellphone and he called his mother, who was just six blocks away at a friend's house where she had taken shelter after leaving her own home.

"It's just a miracle," Rosales said Tuesday night, adding that she'd make sure her son had a phone from now on. "I think we both learned our lesson."

Harvey keeping Rice and Houston football teams off campus

By **STEPHEN HAWKINS, AP Sports Writer**

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — Josh Rahman and the Rice football team were about 8,500 miles from their Houston campus, in a time zone 15 hours ahead, when they started to hear about a tropical storm in the Gulf of Mexico.

At first, they didn't think much about the system that would become Hurricane Harvey.

"It escalated very quickly," Rahman said. "Then we learned this thing is different."

And now, even while back in Texas after playing their season opener in Australia, the Owls still feel a long, long way from home.

With the city of Houston overwhelmed by flooding from the catastrophic storm that is the heaviest tropical downpour in U.S. history, Rice's 101 players are now based at a downtown Fort Worth hotel. They were going to TCU's campus Wednesday for some running, stretching and weightlifting — their first football activity since getting back from Sydney, where they lost to 14th-ranked Stanford on Sunday afternoon, or late Saturday night Texas time.

"We all want to be back in Houston. We just can't get there," said Rice coach David Bailiff, whose team

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doesn't play again until Sept. 9 at UTEP.

Bailiff is constantly in communication with his wife stuck at their home near a levee after floodwaters cut off access to get out of the neighborhood. Bailiff said the immediate family members for all his players and coaches are safe, though many did evacuate their homes.

"We have high anxiety and worry, but I also have a job to do taking care of these young men here," Bailiff said. "I know my wife's safe upstairs in the house. She's dry. ... She's really handled it pretty dang good."

While the Owls will work out at TCU, about a four-hour drive from their campus, the Houston Cougars have been in Austin since Friday, when they evacuated on the same day Harvey made landfall near Rockport, northeast of Corpus Christi, as a Category 4 hurricane.

The Cougars had been preparing at the University of Texas for their scheduled season opener Saturday at Texas-San Antonio, which they instead decided to postpone.

"We felt like it wasn't the right thing to do in terms of where our city is," first-year Houston head coach Major Applewhite said. "We have to focus on our families right now and get back some sense of normalcy."

Like the Rice team that arrived Monday in Fort Worth, the Cougars don't know how long they will remain away from the nation's fourth-largest city. Rice left Houston for Australia on Aug. 20.

"This is bigger than football," Cougars running back Dillon Birden said. "We're ready to get back to our city and help our city."

At least eight Rice players know their apartments or houses near campus have flooded, along with numerous vehicles, Bailiff said. Many of the players are unsure and worry they will also have significant water damage.

Bailiff said that when the Owls get back to Houston, they will "attack those apartments first as a team, and get those apartments cleaned out."

Rahman, a senior defensive end for Rice, said it was stressful knowing his parents had decided to remain in their Sugar Land home near the Brazos River despite a mandatory evacuation because of flooding. He said he is frequently talking with them, and that no water had gotten into their home as of late Tuesday.

"First, because it was jet lag, I woke up at 1 a.m. (Tuesday). Wide awake. The first thing I did was call my mom," he said. "They said it's a little scary. ... I think they're doing well. They're dealing with it the best possible way they can. Everyone here, the entire time, is dealing with it the best possible way they can."

Rice linebacker Emmanuel Ellerbee, whose parents were on the trip to Australia, remembers the mental toll his mother, who is from Louisiana, experienced when she had family members in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Now he knows how she felt, watching from afar on television and social media what his family and friends are dealing with in Houston.

"Houston's a really big part of me," Ellerbee said. "You want to be somewhere where you can help and make a difference and contribute."

AP Sports Writer Jim Vertuno in Austin, Texas, contributed to this report.

More AP college football: www.collegefootball.ap.org and www.twitter.com/AP_Top25

Louisiana residents hope sandbags will keep Harvey water out

By **JEFF AMY** and **MICHAEL KUNZELMAN**, Associated Press

LAKE CHARLES, La. (AP) — A weakened Tropical Storm Harvey made landfall in southwest Louisiana early Wednesday, leaving residents bracing for more wind, rain and possible tornadoes and hoping water would stay out of their sandbagged homes.

The storm came ashore before dawn just west of Cameron, Louisiana, bringing maximum sustained winds near 45 mph (72 kph), the U.S. National Hurricane Center said. Harvey had lingered over Texas for days before meandering back into the Gulf of Mexico.

Forecasters said there was a risk of tornadoes across a large part of the South as Harvey trudged northeast toward northern Louisiana. The national Storm Prediction Center said a few tornadoes were

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expected to develop Wednesday in northeast Louisiana and across southern and central portions of Mississippi. Tornadoes would also be possible across parts of southern and central Alabama, near the eastern edge of Harvey's rain bands. At least five tornadoes from Harvey have been confirmed so far in Louisiana, although they have caused little damage.

Another 1 to 3 inches (2.5 centimeters to 7.5 centimeters) of rain could fall in western Louisiana, with up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) in spots, with the heaviest rain inland.

"We are starting to get down to the end of the tunnel of all this rain," Meteorologist Roger Erickson said.

Harvey appeared to have produced little damage overnight in southwest Louisiana, where hundreds of people were rescued from floodwaters earlier this week, officials said. Harvey's heaviest rains continued to stay west of Louisiana, just across the Sabine River in Texas. Lake Charles recorded less than 1 inch (2.5 centimeters) of rain overnight.

"We're not out of the woods totally, but we're looking much better," Calcasieu Parish Sheriff Tony Mancuso said

The heaviest overnight rain bands also spared New Orleans, where sun broke through the clouds after daybreak and schools reopened Wednesday after closing a day earlier.

Mayor Mitch Landrieu had urged New Orleans residents to stay home Tuesday because of the threat of potential high water. Some neighborhoods flooded earlier this month during a deluge that exposed problems with the city's pump and drainage system. On Tuesday, rains flooded a few of the city's streets, but not to the same extent.

Erickson, the Lake Charles meteorologist, warned that some coastal rivers won't be able to drain effectively because Harvey's winds are pushing in storm surge, aggravating flooding in areas already drenched by more than 20 inches (51 centimeters) of rain. Gusts up to 40 mph (65 kph) are predicted for coastal areas, although Erickson said Harvey would weaken throughout the day.

Cameron Parish Administrator Ryan Bourriaque said storm surge apparently caused little damage along Louisiana's southwestern coast, although some water remained on roadways in parts of the parish. He said officials are likely to consider lifting a mandatory evacuation order for the southern end of the parish once damage assessments are complete.

"We acknowledge that we are certainly much better off that we could have been at this point," Bourriaque said.

State offices in 28 parishes and most Baton Rouge area schools won't open Wednesday in anticipation of possible severe weather. Gov. John Bel Edwards urged people to remain alert but said the state is responding well to less severe conditions in its own borders.

"You never know what Mother Nature is going to throw at us, but with the people in this room, I'm confident we can handle it," he told local and state officials during a visit Tuesday to Lake Charles, which is near the Texas border.

Edwards said Louisiana also has offered to shelter storm victims from Texas. He said he expects Texas officials to decide within 48 hours whether to accept the offer.

Harvey's devastating flooding brought back tough memories in New Orleans as Tuesday marked the 12th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Mayor Mitch Landrieu opened his Tuesday news conference with a moment of silence for Katrina victims and words of support for Harvey's victims in Texas and southwest Louisiana.

"We've got to save our house," New Orleans resident Israel Freeman said as he loaded sandbags for his mother's home into his Cadillac. "She already went through Katrina. She built her house back up. We just had a flood about two, three weeks ago. She just recovered from that."

Bradley Morris lives in a ground-level house in New Orleans and was "preparing for the worst."

"There's plenty of puddling and stuff already," he said, "so I just assume that we're probably going to get a taste of what we had a couple weeks ago."

About 500 people were evacuated in southwest Louisiana's most populous parish early Tuesday, as a heavy band of rain pushed waterways out of their banks, Calcasieu Parish spokesman Tom Hoefler said.

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He said as many as 5,000 parish residents were affected by the flooding, but not all of those people have flooded homes. Some are just cut off by flooded roads.

Family members and authorities in Texas have reported at least 18 deaths from the storm. No Harvey-related deaths were immediately reported in Louisiana, according to a spokesman for Edwards.

Kunzelman reported from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Associated Press writers Stacey Plaisance, Kevin McGill and Janet McConnaughey in New Orleans and Jeff Martin in Atlanta contributed to this report.

For complete Harvey coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/tag/HurricaneHarvey>

More than 1.7 million Muslims gather for start of hajj

By OMAR AKOUR and AHMED HATEM, Associated Press

MECCA, Saudi Arabia (AP) — In Saudi Arabia, more than 1.7 million pilgrims are marking the start of the hajj pilgrimage on Wednesday by circling the cube-shaped Kaaba in Mecca — Islam's holiest site — and performing a series of rites that trace the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims believe the rites also trace the footsteps of the prophets Ibrahim and Ismail — Abraham and Ishmael in the Bible.

The Kaaba represents the metaphorical house of God and the oneness of God in Islam. Observant Muslims around the world face toward the Kaaba during the five daily prayers.

The hajj is required of all Muslims once in a lifetime. The physically demanding journey tests pilgrims' patience as they withstand long waits and thick crowds on their path to achieving spiritual purification and repentance.

Egyptian pilgrim Ahmed Ali, on his first hajj, said he was grateful to be in Mecca.

"It's an indescribable feeling, a spiritual feeling. Thanks to God, I feel great," he said.

A 104-year-old Indonesian woman is among those performing the hajj this year, according to Saudi authorities. Ibu Mariah Marghani Muhammad is joining more than 220,000 pilgrims from Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country.

The journey of the five-day-long pilgrimage begins for many when they depart from their countries dressed in "ihram." For men, that entails wearing only terrycloth, seamless white garments meant to represent unity among Muslims and equality before God. Women wear loose clothing, cover their hair and forgo makeup and nail polish to achieve a state of humility and spiritual purity.

After prayers in Mecca, pilgrims will head to an area called Mount Arafat on Thursday where the Prophet Muhammad delivered his final sermon. From there, pilgrims will head to an area called Muzdalifa, picking up pebbles along the way for a symbolic stoning of the devil and a casting away of sins that takes place in the Mina valley for three days.

Over the years, the Saudi government has spent billions of dollars to improve the safety of the pilgrimage, particularly in Mina where some of the deadliest incidents have occurred, including a stampede and a collision of two crowds that crushed people under the force in 2015 that killed more than 2,400 people.

Saudi Interior Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Mansour al-Turki told reporters in a news conference that a more than 100,000-strong security force is on the ground in and around Mecca to secure the hajj and assist pilgrims. He said the number of pilgrims at the hajj, including those from within Saudi Arabia, could reach 2 million.

"Everything is prepared," he said. "We have our plans, we have people trained to enforce those plans, but this cannot be done only by infrastructure and by what we do. Pilgrims have their own responsibility, and we hope they comply with the schedule plans and the flow of direction."

Health officials said they are also prepared to deal with any injuries or accidents, and have more than 100 ambulances deployed across the hajj sites.

Bangladeshi pilgrim Mohammad Nasser, 53, said the Grand Mosque housing the Kaaba is congested and busy, but believes overall the Saudi government has managed the crowds well so far.

"Thank God it is going very nice and smooth. I'm very happy that I'm here," he said.

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Global stocks advance ahead of US data run

By The Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Upbeat economic figures from around the world helped shore up global stock markets on Thursday ahead of a raft of U.S. data that could determine the scale of upcoming rate hikes from the Federal Reserve.

KEEPING SCORE: In Europe, Germany's DAX rose 0.6 percent to 12,072 while Britain's FTSE 100 advanced 0.7 percent to 7,419. The CAC 40 in France was 0.7 percent higher too at 5,091. U.S. stocks were poised for a steady opening with Dow futures and the broader S&P 500 futures up 0.2 percent.

US DATA: Following jitters at the start of the week over North Korea's firing of a missile over Japan, the mood has improved somewhat with most investors monitoring a raft of economic data that culminates with Friday's U.S. nonfarm payrolls report for August. That could help shape market expectations over the pace of interest rate hikes from the Federal Reserve.

ANALYST TAKE: "Of course, Friday's jobs report is widely regarded as the most important data release each month due to the insight it offers on hiring, wages and therefore potential future inflation pressures," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at OANDA. "Today's data though is arguably equally important, if not more so at the moment, as it contains the latest inflation numbers — as per the Fed's preferred measure — as well as income and spending figures."

EUROZONE INFLATION: Inflation across the 19-country eurozone struck a four-month high of 1.5 percent in the year to August largely because of higher energy costs, in a development that's unlikely to alter expectations that the European Central Bank will play it safe at next week's policy meeting. The increase was anticipated in financial markets, but inflation remains below the European Central Bank's goal of just below 2 percent.

CHINA MANUFACTURING: An official gauge of Chinese factory activity improved for a 13th straight month in August. The preliminary version of the purchasing managers' index from the China Federation of Logistics & Purchasing and the National Bureau of Statistics rose to 51.7 from July's 51.4 on a 100-point scale on which numbers above 50 show activity expanding. An index of new orders rose to 53.1 from July's 52.8.

ASIA'S DAY: The Shanghai Composite Index was unchanged at 3,360.81 while Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gained 0.7 percent to 19,646.24. Hong Kong's Hang Seng shed 0.4 percent to 27,970.30 and Seoul's Kospi lost 0.4 percent to 2,363.19. Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 advanced 0.8 percent to 5,714.50.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude rose 28 cents to \$46.24 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange while Brent crude, used to price international oils, added 35 cents to trade at \$51.08 in London.

CURRENCIES: The euro was down 0.4 percent at \$1.1837 while the dollar rose 0.3 percent to 110.55 yen.

Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Aug. 31, the 243rd day of 2017. There are 122 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On August 31, 1997, Prince Charles brought Princess Diana home for the last time, escorting the body of his former wife to a Britain that was shocked, grief-stricken and angered by her death in a Paris traffic accident earlier that day.

On this date:

In 1867, French poet Charles Baudelaire, 46, died in Paris.

In 1886, an earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 7.3 devastated Charleston, South Carolina, killing at least 60 people, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1916, the musical revue "The Big Show," featuring the song "Poor Butterfly" by Raymond Hubbell and John Golden, opened at New York's Hippodrome.

In 1939, the first issue of Marvel Comics, featuring the Human Torch, was published by Timely Publica-

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tions in New York.

In 1941, the radio program "The Great Gildersleeve," a spinoff from "Fibber McGee and Molly" starring Harold Peary, debuted on NBC.

In 1954, Hurricane Carol hit the northeastern Atlantic states; Connecticut, Rhode Island and part of Massachusetts bore the brunt of the storm, which resulted in some 70 deaths.

In 1965, the U.S. House of Representatives joined the Senate in voting to establish the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In 1972, at the Munich Summer Olympics, American swimmer Mark Spitz won his fourth and fifth gold medals in the 100-meter butterfly and 800-meter freestyle relay; Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut won gold medals in floor exercise and the balance beam.

In 1986, 82 people were killed when an Aeromexico jetliner and a small private plane collided over Ceritos, California. The Soviet passenger ship Admiral Nakhimov collided with a merchant vessel in the Black Sea, causing both to sink; up to 448 people reportedly died.

In 1987, the Michael Jackson album "Bad" was released by Epic Records.

In 1991, Uzbekistan (ooz-bek-ih-STAHN') and Kyrgyzstan (keer-gih-STAHN') declared their independence, raising to ten the number of republics seeking to secede from the Soviet Union.

In 1992, white separatist Randy Weaver surrendered to authorities in Naples, Idaho, ending an 11-day siege by federal agents that had claimed the lives of Weaver's wife, son and a deputy U.S. marshal. (Weaver was acquitted of murder and all other charges in connection with the confrontation; he was convicted of failing to appear for trial on firearms charges and was sentenced to 18 months in prison but given credit for 14 months he'd already served.)

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush met privately at the Pentagon with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who conveyed their concern about a growing strain on troops and their families from long and repeated combat tours in Iraq. President Bush announced a set of modest proposals to deal with an alarming rise in mortgage defaults. Mike Nifong, the disgraced former district attorney of Durham County, North Carolina, was sentenced to a day in jail after being held in criminal contempt of court for lying to a judge when pursuing rape charges against three falsely accused Duke University lacrosse players.

Five years ago: In a speech to an annual Federal Reserve conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Chairman Ben Bernanke sent a clear message that the Fed would do more to help the still-struggling U.S. economy, but did not specify exactly what, or when. Writer Richard Bach, author of "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," was seriously hurt after his small plane went down in Washington state.

One year ago: On Mexican soil for the first time as the Republican presidential nominee, a firm, but measured Donald Trump defended the right of the United States to build a massive border wall along its southern flank, standing up for the centerpiece of his immigration plan during a joint press conference with Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto. The first commercial flight between the United States and Cuba in more than a half century, a JetBlue Airbus A320, landed in the central city of Santa Clara, re-establishing regular air service severed at the height of the Cold War. Brazil's Senate voted to remove President Dilma Rousseff from office (Rousseff was accused of breaking fiscal laws in her management of the federal budget).

Today's Birthdays: Japanese monster movie actor Katsumi Tezuka ("Godzilla") is 105. Baseball Hall of Famer Frank Robinson is 82. Actor Warren Berlinger is 80. Rock musician Jerry Allison (Buddy Holly and the Crickets) is 78. Actor Jack Thompson is 77. Violinist Itzhak Perlman is 72. Singer Van Morrison is 72. Rock musician Rudolf Schenker (The Scorpions) is 69. Actor Richard Gere is 68. Actor Stephen Henderson is 68. Olympic gold medal track and field athlete Edwin Moses is 62. Rock singer Glenn Tilbrook (Squeeze) is 60. Rock musician Gina Schock (The Go-Go's) is 60. Singer Tony DeFranco (The DeFranco Family) is 58. Rhythm-and-blues musician Larry Waddell (Mint Condition) is 54. Actor Jaime P. Gomez is 52. Baseball pitcher Hideo Nomo is 49. Rock musician Jeff Russo (Tonic) is 48. Singer-composer Deborah Gibson is 47. Rock musician Greg Richling (Wallflowers) is 47. Actor Zack Ward is 47. Golfer Pádraig Harrington is 46. Actor Chris Tucker is 45. Actress Sara Ramirez is 42. Rhythm-and-blues singer Tamara (Trina & Tamara) is 40.

Thought for Today: "Fashion can be bought. Style one must possess." — Edna Woolman Chase, American fashion editor (1877-1957).