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Friday, Sept. 8

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, Jell-O with fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich, fruit, milk and juice.

School Lunch: Pepperoni pizza, green beans, romaine salad, fruit.

Football: at Beresford, 7 p.m.

Soccer: Girls host West Central, 4 p.m.

Dance Practice: Groton Community Center (Sugar Babes 3:50 to 4:35, Sweet Sensations 4:40 to 5:25, Spice Girls 5:30 to 6:30)

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

Saturday, Sept. 9

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

Cross Country: at Milbank, 9:30 a.m.

Boys Golf: at Olive Grove in Groton, 10 a.m.

Soccer: at Sioux Falls Christian, girls at 1 p.m., boys at 3 p.m.

Youth Football: In Groton (3rd/4th host WVYF at 9:30 a.m.; 5th/6th hosts Sisseton Red at 9:30 a.m.)

Groton Rummage Day: 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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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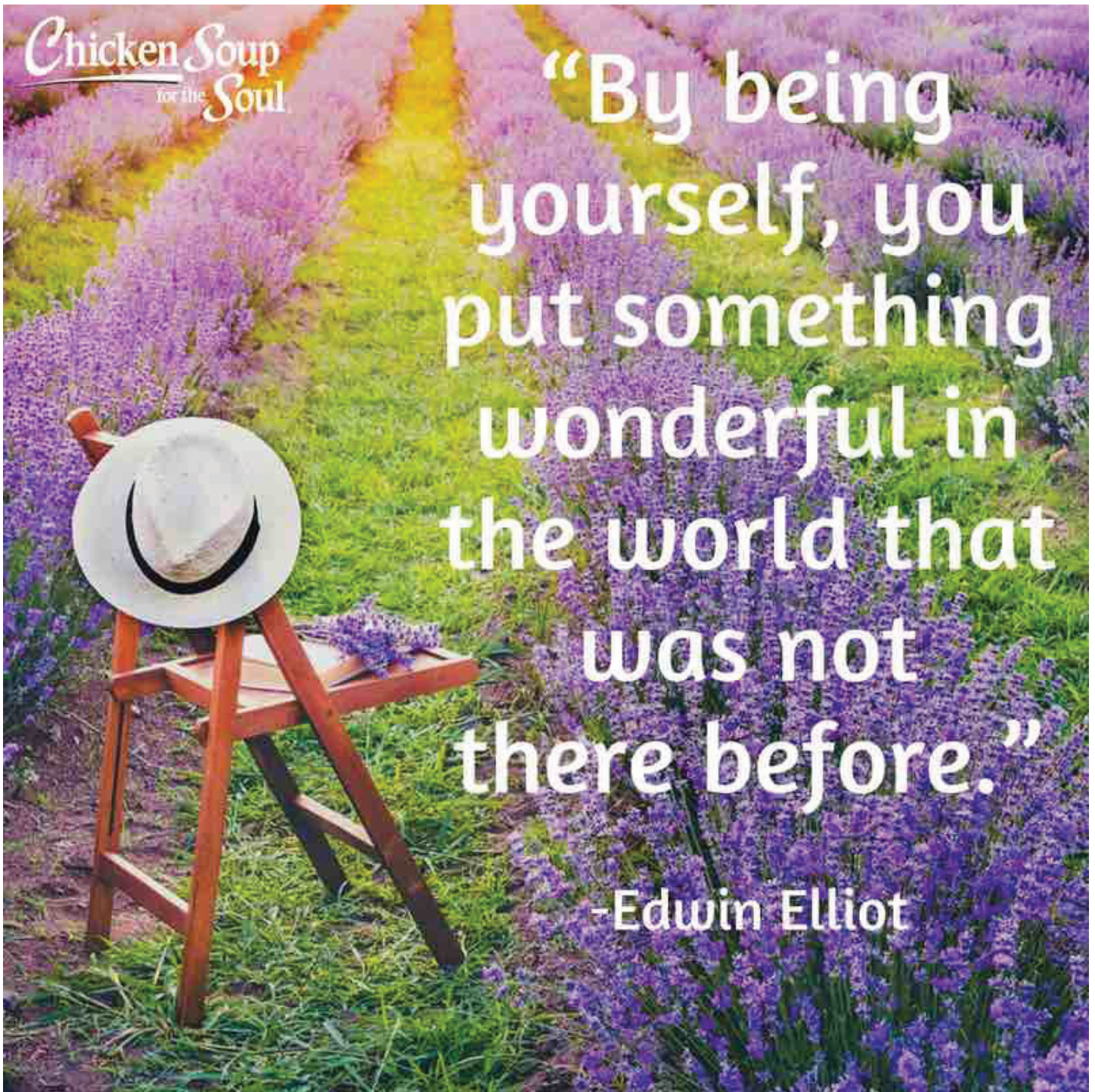
Hanlon Brothers
Gravel Hauling

New & Cleaning of
Stockdams with our
60' reach trackhoe

605/395-6531

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Chicken Soup
for the Soul

“By being
yourself, you
put something
wonderful in
the world that
was not
there before.”

-Edwin Elliot

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**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.**

Smoke Impacting South Dakota Air Quality

Meteorological conditions are causing smoke from fires in several western states and Canada to impact air quality in South Dakota. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) recommends you visit South Dakota's Real Time Air Quality Index map at <http://denr.sd.gov/des/aq/aarealtime.aspx> to see if smoke is currently impacting your area. Regional air quality data is available at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency site at www.airnow.gov.

Western South Dakota was impacted Labor Day weekend when winds pushed smoke from the fires east to South Dakota. Air quality monitoring sites in Rapid City, Wind Cave and the Badlands indicated the 24-hour air quality standard of 35 micrograms per cubic meter was exceeded several times from Friday to Sunday. The highest reading was 71.4 micrograms per cubic meter on Sunday at Wind Cave. Strong winds on Monday moved the heavy smoke conditions out of the state.

The department says air quality conditions will vary until the fires can be put out and encourages the public to visit the websites to determine if air quality in your area is reaching unhealthy levels.

Everyone may experience some effects during unhealthy levels. Sensitive groups generally include children, older adults and people with lung diseases.

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



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



All auto owners!
Save \$2-\$4 /tank
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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")**

\$3.3 Million Recovered In Year One Of State's Debt Collection Efforts

PIERRE, S.D. – More than \$3.3 million has been recovered in the first year of South Dakota's Obligation Recovery Center program, according to a report released today by the Bureau of Administration.

"With this innovative approach, we are more efficiently and effectively engaging those who owe obligations to the state and to our citizens," said Gov. Daugaard. "For the single parent who is owed child support or the crime victim who is supposed to receive restitution, this is making a big difference."

In addition to the \$3.3 million collected in Fiscal Year 2017, the Bureau reports \$7.6 million in payment plans were established.

The Obligation Recovery Center was established by legislation passed during the 2015 Legislative Session. State government agencies utilize the center to recover debts and enforce child support and restitution orders. The Unified Judicial System, Secretary of State, Board of Regents and seven state agencies under the Governor's authority currently have MOUs in place to receive the center's assistance.

The State of South Dakota contracts with CGI Technologies to operate the center. The state also has contracts in place with Progressive, Harris and Harris, and Gila, which serve as third-party debt collectors and handle debts the center has attempted to collect for 180 days.

The report is available on the Obligation Recover Center web-page by clicking the on the FY2017 Annual Report: boa.sd.gov/divisions/obligation.

Expedition League Launches in Aberdeen

ABERDEEN, SD – The Expedition League, the newest member of the summer collegiate wood bat baseball landscape, today announced the arrival of its Aberdeen franchise. The team, owned by Chuck and Mayra Heeman, will play at Fossum Field.

The Expedition League is an elite summer collegiate wood bat league that promotes affordable, wholesome family entertainment, enhances the quality of life in its member communities, provides the tools and experience to optimize collegiate players' development and potential to play professional baseball, while providing the infrastructure and support necessary for the success of the league affiliated team owners.

The teams play a 64-game season beginning in May and ending in early August each year. The 2018 season is scheduled to begin play on May 25 with 10 member teams.

Chuck Heeman, a 25-year veteran in the professional sports industry, was the founding General Manager of two prior summer collegiate teams in Oregon, the Klamath Falls Gems and Medford Rogues. He also served as General Manager for four professional minor league baseball clubs and as Operations Manager with the Arizona Diamondbacks for four years. From 2015 through August 2017 Heeman worked with the Cleveland Indians and Cincinnati Reds at their Spring Training facility in Goodyear, Arizona, serving as Ticket Sales & Operations Coordinator with the City of Goodyear. Mayra Heeman worked with her husband for five years as a volunteer in Oregon, coordinating host families, social media and game day operations as well as being a leading force in sponsorship and ticket sales.

"Mayra and I operated two summer collegiate teams and the challenge of it was amazing," Chuck Heeman said. "We worked together to build two strong franchises and we had a lot of fun doing it. Since then we have been looking for a chance like this and when the Expedition League presented Aberdeen as an option to own teams rather than run them for others, we took a look. It became very obvious very quickly that Aberdeen is a great market for baseball and the kind of family entertainment we bring, and we are thrilled to be a part of it. We'll have a lot of fun in a beautiful ballpark and we invite everyone in the region to join us."

The Heemans will relocate to Aberdeen from Arizona to begin year-round operation of the new team. Team offices will open in mid-September at 416 Production Drive North in Aberdeen. The Heemans also own the Western Nebraska franchise in the Expedition League and will split time between the two locations as the teams grow.

"I'm very excited about Expedition League baseball in the Hub City", said Steve Wagner, Expedition League President. "Aberdeen is an incredible community with a gorgeous ballpark in Fossum Field and I can't wait for the residents of Aberdeen and the surrounding communities to experience this fun, fan-first entertainment. Chuck and Mayra have outstanding experience and I'm confident that they will do a great job operating the team in Aberdeen."

Aberdeen Mayor Mike Levsen sees value in new team

"Watching live baseball compared to watching on TV is like watching a beautiful sunset and looking at picture of one – this can become a great part to our future summers as it was in the past," Mayor Levsen said. "We are encouraged as we see this effort advancing toward offering great baseball and family entertainment to Aberdeen. It can add to the value of our investment in Fossum Field and we are eager to welcome these young men to our community."

Aaron Smith named General Manager

The team has named Aaron Smith as General Manager, effective September 7. Smith, an Aberdeen native, joins the team in conjunction with his duties as Director of Operations with the Aberdeen Wings Hockey Club.

"Aaron is a great addition to the team and we thank Greg Odde and the Wings for allowing Aaron to come aboard with us," Chuck Heeman said. "Aaron's knowledge of the local market and his great reputation in town will help us open doors and add to our success as we launch this venture. We're lucky to have him with us and we look forward to a great relationship with him and with the Wings as we move forward."

Jacob Jarreau named Head Coach

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The team also announced the hiring of Jacob Jarreau as Head Coach. Jarreau, 23, comes to Aberdeen after two seasons with the LaCrosse Loggers of the Northwoods summer collegiate baseball League where he served as the team's first base and hitting coach. He was part of the coaching staff at the University of New Mexico from 2012-17 and is currently an assistant coach at College of the Southwest in Hobbs, NM. In 2017 Jarreau's LaCrosse hitters led the Northwoods League in home runs and were fourth in the 20-team league in runs batted in. "The culture a coach creates is as important to us as wins, losses or stats," Chuck Heeman said. "In summer ball our job is to help players grow as young men and learn how to play the game the right way, just as much as it is to show them the grind of the minor league lifestyle and how to win in that environment. The players should behave in a way our community can be proud of and be an example to the younger kids of South Dakota who watch them play. We need to send our guys back to school better, on and off the field, than when they arrived. Two college coaches I greatly respect recommended Jacob and once we talked through our shared vision I was positive he is our guy. Jacob's philosophy about how to bring that culture to Aberdeen sold me on him, and we're happy to have him as our first Head Coach."

All Hub City games will be broadcast and streamed live on Hub City Radio

The team has reached agreement with Hub City Radio to broadcast all 64 Hub City games, plus playoffs, live on both KSDN stations, 930 AM and 102.1 FM. In addition, all games will be available on live streaming video.

"Brian Lundquist at Hub City Radio came to us with a plan to broadcast all of our games live and to have live video as well, and we loved the idea," Chuck Heeman said. "We know people can't make it to all our games, so this lets them follow the team, especially when we're on the road. Broadcasting live also allows our players to have their families at home, host families and college coaches listen in and watch from all over the country through live streaming. We've broadcast our games live in other places and it's always very popular with the fans and families of the players. We're very happy to be working with Brian and his group and we thank them for providing us this opportunity."

"Summer baseball is back and at a high level," Lundquist said. "Hub City Radio is proud and excited to be a part of the action with the games on KSDN 930 AM and 102.1 FM. These are very exciting times with the quality of baseball and high level of energy Chuck and Mayra Heeman bring to Fossum Field. Congratulations to the team and we thank the Heeman family for bringing their business venture to the Hub City."

The team will conduct a nationwide search for a play-by-play broadcaster and will announce that hiring when it happens.

"Guess the team name" contest launched

The team has launched a "guess the team name" contest in conjunction with the Aberdeen News and Hub City Radio.

"The team will be called Hub City as we honor Aberdeen's railroad history," Chuck Heeman said. "We have the nickname picked out and fans will have two weeks to guess what that name is. We'll pick a winner and that person will win some pretty nice prizes."

Fans can participate by clicking [here](#), by hubbcitysummerball@gmail.com, or by going to the team's Facebook page, Hub City Summer Baseball, where the link will also be posted. The team also has a Twitter account, @HCSummerBall and fans can message there as well. The contest will run through September 21 with team name announced in early October. A random winner will be picked from those who chose the correct name. That winner will receive season tickets for 2018 as well as a team jersey, cap and a feature in the team's 2018 official souvenir program. The winner will also throw out a ceremonial first pitch at the team's opening home game in 2018.

Collegiate player commitments

"We've already received commitments from a number of schools to send players to us next summer," Chuck Heeman said. "I thank Mayra for that because she takes very good care of our players, sets up a great network of host families and really provides that home-away-from-home atmosphere for our players. She's built a great reputation among college coaches we've worked with in the past and they know if

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they send their guys to us they'll be in good hands. As we continue to contact the coaches we've worked with as they enter their fall baseball seasons, we know we'll be seeing more player commitments from those schools."

Heeman said that to date, the University of Kansas, Nebraska-Omaha, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Creighton, the University of New Mexico, Tennessee Wesleyan, Northern State University and Presentation College have committed to send players to the new team. Per NCAA, NAIA and NJCAA rules a team may have up to four players from any particular school.

Season ticket deposits available now

Fans can put deposits on season tickets immediately by emailing the team at hubcitysummerball@gmail.com. Season tickets are \$249 (\$7.80 per game) per seat for covered grandstand seats and deposits are \$100 per seat to reserve season tickets. Seat selection will go in order of deposits received.

Host families needed for players and interns

The new team is looking for a number of host families to house players and interns for the summer months. Interns arrive in mid-May and players in late May, all stay through early August. Players will be on the road for half the season and at your home when the team is in town. Families need to provide a bed and safe housing. Host families receive free season tickets for members of their household, discounts on concessions and souvenirs, hosted Party Deck nights and many other perks.

"Hosting a player is a great mentoring program for families that have young ballplayers of their own," Mayra Heeman said. "What better way to show your young ballplayer that they need to stay in school, play fair and be good citizens than having an actual college ballplayer in your home? We screen our players carefully and match them with a family and we've found that the players and host families form life-long friendships. It really is all about family and this is a great way to add to yours."

Contact the team

Those interested in tickets, being a host family or a business sponsor can contact the Hub City's new Expedition League team by e-mailing to hubcitysummerball@gmail.com, going to the team's Facebook page, Hub City Summer Baseball or the team's Twitter account, @HCSummerBall. The team's Aberdeen office is open as of September 7.

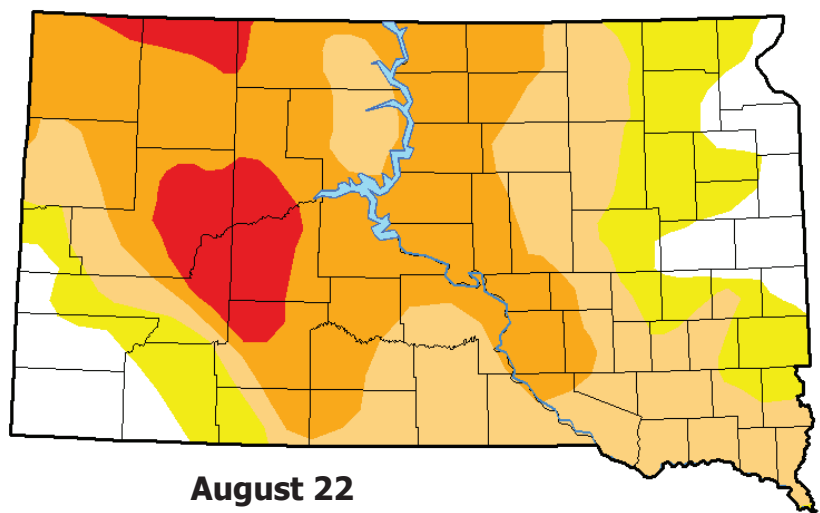
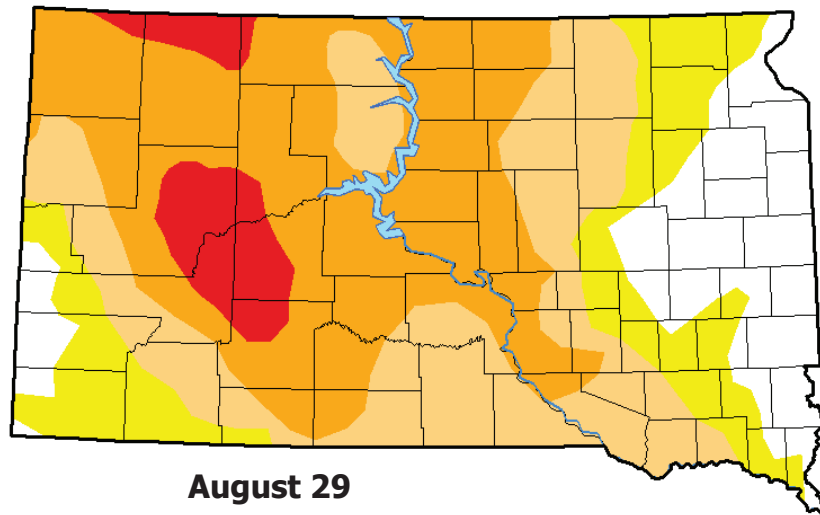
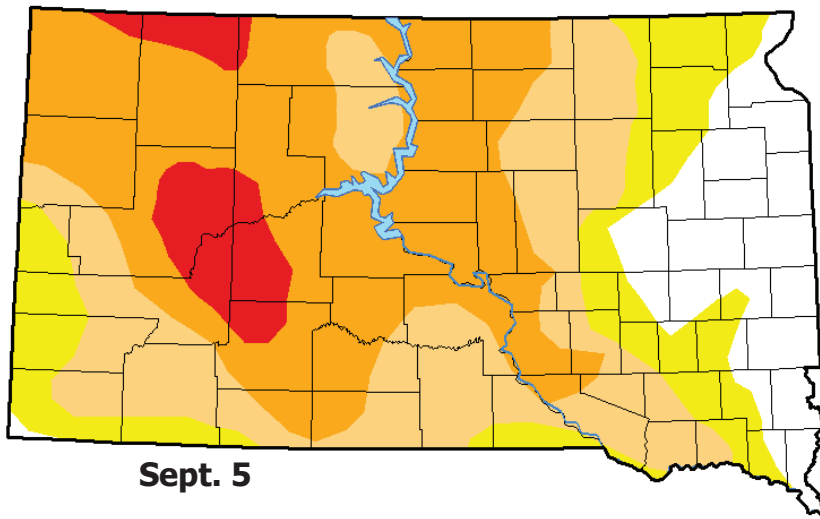
Hub City Baseball Club, 416 Production St. North, Suite B, Aberdeen, SD 57401

Phone: 605-725-2HIT (2448); e-mail: hubcitysummerball@gmail.com

END

Drought Monitor

Above-normal temperatures continued across the Dakotas and the Nebraska Panhandle this past week. A band of rain moved through the region during the week, though amounts were generally less than one inch. North-central North Dakota saw increases in severe drought where rainfall was less than 25 percent of normal over the last 30 to 60 days and satellite based-vegetation indicators were showing stress. South-central North Dakota saw a one-category improvement in areas where rainfall deficits, soil moisture, and well levels have begun to show recovery and pastures have responded to rains over the last 30 days. Western South Dakota saw a small one-category deterioration due to a continued lack of rainfall, low soil moisture and streamflow values, and vegetation stress. Southeastern South Dakota and northeastern Nebraska saw one-category improvements in areas where precipitation deficits, soil moisture, and vegetation indicators have returned to normal or near-normal values. Improvements also occurred in the abnormally dry area in the Nebraska Panhandle and in the moderate drought in central Kansas.

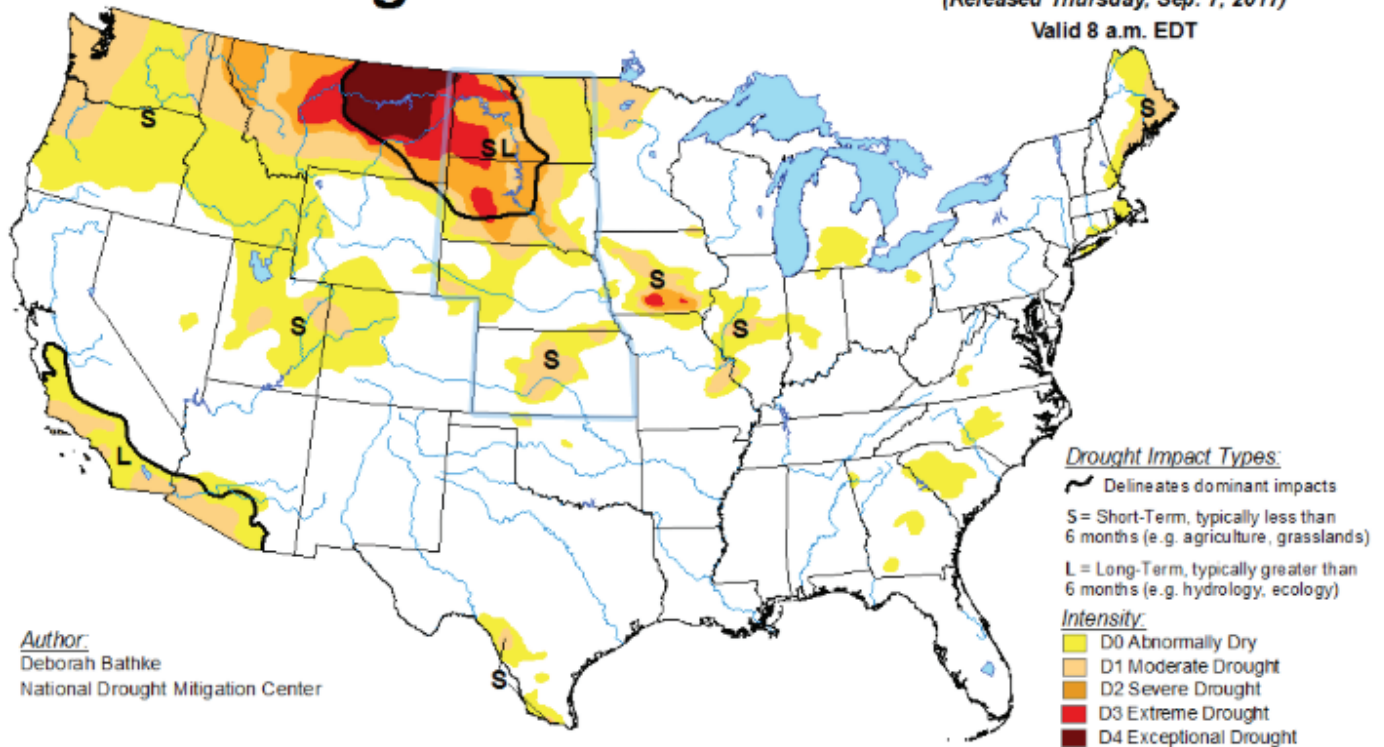


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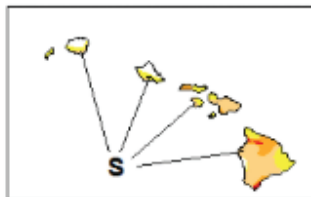
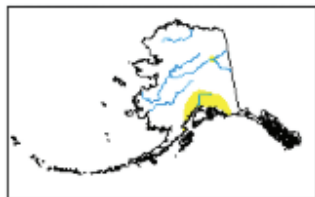
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U.S. Drought Monitor

September 5, 2017
(Released Thursday, Sep. 7, 2017)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Author:
Deborah Bathke
National Drought Mitigation Center



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

Service Notice: Marty Sippel

Services for Martin "Marty" Sippel, 67, of Groton will be 10:30 a.m., Monday, September 11th at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. Rev. Craig Grams will officiate. Burial will follow in Groton Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the church one hour prior to services.

Marty passed away Wednesday, September 06, 2017 at Groton Care and Rehabilitation Center.

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Gia Gengerke
(Photo by J. Kosel)



Eliza Wanner
(Photo by J. Kosel)



Jessica Bjerke
(Photo by J. Kosel)

Groton Area netters beat Britton-Hecla

Groton Area's volleyball team improved to 4-1 on the season with a 3-0 win over Britton-Hecla. The match was played Thursday in Groton. Groton won the varsity games by game scores of 25-11, 25-9 and 25-9. Groton won the junior varsity match by game scores of 25-10 and 25-10. The eighth graders split their match, winning the first game, 28-26, and losing the second game, 25-19.

The varsity match was carried live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Olson Developmen, Allied Climiate Professionals with Kevin Nehls, Grain Solutions with Jesse Zak, Blocker Construction, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., Hanlon Brothers of Groton and Verdon, James Valley Seed with Doug Jorgensen, Erickson Insurance Agency and Bahr Spray Foam and Construction. Make sure you tell these sponsors thank you and that you patronize them as well.

Setting: Groton: 69-74, 15 aces (Gia Gengerke 10-12, 5 aces; Payton Maine 11-12, 4 aces; Jennie Doeden 16-16, 2 aces. BH: 24-26. (Morgan Dahme 6-6).

Attacks: Groton: 57-65, 34 kills (Gia Gengerke 14-15, 12 kills; Eliza Wanner 10-11, 6 kills). BH: 46-53, 12 kills (Morgan Dahme 11-14, 5 kills)

Sets: Groton: 67-67, 31 assists. (Miranda Hanson 63-63, 30 assists; Payton Maine 4-4, 1 assist). BH: 40-42, 9 assists (haley Ringkob 5 assists).

Digs: Groton 45 (Payton Maine 10, Jennie Doeden 8, Eliza Wanner 7). BH: 39 (Jaidyn Roeher 130).

Blocks: Groton: Gengerke with 2.

Groton's next action will be Tuesday when it will be the battle of the Tigers as Mobridge-Pollock come to town.



Jennie Doeden
(Photo by J. Kosel)

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6 School Board Meeting ~ September 11, 2017 – 7:00 PM GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.
- POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3
- CONSENT AGENDA:
1. Approval of minutes of August 14, 2017 school board meeting as drafted or amended.
 2. Approval of North Central Special Education Co-Op (NCSEC) agenda items...as fiscal agent.
 3. Approval of August District bills for payment.
 4. Approval of August Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
- OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:
1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
 2. School Board Committee Reports:
 - a. Building, Grounds, & Transportation: Clint Fjelstad, Merle Harder, Marty Weismantel
 - b. Personnel, Policy, & Curriculum: Deb Gengerke, Grant Rix
 - c. Negotiations: Kelly Kjelden, Steve Smith
 3. Update on Elementary project progress.
 4. Consider Elementary project change orders.
 - a. CCO#012: FWO#9 Mechanical Room Walls
 - b. CCO#013: FWO#10 Wallboard Overlay 1992 Addition/Center Area
 - c. CCO#014: FWO#4 Mechanical Equipment Concrete Slabs
 - d. CCO#002: Credit for Concrete Slabs at ACCU-1 and ACCU-2
 - e. CCO#015: Add Insulation at Walls between Addition and Classrooms 081 and 082
 - f. CCO#016: Metal Expansion Joint Color
 5. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report
- NEW BUSINESS:
1. Review and approve 2017-2018 school bus routes.
 2. Approve resignation from Ryan Dix, Special Education Paraprofessional, for the 2017-2018 school year.
 3. Approve educational lane change for Mrs. Desiree Yeigh from BS to BS+15.
 4. Acknowledge receipt of Notification of Public School Exemptions:
 - a. #18-03: Grades 1 and 2
 - b. #18-04: Grade 7
 - c. #18-05: Grade 7
 - d. #18-06: Grade 1
 - e. #18-07: Grade 5
 - f. #18-08: Grades 1, 2, and 4
 - g. Approve Open Enrollment Applications #18-14, #18-15, #18-16, #18-17 (Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9) from Aberdeen School District
 5. Approve withdrawal of Open Enrollment Application #16-01
- ADJOURN

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Groton Area Open House

Groton Area School held its open house this year at the newly renovated elementary building. A smaller than normal crowd was on hand, but it was a busy night with several extra curricular activities in action.



Michael J. Weber announced the winners of the door prizes. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Branden, April and Axel Abeln are being served by Superintendent Joe Schwan, Elementary Principal Brett Schwan and school board member Deb Gengerke. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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School Board Member Grant Rix and Superintendent Joe Schwan serve up some of the food in the serving line. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

Brandon Clocksene is the new head cook at the Groton Area School. Pictured in back are the cooks for the hot dogs and brats, school board members Marty Weismantel on the left and Steve Smith on the right. (Photo by

Paul Kosel)



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

**Thurs., Sept. 7, 2017, 1 p.m.
Groton Community Center**

Upcoming GDI Events

Click on Image
Programs under the images

It's Volleyball Action on GDILIVE.COM



Groton Area Tigers

VS



Britton-Hecla Braves

Thursday, Sept. 7, 2017, 7 p.m.
Groton Area High School Arena

[Click here for the program](#)

It's Football Action on GDILIVE.COM



Groton Area Tigers

VS



Beresford Watchdogs

Friday, Sept. 8, 2017, 7 p.m.
at Beresford, SD

[Click here for the program](#)

Trout to be Stocked Near Pierre

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) will be stocking rainbow trout in Oahe Marina near Fort Pierre in September.

Robert Hanten of Fort Pierre, South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks fisheries biologist, said the department will stock 15-inch, one-pound rainbow trout in the marina basin immediately downstream from Oahe Dam.

“Weather permitting, the first stocking of trout will occur on Wednesday, Sept. 6, with an additional stocking planned for Thursday, Sept. 12,” Hanten said. “The fishing should be great, so get out and enjoy it with your family or friends.”

Oahe Marina is located just downstream from Oahe Dam, off state Highway 1806, north of Fort Pierre.

-GFP-

Landowners and Hunters Asked to Report Dead Deer

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) has documented the first deer mortalities in 2017 due to hemorrhagic disease, also known as epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) or blue tongue. EHD was recently confirmed by laboratory analysis in a white-tailed deer in eastern Harding County and a white-tailed deer in western Butte County.

This disease is common in white-tailed deer and is typically detected in late summer or early fall. Minor deer losses to EHD can occur in any given year in South Dakota, but weather and habitat conditions will dictate the severity of the disease. EHD is not infectious to humans.

The virus is spread by a biting midge and causes extensive internal hemorrhaging. Many deer exhibit no clinical signs and appear perfectly healthy, while others may have symptoms such as respiratory distress, fever and swelling of the tongue. With highly virulent strains of the virus, deer can be dead within 1-3 days. Affected deer are often found near low lying areas or water, likely due to the deer attempting to combat the high fever.

GFP asks anyone who observes sick deer or finds several dead deer in a localized area to contact their local conservation officer or GFP office. This information is valuable to wildlife managers in monitoring deer populations across the state.

EHD outbreaks can be locally severe, but rarely affect a high proportion of the deer population. In 2016, however, the disease did affect deer populations in certain areas of eastern South Dakota and license adjustments were made in some hunting units to react to these unforeseen mortality events. Deer can continue to succumb to this disease until a hard freeze reduces midge populations that carry the disease.

For more information on the EHD virus, visit gfp.sd.gov/wildlife/diseases/epizootic-hemorrhagic-disease.aspx.

Percent of grads taking ACT grows; scores remain above national average

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota saw a significant increase in the percentage of graduating seniors who took the ACT in 2017, while the state’s average composite score remained above the national average and down slightly from 2016.

South Dakota’s average ACT score for 2017 was 21.8, compared to the national average of 21.0 and last year’s statewide average of 21.9. The composite score reflects sub-scores for English, math, reading and science. In South Dakota, 80 percent of graduates took the ACT in 2017, compared to 76 percent in 2016. Nationally, 60 percent of 2017 graduates took the ACT, and of the six states that tested 70 to 90 percent of their students, South Dakota had the second-highest average ACT composite score.

“Four percent more of the 2017 graduating class took the ACT than their predecessors. That’s good news because it means more students are thinking about an education beyond high school, which is critically important when you consider today’s workforce demands,” said Secretary of Education Dr. Melody Schopp.

According to ACT, 93 percent of South Dakota’s 2017 ACT test-takers indicated that they aspire to pursue postsecondary education. The same was true of 2016 ACT test-takers; however, only 75 percent of those 2016 graduates actually enrolled.

“That’s where we have an opportunity as a state,” Schopp said. “We know we have students who are interested in postsecondary, but they may not know exactly what type of further schooling and career they want to pursue. We can help students by providing them with exposure to, and experiences with, various in-demand careers.”

Efforts such as career and technical education programs, career counseling, dual credit opportunities, and school and business partnerships support this connection between students and the world of work. “At the state level, we are aiming to help school districts to offer and expand these kinds of efforts, so students have a really good understanding of – and ideally some hands-on experiences with – the opportunities available to them once they leave school,” Schopp said.

For more information, visit ACT’s website at act.org.

Average Composite ACT Scores – South Dakota vs. National

Year	South Dakota	National
2013	21.9	20.9
2014	21.9	21.0
2015	21.9	21.0
2016	21.9	20.8
2017	21.8	21.0

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Today in Weather History

September 8, 1959: High winds and areas of blowing dust occurred across parts of central South Dakota from Walworth to Mellette. During the evening, wind gusts of 40 to 50 mph affected the counties either side of the Missouri River. Low visibility in blowing dust was blamed for a four-car crash near Pierre, injuring five persons, another accident near Mobridge injured one person. Barn buildings were blown over or unroofed near Delmont in Douglas County. Lightning started grass fires and burned several thousand acres of rangeland in Mellette and Lyman counties. In the late afternoon, high winds associated with a cold front gusted to 70 mph and destroyed six buildings on a farm north and east of Reliance. At 500 pm, winds ripped a camper off a pickup truck 12 miles south of Pierre. Winds were measured at 68 mph at Pierre. At 6 pm CDT winds gusting to 70 mph damaged many trees in the Watertown area, power lines, and some buildings. A trailer and truck, twelve miles north of Watertown, were blown over while traveling on Interstate 29. A large oil tank was also destroyed.

1900: An estimated Category 4 storm made landfall in Galveston, Texas on this day. This hurricane killed between 6,000 and 12,000 individuals, making it the deadliest US Atlantic hurricane on record. The highest point in the city of Galveston was less than nine feet above sea level. The hurricane brought a storm surge of over 15 feet, which overwhelmed the entire island. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History Channel.

1987 - A tropical depression off the coast of South Carolina brought another round of heavy rain to the Middle Atlantic Coast Region and the Upper Ohio Valley. Showers and thunderstorms produced extremely heavy rain in eastern Pennsylvania, where flooding caused more than 55 million dollars across a seven county area. The afternoon high of 97 degrees at Miami FL was a record for the month of September. (The National Weather Summary)








1998: A severe thunderstorm rapidly developed over the south end of the Las Vegas Valley in Nevada and moved north focusing damaging winds and heavy rain mainly across the eastern half of the metro area. Henderson Executive Airport recorded wind gusts of 80 mph. Air traffic control personnel temporarily evacuated the airport tower. Approximately 15 homes and trailers in Moapa were severely damaged by thunderstorm winds estimated at 80 to 90 mph.

1988 - Eighteen cities in the south central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Roanoke VA with a reading of 42 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced very heavy rain in the central U.S. Thunderstorms during the late morning and afternoon produced five to nine inches of rain around Lincoln NE, with an unofficial total of eleven inches near Holmes Park. Up to six and a half inches of rain soaked northern and western Iowa. Eighty to ninety percent of the homes in Shenandoah IA, where 5.89 inches of rain was received, reported basement flooding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Areas Fog then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 77 °F	Low: 54 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 84 °F	Low: 59 °F	High: 83 °F



Mild Today – Warmer Sat/Sun





Today
Low 70s Western Minnesota
To Mid 80s West River

Saturday – Isolated Showers Late
70s Sisseton Hills & East
80s James Valley & West

Sunday
Widespread 80s to Near 90

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD

weather.gov/Aberdeen  National Weather Service Aberdeen  @NWSAberdeen Updated: 9/8/2017 5:12 AM Central

Published on: 09/08/2017 at 5:14AM

We will see a slow warm up with increasingly breezy conditions through the weekend. Not much chance for moisture however, with just a few isolated showers late Saturday into early Sunday.

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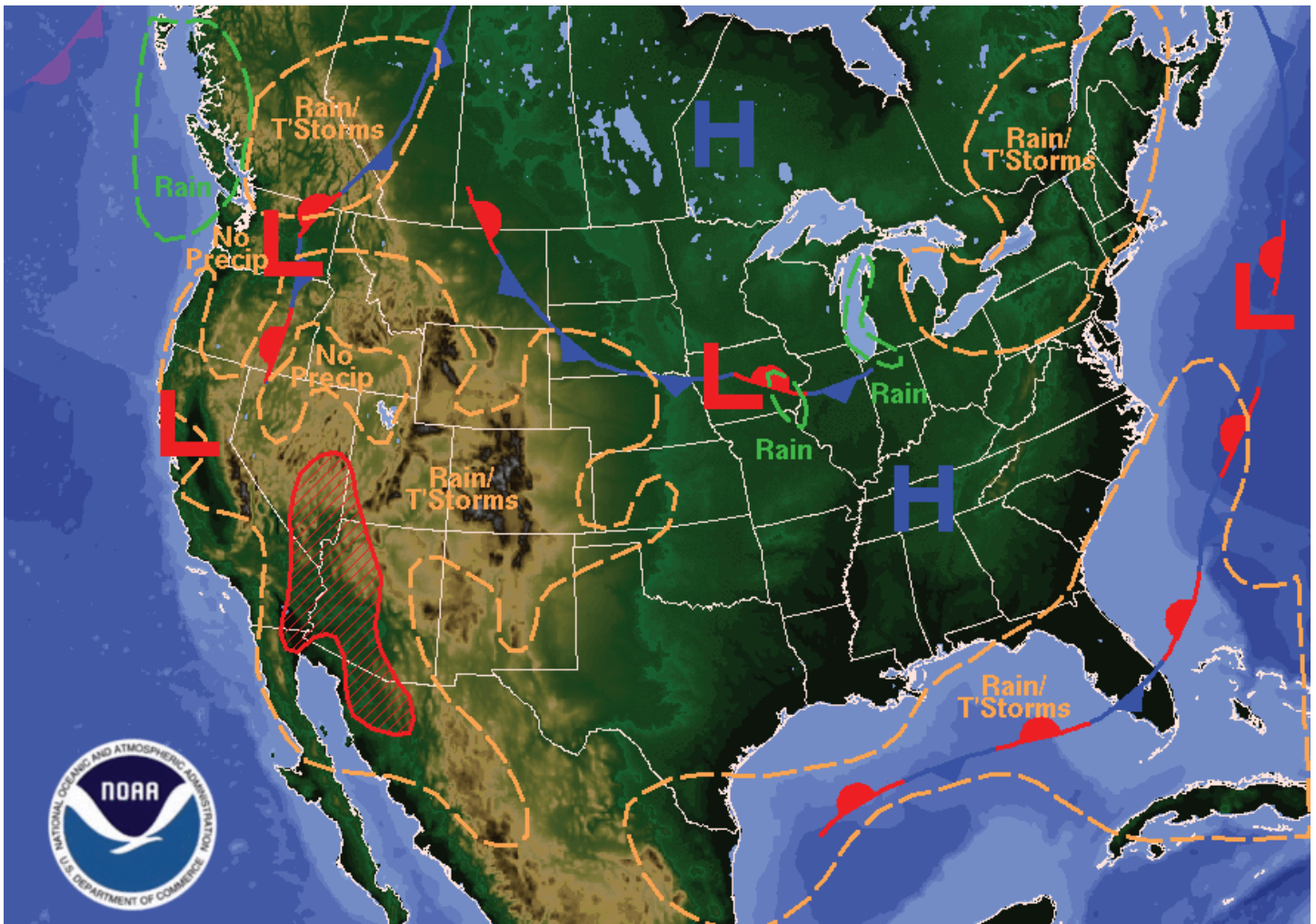
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 84.8 at 5:01 PM
Low Outside Temp: 43.5 at 3:03 AM
High Gust: 10 mph at 8:35 AM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 101° in 1933
Record Low: 32° in 1992
Average High: 76°F
Average Low: 49°F
Average Precip in Sept: 0.60
Precip to date in Sept: 0.11
Average Precip to date: 16.89
Precip Year to Date: 9.63
Sunset Tonight: 7:57 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:05 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Fri, Sep 08, 2017, issued 3:59 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain
Rain and T'Storms
Rain and Snow
Snow

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

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HERE'S HOPE!

Jake Hess, the great gospel singer was known to say, "Things are going to get better, get worse or stay about the same." How true!

We all seem to face three types of trouble: things that trouble us from the past, things that are troubling us now and things we expect to trouble us in the future. Trouble seems to be a large part of everyone's life.

David had his troubles, too. In fact, his troubles were so severe that he was downcast by what had happened in his past and when he viewed his future he became discouraged by what he expected would someday happen to him.

However, one day when he realized what was going on, he asked himself two questions: "Why are you downcast, O my soul, Why so disturbed within me?" The word "downcast" means "to be depressed" and the word "disturbed" means "to growl like a bear."

When he looked within himself at his depression, he became so disturbed that it sounded like a bear was growling inside of him. But suddenly, he decided to look upward and said to his soul, – himself – "Put our hope in God," not in yourself!

And when he did he said, "For I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God." His inner feelings expressed themselves in questions of despair and defeat. In that moment of loneliness his faith was tested and tried but not trampled by doubt. Ultimately he triumphed by giving himself some great advice: "Put your hope in God," he said, "and continue to praise Him!" And he did.

Faith and doubt often appear as twins. But when doubt was about to triumph, his hope surged within him and he overcame the troubles he faced by the hope he had in God. What an example for us to follow.

Prayer: Father, in our moments of despair may we turn to You with a never-ending hope that assures us of Your presence. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 42:5b Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores By The Associated Press

Volleyball

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Deuel, 25-16, 25-19, 25-16
Andes Central/Dakota Christian def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-11, 25-6, 25-22
Arlington def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 25-8, 25-20, 25-18
Avon def. Alcester-Hudson, 25-16, 25-22, 25-15
Belle Fourche def. Spearfish, 17-25, 25-23, 16-25, 25-21, 15-13
Bennett County def. White River, 25-22, 25-17, 25-21
Bridgewater-Emery def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-14, 25-18, 16-25, 27-25
Burke/Sanborn Central def. St. Mary's, Neb., 25-8, 25-9, 25-14
Chamberlain def. Crow Creek, 25-19, 25-17, 26-24
Colome def. Jones County, 25-16, 25-11, 21-25, 25-23
Dakota Valley def. Beresford, 25-21, 25-18, 25-15
Dell Rapids def. Tea Area, 25-22, 14-25, 25-15, 25-16
DeSmet def. Estelline, 25-18, 25-12, 25-11
Deubrook def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 25-18, 25-11, 25-13
Douglas def. Hot Springs, 14-25, 25-18, 15-25, 25-15, 16-14
Edmunds Central def. McIntosh, 25-20, 21-25, 23-25, 25-19, 15-9
Ethan def. Menno, 25-20, 25-16, 25-9
Faulkton def. Potter County, 25-23, 25-14, 15-25, 25-16
Florence/Henry def. Langford, 25-23, 25-23, 25-22
Freeman def. Gayville-Volin, 25-9, 25-15, 25-18
Freeman Academy/Marion def. Scotland, 25-15, 25-21, 22-25, 25-21
Great Plains Lutheran def. Wilmot, 19-25, 25-22, 10-25, 26-24, 15-10
Groton Area def. Britton-Hecla, 25-11, 25-15, 25-18
Hamlin def. Clark/Willow Lake, 21-25, 25-14, 25-10, 25-8
Hanson def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 31-29, 25-19, 25-14
Harrisburg def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 25-12, 25-10, 25-21
Herreid/Selby Area def. Timber Lake, 25-14, 25-14, 22-25, 27-25
Highmore-Harrold def. Iroquois, 25-10, 25-5, 25-10
Huron def. Aberdeen Central, 30-28, 25-23, 27-25
James Valley Christian def. Corsica/Stickney, 22-25, 25-17, 25-13, 25-23
Kadoka Area def. Wall, 24-26, 25-14, 25-19, 22-25, 15-6
Kimball/White Lake def. Tripp-Delmont/Armour, 25-19, 25-22, 25-11
Lake Preston def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 25-5, 25-16, 25-19
Leola/Frederick def. Mobridge-Pollock, 27-25, 25-23, 25-19
Madison def. Lennox, 25-20, 25-15, 25-16
Milbank def. Webster, 25-15, 25-4, 25-18
Miller def. Ipswich, 25-16, 25-14, 25-13
North Border def. McLaughlin, 25-6, 25-13, 25-18
Northwestern def. Warner, 25-21, 26-24, 25-19
Philip def. Stanley County, 25-19, 25-19, 20-25, 25-7
Pierre def. Sturgis Brown, 21-25, 25-14, 25-21, 25-11
Platte-Geddes def. Bon Homme, 25-21, 25-20, 25-23
Rapid City Christian def. Faith, 19-25, 18-25, 27-25, 26-24, 15-10

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Rapid City Stevens def. Rapid City Central, 25-15, 25-15, 25-20
Red Cloud def. Little Wound, 25-20, 25-20, 25-20
Redfield/Doland def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-13, 25-6, 25-13
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Mitchell Christian, 14-25, 25-15, 25-11, 25-20
Sioux Falls Christian def. West Central, 25-9, 25-18, 25-14
Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Brookings, 25-19, 19-25, 25-17, 24-26, 15-10
St. Francis Indian def. Martyr Indian, 22-25, 25-17, 25-9, 25-11
St. Thomas More def. Custer, 26-24, 25-15, 25-19
Vermillion def. Tri-Valley, 25-14, 25-18, 25-16
Wagner def. Gregory, 25-9, 25-14, 26-24
Watertown def. Sioux Falls Washington, 25-15, 25-15, 22-25, 25-22
Waverly-South Shore def. Waubay/Summit, 25-18, 25-22, 25-16
Wolsey-Wessington def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-22, 26-24, 27-25
Wynot, Neb. def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-8, 25-18, 25-12
Yankton def. Brandon Valley, 25-11, 25-17, 25-23
Big East Conference Tournament
Parker def. Flandreau, 25-18, 25-16, 25-21
Consolation
Baltic def. Garretson, 25-16, 25-22, 25-16
Chester def. Garretson, 25-10, 25-15, 25-9
Howard def. Flandreau, 25-18, 25-22, 23-25, 25-21
Sioux Valley def. Baltic, 21-25, 25-12, 28-26, 25-17
Hay Springs Triangular
Edgemont def. Hay Springs, Neb., 25-18, 25-19, 25-15

South Dakota's lone law school considers 3rd option in move

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A task force weighing whether to move the University of South Dakota School of Law to Sioux Falls is now considering a third option.

The task force met Wednesday to discuss potentially moving only third-year law students from Vermillion to Sioux Falls, the Argus Leader reported. Supporters said such a move could help students at the state's only law school better connect with law firms and more internship opportunities.

The first option involves moving the entire law school to Sioux Falls. In addition to more internships and law firms, task force members said a larger city would attract more students and faculty.

The second option would keep the school at its current location in Vermillion. Some committee members have said uprooting the law school would not solve declining enrollment, lower bar pass rates and other issues.

South Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice David Gilbertson, a member of the task force, warned: "Trying to make a connection between the (bar exam) pass rate decline and the fact that the school is in Vermillion is very dangerous."

Another member, law professor Chris Hutton, said moving third-year students to Sioux Falls would only increase strain on law school faculty.

Students, faculty and business leaders have come forward with several questions, so it's unclear if the task force is ready to reach a decision, said Mark Mickelson, chairman of group.

The committee hasn't determined the cost of moving the entire law school to Sioux Falls, though members have decided a new building would be required. The group will meet again Oct. 6 in Vermillion.

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ND gov. meets with feds to advocate for drought relief

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Gov. Doug Burgum says he has met with federal officials to advocate for drought relief for North Dakota.

Burgum says he met Thursday with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke.

Burgum made a request on Aug. 8 for a presidential major disaster declaration for drought. That request is still pending.

Drought conditions in the Dakotas haven't changed much over the past week, due to above-normal temperatures and little rain.

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor map shows 66 percent of North Dakota in some stage of drought, unchanged over the week. Twenty-one percent of the state is in extreme or exceptional drought, down slightly from 22 percent.

Drought conditions improved in south-central North Dakota but worsened in the north-central part of the state.

Record jackpot won in Dakota Cash

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — State lottery officials say one lucky player has hit a record jackpot in Dakota Cash. Wednesday was the first time in 58 drawings that the Dakota Cash jackpot was won. That pushed the total to about \$614,000, the highest since the game was launched in South Dakota in 1994.

The game is drawn each Wednesday and Saturday. No one has stepped forward yet with the winning ticket.

The winning numbers are 16, 20, 23, 24 and 30. The odds of winning the jackpot are about one in 325,000.

\$3.3M collected in first year of state debt recovery efforts

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A collections program meant to recover money owed to state agencies and programs has recovered more than \$3.3 million in its first year.

The Bureau of Administration released a report Thursday saying that \$7.6 million in payment plans were also established in the 2017 budget year. Agencies referred more than \$47 million in debt to the center during that time period.

Lawmakers approved the recovery center during the 2015 legislative session. State agencies use the center to enforce child support and restitution orders and recover debts.

The center started operating in July 2016 with referrals from the state court system and the Department of Corrections. More agencies have since signed on.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard says South Dakota is more effectively engaging people who owe obligations to the state and its citizens with the "innovative approach."

Wanblee man sentenced for fatal stabbing on reservation

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Wanblee man has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for stabbing to death another man during a fight on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation last year.

Thirty-four-year-old Leon Lodges in March admitted stabbing 22-year-old Leonard Sitting Up with a knife in May 2016.

The Rapid City Journal reports Lodges was sentenced Wednesday for second-degree murder and for assault with a dangerous weapon for stabbing and injuring another man during the altercation.

In addition to the prison time, U.S. District Court Chief Judge Jeffrey Viken ordered Lodges to pay \$2,000 in restitution for funeral-related expenses.

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Mount Vernon man pleads not guilty to more child sex crimes

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — A Mount Vernon man accused of sexually assaulting a 7-year-old boy after promising him a video game is facing more child sex crime charges.

The Daily Republic reports that 28-year-old Tyler Dobras on Tuesday pleaded not guilty to six felonies related to alleged sexual contact with 8- and 5-year-old children.

Dobras in July pleaded not guilty to raping the 7-year-old after telling the boy he would buy him a video game if he participated in a sex act.

Dobras could face up to life in prison if convicted.

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

More than 2 dozen hogs killed in semi rollover

HUMBOLDT, S.D. (AP) — A semi carrying a load of about 160 hogs rolled over in Minnehaha County, killing some of its cargo.

The Highway Patrol says the 25-year-old semi driver from Winfred wasn't seriously hurt in the accident on an Interstate 90 ramp near Humboldt Wednesday. Twenty-six hogs were killed when the semi overturned while the driver was trying to turn left from Highway 19 to the I-90 ramp.

The Argus Leader says farmers in the area and relatives of the driver helped unload the remaining hogs.

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

President: Mexico hit by biggest quake in century, 5 killed

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN and E. EDUARDO CASTILLO, Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — One of the most powerful earthquakes ever to strike Mexico has hit off its southern coast, killing at least five people, toppling houses and businesses and sending panicked people into the streets more than 650 miles (1,000 kilometers) away.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the earthquake hit off Chiapas state near the Guatemalan border with a magnitude as 8.1 — equal in force to the 1985 quake that killed thousands and devastated large parts of Mexico City.

Officials said at least five people died, but the death toll could rise as authorities assess the damage. Buildings collapsed, power was cut at least briefly to more than 1 million people and authorities closed schools Friday in at least 11 states to check them for safety.

"The house moved like chewing gum and the light and internet went out momentarily," said Rodrigo Soberanes, who lives near the Chiapas state city of San Cristobal de las Casas.

The U.S. Geological Survey recorded at least 20 aftershocks of magnitude 4.0 or greater within about five hours after the main shake, and the president warned that a major aftershock as large as magnitude 7.2 could occur.

The USGS said the quake struck at 11:49 p.m. Thursday (12:49 a.m. EDT ; 0449 GMT Friday) and its epicenter was 102 miles (165 kilometers) west of Tapachula in Chiapas. It had a depth of 43.3 miles (69.7 kilometers).

The quake caused buildings to sway violently in Mexico's capital more than 650 miles (1,000 kilometers) away. As beds banged against walls, people still wearing pajamas fled into the streets, gathering in frightened groups.

Chiapas Gov. Manuel Velasco said that three people were killed in San Cristobal, including two women who died when a house and a wall collapsed. He called on people living near the coast to leave their houses as a protective measure.

"There is damage to hospitals that have lost energy," he said. "Homes, schools and hospitals have been damaged."

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Tabasco Gov. Arturo Nunez said two children had died in his Gulf coast state. One of them was killed when a wall collapsed, and the other was a baby who died in a children's hospital that lost electricity, cutting off the infant's ventilator.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said waves of one meter (3.3 feet) above the tide level were measured off Salina Cruz, Mexico. Smaller tsunami waves were observed on the coast or measured by ocean gauges in several other places. The center's forecast said Ecuador, El Salvador and Guatemala could see waves of a meter or less. No threat was posed to Hawaii and the western and South Pacific.

Mexican authorities said they were evacuating some residents of coastal Tonalá and Puerto Madero because of the warning.

The quake hit as Mexican emergency agencies were bracing for another crisis on the other side of the country. The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Hurricane Katia was likely to strike the Gulf coast in the state of Veracruz early Saturday as a Category 2 storm that could bring life-threatening floods.

In neighboring Guatemala, President Jimmy Morales spoke on national television to call for calm while emergency crews checked for damage.

"We have reports of some damage and the death of one person, even though we still don't have details," Morales said. He said the unconfirmed death occurred in San Marcos state near the border with Mexico.

The quake occurred in a very seismically active region near the point of collision between three tectonic plates, the Cocos, the Caribbean and the North American.

Mexico's National Seismological Service said the area has seen at least six other quakes of magnitude 7.0 or greater since 1900 — though three of those all occurred within a nerve-wracking nine-month span in 1902-1903.

Frank Griffiths in London contributed to this report.

Police shoot armed man at Miami airport amid Irma evacuation

By KELLI KENNEDY, Associated Press

Police shot a man who wielded a knife and tried to get into a Miami airport terminal from a runway, prompting the closure of a busy concourse as travelers tried to leave Florida ahead of Hurricane Irma, authorities said.

Miami-Dade Police Director Juan Perez said late Thursday that the unidentified suspect entered a restricted area on the tarmac "where the airplanes actually come in."

"One of the sergeants that responded observed a gentleman on the tarmac. The gentleman fled into a room allegedly armed with a knife," Perez told reporters during a news conference.

The man tried to leave the room and get back into the terminal through the ceiling, Perez said. That's when officers confronted the man and shot him, Perez said.

Perez said the suspect was taken to a hospital in stable condition to be treated for his injuries. It's not clear how he was able to breach security and get onto the runway.

Authorities tried to keep travelers at ease, stressing they believe the suspect acted alone.

"We do not believe this is related to a terrorist incident at all, but we are not ruling that out because it is early," Perez said.

Many travelers are jamming flights to get out of the path of the hurricane, which devastated a string of Caribbean islands and is on its way to Florida this weekend. A half-million people were ordered to leave South Florida on Thursday. The powerful storm was downgraded to a Category 4 hurricane early Friday.

Shawn Woodford and his wife were about to board a flight home for Canada when firetrucks and police cars came "flying across the tarmac" and "surrounded a plane at the gate next to us," he told The Associated Press.

The plane at the gate was a Latam Airlines flight to Santiago, Chile, according to Miami's departures board. Latam officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment from the AP.

A short time later, police came into the terminal where Woodford and his wife were and "said 'everybody

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out of here' and evacuated the entire concourse," he said.

The closure led to some flights being delayed or moved to other gates. Woodford was able to board his flight for Toronto — at a different concourse and nearly 4 hours after his original departure time.

The Latam flight to Santiago was listed as delayed for hours, finally leaving at 1:30 a.m. Eastern.

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. POWERFUL MEXICO QUAKE KILLS AT LEAST 5

The 8.1-magnitude earthquake — the strongest to hit the country in a century — topples houses in Chiapas state and triggers tsunami alerts.

2. HURRICANE IRMA RAKES CARIBBEAN, MENACES FLORIDA

With 160 mph winds, the Category 4 storm has killed 11 people on St. Martin and other islands, and it's expected to barrel into southern Florida this weekend.

3. IRMA COULD BE THE DREADED 'BIG ONE'

The powerful storm triggers near panic in a region of more than 6 million people that includes Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach.

4. WHAT AP-USA TODAY ANALYSIS REVEALS ABOUT TEEN SHOOTINGS EPIDEMIC

Medium-sized cities like Wilmington, Del., and Syracuse, N.Y. have some of the nation's highest gun violence against young people, the reporting shows.

5. HOUSE POISED TO BACK \$15.3B HARVEY AID PACKAGE

Republicans grumble over how disaster funds are tied to a temporary increase in the nation's debt limit.

6. WHO FLED HIS DAD'S NAME BEFORE EMBRACING IT

Donald Trump Jr., who once said he avoided his last name "at all costs," has become a key supporter of his father.

7. SOME 270,000 ROHINGYA MUSLIMS FLEE MYANMAR, UN SAYS

The exodus began after Rohingya insurgents attacked police posts, prompting the military to respond with "clearance operations."

8. NKOREA COULD BE PREPARING FOR ANOTHER MISSILE TEST

Pyongyang may launch another intercontinental ballistic missile Saturday when it celebrates its founding anniversary.

9. WHY WESTERN WILDFIRES ARE SO SEVERE THIS YEAR

A combination of quick snowpack meltdown, hot and dry weather, great swaths of trees damaged by beetles, and other factors have led to the conditions that have caused the fires to burn 12,500 square miles in 2017.

10. ROOKIE RB SCORES 3 TDS, CHIEFS ROUT PATRIOTS

Kareem Hunt rushes 246 yards in his pro debut as Kansas City shocks New England 42-27.

S. Korea braces for another possible N. Korea missile test

By KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea is closely watching North Korea over the possibility it may launch another intercontinental ballistic missile as soon as Saturday when it celebrates its founding anniversary.

Seoul's Unification Ministry spokeswoman Eugene Lee said Friday that Pyongyang could potentially conduct its next ICBM tests this weekend or around Oct. 10, another North Korean holiday marking the founding of its ruling party.

North Korea has previously marked key dates with displays of military power, but now its tests appear to be driven by the need to improve missile capabilities.

The North is just coming off its sixth and the most powerful nuclear test to date on Sunday in what it

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claimed was a detonation of a thermonuclear weapon built for its ICBMs. The country tested its developmental Hwasong-14 ICBMs twice in July and analysts say the flight data from the launches indicate the missiles could cover a broad swath of the continental United States, including major cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago, when perfected.

North Korea fired the ICBMs at highly lofted angles in July to reduce ranges and avoid other countries. But South Korean officials say the next launches could be conducted at angles close to operational as the North would seek to test whether the warheads survive the harsh conditions of atmospheric re-entry and detonate properly.

In Washington, President Donald Trump reiterated Thursday that military action is "certainly" an option against North Korea, as his administration tentatively concurred with the pariah nation's claim to have tested a hydrogen bomb. A senior administration official said the U.S. was still assessing last weekend's underground explosion but so far noted nothing inconsistent with Pyongyang's claim.

"Military action would certainly be an option," Trump told a White House news conference. "I would prefer not going the route of the military, but it's something certainly that could happen."

Pressed on whether he could accept a scenario in which the isolated nation had nukes but was "contained and deterred," Trump demurred. "I don't put my negotiations on the table, unlike past administrations. I don't talk about them. But I can tell you North Korea is behaving badly and it's got to stop," he said.

North Korea broke from its pattern of lofted launches last month when it fired a powerful new intermediate range missile, the Hwasong-12, over northern Japan. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un then called the launch a "meaningful prelude" to containing the U.S. Pacific island territory of Guam and called for his military to conduct more ballistic missile launches targeting the Pacific Ocean.

Meanwhile, Sweden urged its citizens Friday to refrain from unnecessary trips to North Korea.

The announcement by the Swedish Foreign Affairs Ministry came hours after Mexico's government said it declared North Korean Ambassador Kim Hyong Gil as persona non grata and ordered him to leave the country within 72 hours in response to Sunday's nuke test.

The United States has already banned Americans from traveling to North Korea following the death of Otto Warmbier, a 22-year-old college student from Ohio who was released from North Korea in June in a coma after being detained there for more than a year.

Sweden has had diplomatic relations with North Korea since 1973. The Swedish Embassy in Pyongyang also provides consular services for the United States, Australia and Canada.

Also Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed North Korea by phone. Macron called for more pressure on North Korea to bring the country back to the negotiating table, and China's official Xinhua News Agency described Xi as being "adamant" about the denuclearization of the peninsula while also expressing hope that France would play "a constructive role in easing the situation and restarting dialogue."

South Korean experts say that the launch was Pyongyang's attempt to make missiles flying over Japan an accepted norm as it seeks to test new projectiles in conditions close to operational and win more military space in a region dominated by enemies.

Kim, a third-generation dictator in his 30s, has conducted four of North Korea's six nuclear tests since taking power in 2011. His military has maintained a torrid pace in testing weapons, which also include solid-fuel missiles built to be fired from road mobile launchers or submarines.

In accelerating his pursuit of nuclear weapons targeting the United States and allies South Korea and Japan, Kim is seen as seeking a real nuclear deterrent to help ensure the survival of his government and also the stronger bargaining power that would come from it.

Washington, Seoul and Tokyo have been pushing for stronger sanctions to punish Pyongyang over its nuclear activities, such as denying the country oil supplies. China and Russia have been calling for talks, saying sanctions aren't working against North Korea.

Associated Press writers Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark and Gillian Wong in Beijing contributed

to this report.

Hurricane Irma slams Turks and Caicos on path to Florida

By **DESMOND BOYLAN** and **BEN FOX**, Associated Press

CAIBARIEN, Cuba (AP) — Hurricane Irma battered the Turks and Caicos Islands early Friday and Cuba evacuated tourists from beachside resorts as the fearsome storm continued a rampage through the Caribbean that has killed at least 11 people, with Florida in its sights.

Waves as high as 20 feet (6 meters) were expected in the Turks and Caicos. Communications went down as the storm slammed into the islands, and the extent of the devastation was unclear.

The first hurricane warnings were issued for parts of southern Florida as the state braced for what could be a catastrophic hit over the weekend. Following in Irma's wake was Hurricane Jose, with some of the islands hit hardest by Irma in its expected path.

Irma weakened from a Category 5 storm to Category 4 on Friday morning with maximum sustained winds near 155 mph (250 kph), but it remained a powerful hurricane.

Irma rolled past the Dominican Republic and Haiti on Thursday and spun along the northern coast of Cuba on Friday morning. Thousands of tourists were evacuated from low-lying keys off the Cuban coast Thursday in anticipation of 20-foot storm surges. Buses loaded with tourists began streaming out of Santa Maria, Cayo Coco, Cayo Guillermo and other keys dotted with all-inclusive resorts.

All residents of the area were under mandatory evacuation orders from the Cuban government, which was moving tens of thousands of people from vulnerable coastline.

French, British and Dutch military authorities rushed aid to a devastated string of Caribbean islands where at least 11 people were dead and thousands homeless. Warships and planes were sent with food, water and troops after the hurricane smashed homes, schools and roads, laying waste to some of the world's most beautiful and exclusive tourist destinations.

The first islands hit by the storm were scenes of terrible destruction.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said Thursday that four people were confirmed dead and about 50 injured on the French side of St. Martin, an island split between Dutch and French control, where homes were splintered and road signs scattered by the fierce winds. The cafes and clothing shops of the picturesque seaside village of Marigot were submerged in brown floodwaters. The toll could rise because rescue teams had yet to get a complete look at the damage.

Looting was reported in St. Martin. Annick Girardin, minister for France's overseas territories, described on BFM television Friday "scenes of pillaging" of televisions as well as food and water. She lamented "how people can take advantage of the distress of others" and said it's essential for police to restore order and ensure urgent care for victims.

The U.S. Consulate General in Curacao said it believes about 6,000 Americans are stranded on St. Martin. It said it was working with the U.S. and other governments to try to figure out how to get the Americans off the island either by air or boat. Frantic Americans were calling home to relatives to try to get them off the island ahead of Hurricane Jose.

At least four people were killed in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and officials said they expected to find more bodies. Authorities described the damage as catastrophic and said crews were struggling to reopen roads and restore power.

Three more deaths were reported on the British island of Anguilla, as well as Barbuda and the Dutch side of St. Martin.

The hospital on St. Thomas was destroyed and dozens of patients were being evacuated to St. Croix and Puerto Rico by the U.S. Coast Guard. Local official said a U.S. Navy hospital ship was arriving as early as Friday to care for unknown numbers of injured and two Air Force C-130s transport planes were bringing in food and water.

Power lines and towers were toppled, leaves were stripped off plants and trees, a water and sewage treatment plants was heavily damaged and the harbor was in ruins, along with hundreds of homes and

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dozens of businesses. Gov. Kenneth Mapp imposed a 6 p.m. curfew.

The primary focus for now is "making sure people have meals, water and shelter," Mapp said. "An event of this magnitude is very chilling."

Irma also slammed the French island of St. Barts, tearing off roofs and knocking out electricity in the high-end tourist destination.

French Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said 100,000 food rations were sent to St. Barts and St. Martin, the equivalent of four days of supplies.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said the storm "caused wide-scale destruction of infrastructure, houses and businesses."

"There is no power, no gasoline, no running water. Houses are under water, cars are floating through the streets, inhabitants are sitting in the dark in ruined houses and are cut off from the outside world," he said.

Big waves smashed a dozen homes into rubble in the Dominican fishing community of Nagua, but work crews said all the residents had left before the storm. Officials said 11,200 people in all had evacuated vulnerable areas, while 55,000 soldiers had been deployed to help the cleanup.

In Haiti, two people were injured by a falling tree, a national roadway was blocked by debris and roofs were torn from houses along the northern coast but there were no immediate reports of deaths. Officials warned that could change as Irma continued to lash Haiti, where deforested hillsides are prone to devastating mudslides that have wiped out entire neighborhoods of precariously built homes in flood zones.

"We are vulnerable. We don't have any equipment to help the population," Josue Alusma, mayor of the northern city of Port de Paix, said on Radio Zenith FM.

French President Emmanuel Macron's office said he would go to the islands as soon as the weather permits it.

On Barbuda, nearly every building was damaged when the hurricane's core crossed almost directly over the island early Wednesday. About 60 percent of its roughly 1,400 residents were left homeless, Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne said.

Hundreds of miles to the west, Florida prepared for Irma's wrath, with forecasters warning the storm could slam headlong into the Miami metropolitan area of 6 million people, punish the entire length of the state's Atlantic coast and move into Georgia and South Carolina.

More than a half-million people in Miami-Dade County were ordered to leave as Irma closed in.

Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami, said Irma could easily prove to be the costliest storm in U.S. history.

"Take it seriously, because this is the real deal," said Maj. Jeremy DeHart, a U.S. Air Force Reserve weather officer who flew through the eye of Irma at 10,000 feet (3,048 meters).

Farther out in the Atlantic, Hurricane Jose, a Category 3 storm with 125 mph (200 kph) winds, posed a potential threat for Saturday to some of the same islands ravaged by Irma.

Irma, the most potent Atlantic Ocean hurricane ever recorded, appeared increasingly likely to rip into heavily populated South Florida on Sunday afternoon after sweeping along Cuba's northern coast on Saturday.

People in Florida rushed to board up their homes, take their boats out of the water and gas up their cars. With gasoline running out and tensions rising, the Florida Highway Patrol escorted tanker trucks sent to replenish gas stations.

"It is wider than our entire state and could cause major and life-threatening impacts from coast to coast," Florida Gov. Rick Scott said. "Regardless of which coast you live on, be prepared to evacuate."

Fox reported from Miami. Associated Press writers Ian Brown in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands; Evens Sanon in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; Danica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico; Ezequiel Lopez Abiu in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Anika Kentish in St. John's, Antigua; Seth Borenstein in Washington; Michael Weissenstein in Havana; and Samuel Petrequin in Paris contributed to this report.

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inbox: <http://apne.ws/ahYQGtb>

House heads toward passage of Harvey aid bill, debt hike

By **ANDREW TAYLOR**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Conservative grumbling aside, the House is heading toward backing a \$15.3 billion disaster aid package that President Donald Trump and Democrats have linked to a temporary increase in America's borrowing authority and keeping the government funded through December.

The House vote on Friday would send the massive package to Trump for his signature, replenishing rapidly dwindling emergency accounts as Florida braces for the impact of Hurricane Irma this weekend and Texas picks up the pieces after the devastation of the Harvey storm.

The must-do legislation, backed 80-17 by the Senate on Thursday, would provide money to fund government agencies through Dec. 8, eliminating the threat of a shutdown when the new fiscal year starts Oct. 1. Republicans cast all 17 no votes.

Trump stunned Republicans by cutting a deal with Democratic leaders Sen. Chuck Schumer and Rep. Nancy Pelosi to increase the debt limit for three months, rather than the long-term approach preferred by the GOP. Voting on the debt limit is politically toxic for Republicans, and the deal will make the GOP vote twice ahead of next year's midterm elections.

Fiscal conservatives have clamored for deep cuts in spending in exchange for any increase in the government's borrowing authority. The storm relief measure had widespread support, but the linkage with the debt ceiling left many Republicans frustrated.

"It's like the Washington that Trump campaigned against," said Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas. "So, as much as I want to help Texas, I can't vote for something that just is a blank check on the debt."

White House budget director Mick Mulvaney, a former tea party congressman from South Carolina who took a hard line against debt increases during his years in the House, and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin planned to travel to the Capitol on Friday to sell the measure to skeptical rank-and-file Republicans.

But most in the GOP said they weren't upset with Trump himself.

"I think this may be just a one-off," said Rep. Mark Walker, R-S.C., chairman of the conservative Republican Study Committee. "Our guys were a little surprised about it, but if this becomes a pattern, then, yeah, it would create some cause for concern,"

Walker said he expects two-thirds of the Republican Study Committee to oppose the massive package.

Democratic votes are invariably needed to increase the debt limit — and avert a potential market-quaking default on government obligations — and Schumer and Pelosi successfully pressed to waive the debt limit through Dec. 8.

As a practical measure, since the arcane debt-limit suspension replenishes Treasury's ability to tap other accounts to maintain cash flows, the actual date of a potential default wouldn't come before February or March. That's according to a back-of-the-envelope calculation by Shai Akabas, who tracks the issue for the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington think tank.

The aid money comes as Harvey recovery efforts are draining federal disaster aid coffers and Irma heads toward Florida. It's just the first installment on a recovery and rebuilding package for the twin hurricanes that could eclipse the more than \$110 billion cost to taxpayers of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Late Wednesday, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., added \$7.4 billion in rebuilding funding to Trump's \$7.9 billion request to deal with the immediate emergency in Texas and parts of Louisiana.

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On Capitol Hill, Trump Jr. denies collusion with Russia

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ERIC TUCKER and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's eldest son cast his meeting with a Russian lawyer last year as simply an opportunity to learn about Hillary Clinton's "fitness, character or qualifications," insisting to Senate investigators behind closed doors that he did not collude with Russia to hurt her campaign against his father.

Donald Trump Jr.'s description of the June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower in New York, delivered in a statement Thursday at the outset of a Senate panel's staff interview, provided his most detailed account yet of an encounter that has drawn close scrutiny from Congress and special counsel Robert Mueller.

He tried to dismiss concerns about one comment he made in emails leading up to the meeting. He said he was just being polite when he emailed "I love it" to Rob Goldstone, the publicist who was setting up the meeting with a Russian who was said to have election-season dirt on Clinton.

Trump Jr. said it was "simply a colloquial way of saying that I appreciated Rob's gesture."

Thursday's interview at the Capitol was the first known instance of Trump Jr. giving his version of the meeting in a setting that could expose him to legal jeopardy. It's a crime to lie to Congress.

Multiple congressional committees and Mueller's team of prosecutors are investigating whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to influence the outcome of the election. A grand jury used by Mueller as part of his investigation has already heard testimony about the meeting, which besides Trump Jr., included the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his then-campaign chairman, Paul Manafort.

Trump Jr. spoke to committee staff members for about five hours, leaving in the midafternoon, out of view of reporters. In a statement released afterward, he appeared to suggest he would not testify publicly before the committee, saying he trusted that "this interview fully satisfied" the panel's inquiry.

In July, the committee's chairman, Republican Chuck Grassley of Iowa, said he wanted Trump Jr. to appear at a public hearing, though in recent days he's declined to say whether that will still happen. California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the top Democrat on the panel, said Wednesday that she and Grassley had agreed in July to subpoena Trump Jr. if he wouldn't appear willingly in public.

Trump Jr. and the Senate Judiciary Committee had negotiated for him to appear privately on Thursday and to be interviewed only by committee staff. Senators were allowed to sit in but not ask questions.

According to one person with knowledge of what was said, Trump Jr. told committee staff that he didn't inform his father about the June 2016 meeting.

He also said he didn't know or didn't recall the details of any White House involvement in his response to the first reports of that meeting, the person said. The White House has said the president was involved in drafting a statement saying the meeting primarily concerned a Russian adoption program.

The person declined to be identified because the meeting was private.

In prepared remarks obtained by The Associated Press, Trump Jr. did not address the drafting of the statement. Instead, he sought to explain the emails that showed him agreeing to the meeting, which had been described as part of a Russian government effort to help his father's campaign.

He said he was skeptical of the outreach by music publicist Goldstone but thought he "should listen to what Rob and his colleagues had to say."

"To the extent they had information concerning the fitness, character or qualifications of a presidential candidate, I believed that I should at least hear them out," Trump Jr. said.

He said the Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, gave vague information about possible foreign donations to the Democratic Party but then quickly changed the subject to a sanctions law, known as the Magnitsky Act, which the Russian government opposes.

On the day of the meeting, Trump Jr. said he didn't know who would be attending because Goldstone didn't give him a list ahead of time. He said Trump Tower security also didn't keep a record. Goldstone was able to bring the "entire group up" by only giving his name to a guard in the lobby, he said.

"There is no attendance log to refer back to and I did not take notes," Trump Jr. said.

He said he remembers seven people in the meeting, though eight have been publicly reported.

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The attendees Trump Jr. identified were himself, Goldstone, Manafort, Kushner, Veselnitskaya, a translator and Irakli Kaveladze, who worked for a Russian development company headed by Aras Agalarov and his son, Emin, who partnered with Donald Trump to bring the Miss Universe pageant to Moscow in 2013.

He did not mention Russian-American lobbyist Rinat Akhmetshin, who has told multiple news outlets, including the AP, that he attended the meeting at Veselnitskaya's invitation. In recent weeks, Akhmetshin has testified about his recollection of the meeting before a Washington grand jury used by Mueller.

The top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, California Rep. Adam Schiff, released a statement responding to reports of the meeting and said Trump Jr.'s statement "raises more questions than it answers" and "highlights how significant the campaign viewed the promise of dirt on their opponent from the Russian government."

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., who briefly sat in on the interview, released a statement later containing the federal statute barring lying to Congress. The statement was addressed to "Interested parties" regarding "Donald Trump Jr. testimony today."

Associated Press writer Chad Day contributed to this report.

Read Trump Jr.'s prepared statement: <http://apne.ws/VTCJCVr>

For Trump and Ryan, a tortured relationship grows more so

By ERICA WERNER and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It started out cold as ice, and then turned warm and friendly. Now the tortured relationship between President Donald Trump and House Speaker Paul Ryan has gone cool again, with the Republican president making clear he has no qualms about bucking the GOP leader to cut deals with his Democratic foes.

The two men dined at the White House Thursday night and discussed legislative challenges ahead for the fall, a get-together that was scheduled over Congress' August recess, long before the head-spinning events of this week. In a moment that stunned Washington, Trump cut a debt and disaster aid deal Wednesday with Congress' Democratic leaders as Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell watched on helplessly, after lobbying unsuccessfully for much different terms.

The moment distilled the inherent tensions between Trump, 71, a former Democrat and ideologically flexible deal-maker, and Ryan, 47, a loyal Republican whose discomfort with Trump led him to withhold his endorsement for weeks last year.

After Trump was elected the two papered over their differences and even developed a rapport, talking frequently during health care negotiations earlier this year, as each understood they needed the other to advance individual and shared goals. But their phone calls have tapered off of late and Trump has expressed his frustration with GOP leaders on multiple fronts, culminating in the president's decision to ditch them and join hands with the Democrats instead.

Trump exulted in his newly bipartisan approach Thursday, declaring it "a great thing for our country," while Ryan mostly grinned and bore it.

"Yeah, I sort of noticed that," Ryan said ruefully when an interviewer pointed out that Trump had overruled his strong objections to side with Democrats on a three-month debt ceiling increase instead of the much longer-term deal Republicans had supported.

But Ryan went on to defend the president, saying at a New York Times' forum that with one massive hurricane on its way out of the U.S. and another headed in, Trump "just wanted this to be a bipartisan moment for the country." The debt deal is set for House passage Friday along with \$15 billion in disaster aid and a three-month government funding extension.

Indeed for Ryan, GOP reactions to the deal exposed some lurking threats to his perch atop a conference where unrest brews nearly ceaselessly among conservatives, and there have been recent rumblings of a possible coup.

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Trump remains highly popular in the conservative districts occupied by many House Republicans, much more so than Ryan himself, who is scorned by many in the GOP base as an establishment sell-out. In a whipsawed moment, some House Republicans defended Trump's handling of a deal they don't like, while simultaneously criticizing Ryan, who had been overruled by the president. It also underscored the political pressure on Ryan to try to remain in the president's good graces even when Trump is flirting with Democrats.

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, said the message in his conservative district is that "congressional Republicans need to get behind the president."

That sentiment "makes him weaker," King said of Ryan.

Rep. Paul Gosar of Arizona described Ryan as "very unpopular" in his district, while regard for Trump is "pretty high."

As far as his constituents are concerned, Gosar said, they'd be happy if Ryan got the boot and Trump stayed. "That's kind of the mantra in my district," he said.

For his part, Trump has soured on the Republican congressional leadership in recent months, fuming to associates that they led him astray on their health care strategy, among other complaints.

The president has told those close to him that he regrets choosing to tackle the repeal and replace of Barack Obama's health care law as his first legislative push. He has singled out Ryan for blame, saying the speaker assured him it would pass and instead handed him an early, humiliating failure, before ultimate House passage of a revived bill, according to three White House and outside advisers familiar with the conversations but not authorized to speak about them publicly.

GOP health care efforts collapsed in the Senate in July.

Trump has spoken to Ryan less frequently in recent weeks, particularly after the departure of his first chief of staff, Reince Priebus, who has deep Wisconsin ties to the speaker. Priebus would sometimes broker the calls and stress to each man their importance, according to two people familiar with the conversations. Those calls have occurred less often since John Kelly took over as chief of staff.

Ryan's pleas last week for Trump not to end the program to aid immigrants brought to the country as children and living here illegally were ignored by the president, who tossed the issue to Congress to resolve in six months.

Though Trump has expressed particular anger at McConnell for the failed Senate health care vote and for not protecting him from the Russia investigation, he grudgingly has told associates that he is aware of the Senate leader's grip on power. He has spoken less glowingly about Ryan's own ability to lead due to the shorter House terms and the growing insurgency within the conservative Freedom Caucus.

Ryan's position is seen as secure for now, if only because it is widely accepted that no other House Republican could garner the support needed to replace him. But even allies believe his tenure in the job could be finite, and might depend in part on the whims of a president with whom he has no real deep ties.

"I think any speaker is going to have a very difficult time in this environment," said Rep. Tom Reed, R-N.Y. "The nature of that job, I think, over time, they don't last."

Lemire reported from New York.

Nations rush to help islands devastated by Hurricane Irma

By EVENS SANON and DANICA COTO, Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — French, British and Dutch military authorities rushed aid to a devastated string of Caribbean islands Thursday after Hurricane Irma left at least 11 people dead and thousands homeless as it spun toward Florida for what could be a catastrophic blow this weekend.

Warships and planes were dispatched with food, water and troops after the fearsome Category 5 storm smashed homes, schools and roads, laying waste to some of the world's most beautiful and exclusive tourist destinations.

Hundreds of miles to the west, Florida braced for the onslaught, with forecasters warning that Irma

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could slam headlong into the Miami metropolitan area of 6 million people, punish the entire length of the state's Atlantic coast and move into Georgia and South Carolina.

More than a half-million people in Miami-Dade County were ordered to leave as Irma closed in with winds of 165 mph (270 kph).

"Take it seriously, because this is the real deal," said Maj. Jeremy DeHart, a U.S. Air Force Reserve weather officer who flew through the eye of Irma at 10,000 feet (3,048 meters).

The first islands hit by the storm were scenes of terrible destruction.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said four people were confirmed dead and about 50 injured on the French side of St. Martin, an island split between Dutch and French control, where homes were splintered and road signs scattered by the fierce winds. The cafes and clothing shops of the picturesque seaside village of Marigot were submerged in brown floodwaters. The toll could rise because rescue teams had yet to get a complete look at the damage.

The U.S. Consulate General in Curaçao said it believes about 6,000 Americans are stranded on St. Martin and is collecting their names and locations. It said it was working with the U.S. and other governments to try to figure out how to get the Americans off the island either by air or boat. Frantic Americans were calling home to relatives to try to get them off the island, especially because Hurricane Jose threatened a second blow to the tourist Mecca.

At least four people were killed in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and officials said they expected to find more bodies. Authorities described the damage as catastrophic and said crews were struggling to reopen roads and restore power.

Three more deaths were reported on the British island of Anguilla, as well as Barbuda and the Dutch side of St. Martin.

Irma also slammed the French island of St. Barts, tearing off roofs and knocking out electricity in the high-end tourist destination.

French Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said 100,000 food rations were sent to St. Barts and St. Martin, the equivalent of four days of supplies.

"It's a tragedy. We'll need to rebuild both islands," he said. "Most of the schools have been destroyed."

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said the storm "caused wide-scale destruction of infrastructure, houses and businesses."

"There is no power, no gasoline, no running water. Houses are under water, cars are floating through the streets, inhabitants are sitting in the dark in ruined houses and are cut off from the outside world," he said.

The hurricane was still north of the Dominican Republic and Haiti on Thursday evening, sweeping the neighboring nations on Hispaniola island with high winds and rain while battering the Turks and Caicos islands on its other side.

Big waves smashed a dozen homes into rubble in the Dominican fishing community of Nagua, but work crews said all the residents had left before the storm. Officials said 11,200 people in all had evacuated vulnerable areas, while 55,000 soldiers had been deployed to help the cleanup.

In Haiti, two people were injured by a falling tree, a national roadway was blocked by debris and roofs were torn from houses along the northern coast but there were no immediate reports of deaths. Officials warned that could change as Irma continued to lash Haiti, where deforested hillsides are prone to devastating mudslides that have wiped out entire neighborhoods of precariously built homes in flood zones.

"We are vulnerable. We don't have any equipment to help the population," Josue Alusma, mayor of the northern city of Port de Paix, said on Radio Zenith FM.

About a million people were without power in Puerto Rico after Irma sideswiped the island overnight, and nearly half the territory's hospitals were relying on generators. No injuries were reported.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, Gov. Kenneth Mapp said the U.S. military was sending troops to aid relief efforts.

The primary focus for now is "making sure people have meals, water and shelter," Mapp said. "An event of this magnitude is very chilling."

The territory's two islands were battered by 150 mph (241 kph) winds for four hours. Two fire stations,

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two fire police stations and the hospital on St. Thomas were destroyed. A curfew was ordered for St. John and St. Thomas that also covered about 5,000 tourists who were unable to leave before the storm.

Farther out in the Atlantic, Hurricane Jose strengthened into a Category 3 storm with 120 mph (195 kph) winds and posed a potential threat for Saturday to some of the same islands ravaged by Irma.

Irma, the most potent Atlantic Ocean hurricane ever recorded, appeared increasingly likely to rip into heavily populated South Florida on Sunday afternoon after threatening parts of the Turks and Caicos and the Bahamas on Thursday night and Friday and sweeping along Cuba's northern coast on Saturday.

People in Florida rushed to board up their homes, take their boats out of the water and gas up their cars. With gasoline running out and tensions rising, the Florida Highway Patrol escorted tanker trucks sent to replenish gas stations.

"It is wider than our entire state and could cause major and life-threatening impacts from coast to coast. Regardless of which coast you live on, be prepared to evacuate," Gov. Rick Scott said.

French President Emmanuel Macron's office said he would go to the islands as soon as the weather permits it. Saying he was "grief-stricken," Macron called for concerted efforts to tackle global warming to prevent similar natural disasters.

Two Dutch navy ships were in St. Martin with vital supplies. And two Dutch military aircraft were being sent to the island of Curacao and on to St. Martin to deliver food and water intended to last the population of 40,000 five days. The aircraft were carrying 100 extra troops to deliver aid, repair infrastructure and restore order.

Britain was sending hundreds of troops and the Royal Navy flagship HMS Ocean to Anguilla, Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands.

In Anguilla, officials reported extensive damage to the airport, hospitals, shelters and schools and said 90 percent of roads were impassable.

On Barbuda, nearly every building was damaged when the hurricane's core crossed almost directly over the island early Wednesday. About 60 percent of its roughly 1,400 residents were left homeless, Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne said.

He said roads and telecommunications systems were wrecked and recovery will take months, if not years. "It is just really a horrendous situation," Browne said.

Associated Press writer Evens Sanon reported this story in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and AP writer Danica Coto reported from San Juan, Puerto Rico. AP writers Ezequiel Lopez Abiu in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Anika Kentish in St. John's, Antigua; Seth Borenstein in Washington; Michael Weissenstein in Havana; Samuel Petrequin in Paris and Ben Fox in Miami contributed to this report.

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Equifax breach exposes 143 million people to identity theft

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE, AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Credit monitoring company Equifax has been hit by a high-tech heist that exposed the Social Security numbers and other sensitive information about 143 million Americans. Now the unwitting victims have to worry about the threat of having their identities stolen.

The Atlanta-based company, one of three major U.S. credit bureaus, said Thursday that "criminals" exploited a U.S. website application to access files between mid-May and July of this year.

The theft obtained consumers' names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses and, in some cases, driver's license numbers. The purloined data can be enough for crooks to hijack the identities of people whose credentials were stolen through no fault of their own, potentially wreaking havoc on their lives. Equifax said its core credit-reporting databases don't appear to have been breached.

"On a scale of one to 10, this is a 10 in terms of potential identity theft," said Gartner security analyst

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Avivah Litan. "Credit bureaus keep so much data about us that affects almost everything we do."

Lenders rely on the information collected by the credit bureaus to help them decide whether to approve financing for homes, cars and credit cards. Credit checks are even sometimes done by employers when deciding whom to hire for a job.

Equifax discovered the hack July 29, but waited until Thursday to warn consumers. The Atlanta-based company declined to comment on that delay or anything else beyond its published statement. It's not unusual for U.S. authorities to ask a company hit in a major hack to delay public notice so that investigators can pursue the perpetrators.

The company established a website, <https://www.equifaxsecurity2017.com/>, where people can check to see if their personal information may have been stolen. Consumers can also call 866-447-7559 for more information. Experian is also offering free credit monitoring to all U.S. consumers for a year.

"This is clearly a disappointing event for our company, and one that strikes at the heart of who we are and what we do," Equifax CEO Richard Smith said in a statement. "I apologize to consumers and our business customers for the concern and frustration this causes."

This isn't the biggest data breach in history. That indignity still belongs to Yahoo, which was targeted in at least two separate digital burglaries that affected more than 1 billion of its users' accounts throughout the world.

But no Social Security numbers or drivers' license information were disclosed in the Yahoo break-in.

Equifax's security lapse could be the largest theft involving Social Security numbers, one of the most common methods used to confirm a person's identity in the U.S. It eclipses a 2015 hack at health insurer Anthem Inc. that involved the Social Security numbers of about 80 million people.

Any data breach threatens to tarnish a company's reputation, but it is especially mortifying for Equifax, whose entire business revolves around providing a clear financial profile of consumers that lenders and other businesses can trust.

"This really undermines their credibility," Litan said. It also could undermine the integrity of the information stockpiled by two other major credit bureaus, Experian and TransUnion, since they hold virtually all the data that Equifax does, Litan said.

Equifax's stock dropped 13 percent to \$124.10 in extended trading after its announcement of the breach.

Three Equifax executives insulated themselves from that downturn by selling shares worth a combined \$1.8 million just a few days after the company discovered the breach on July 29, according to documents filed with securities regulators.

The sales, executed on August 1 and August 2, were made by: John Gamble, Equifax's chief financial officer; Rodolfo Ploder, Equifax's president of workforce solutions; and Joseph Loughran, Equifax's president of U.S. information solutions. Bloomberg News first reported the divestitures.

In a subsequent statement, Equifax said the three executives "had no knowledge that an intrusion had occurred at the time they sold their shares."

The potential aftershocks of the Equifax breach should make it clear that Social Security numbers are becoming an unreliable way to verify a person's identity, Nathaniel Gleicher, the former director of cybersecurity policy in the White House during the Obama administration, said in an email statement.

"This breach might just have put the nail in the coffin of the idea that we can use personal identifiers like Social Security numbers as security factors," wrote Gleicher, who now oversees cybersecurity strategy for computer security firm Illumio.

In addition to the personal information stolen in its breach, Equifax said the credit card numbers for about 209,000 U.S. consumers were also taken, as were "certain dispute documents" containing personal information for approximately 182,000 U.S. individuals.

Equifax warned that hackers also may have some "limited personal information" about British and Canadian residents. The company doesn't believe that consumers from any other countries were affected.

New fires in empty Rohingya village challenge Myanmar claims

BANGKOK (AP) — Journalists saw new fires burning Thursday in a Myanmar village that had been abandoned by Rohingya Muslims, and pages ripped from Islamic texts that were left on the ground. That intensifies doubts about government claims that members of the persecuted minority have been destroying their own homes.

About two dozen journalists saw the fires in Gawdu Zara village in northern Rakhine state on a government-controlled trip.

About 164,000 Rohingya from the area have fled across the border into Bangladesh in less than two weeks since Aug. 25, when Rohingya insurgents attacked police outposts in Gawdu Zara and several other villages, the U.N. refugee agency said Thursday.

The military has said nearly 400 people, mostly Rohingya, have died in clashes and that troops were conducting "clearance operations." It blames insurgents for setting the villages on fire, without offering proof.

Rohingya who have fled Myanmar, however, have described large-scale violence perpetrated by Myanmar troops and Buddhist mobs — setting fire to their homes, spraying bullets indiscriminately, stabbing civilians and ordering them to abandon their homes or be killed.

On the Myanmar side of the border, reporters saw no Rohingya in any of the five destroyed villages they were allowed to tour Thursday, making it unlikely they could have been responsible for the new fires.

An ethnic Rakhine villager who emerged from the smoke said police and Rakhine Buddhists had set the fires. The villager ran off before he could be asked anything else.

No police were seen in the village beyond those who were accompanying the journalists. But about 10 Rakhine men with machetes were seen there. They looked nervous and the only one who spoke said he had just arrived and did not know how the fires started.

Among the buildings on fire was a madrassa, an Islamic school. Copies of books with texts from the Quran, Islam's holy book, were torn up and thrown outside. A nearby mosque was not burned.

Another village the journalists visited, Ah Lel Than Kyaw, was blackened, obliterated and deserted. Cattle and dogs wandered through the still-smoldering remains.

Local police officer Aung Kyaw Moe said 18 people were killed in the village when the violence began last month.

"From our side, there was one immigration officer dead, and we found 17 dead bodies from the enemy side," he said.

He said the fires were set Aug. 25, though some continued to burn Thursday. Virtually all buildings in the village seen by journalists had been burned, along with cars, motorbikes and bicycles that fleeing villagers left behind. A mosque was also damaged.

Columns of smoke could be seen rising in the distance, and distant gunshots could be heard.

"They burned their own houses and ran away," Aung Kyaw Moe said. "We didn't see who actually burned them because we had to take care of the security for our outpost. ... But when the houses were burned, Bengalis were the only ones in the village."

Buddhist-majority Myanmar refers to Rohingya as Bengalis, contending they migrated illegally from Bangladesh, though many Rohingya families have lived in Myanmar for generations.

Burning the homes of Rohingya can make it less likely they will return. Tens of thousands of Rohingya were driven from their homes in another wave of violence in 2012. Many are now confined to camps, while the land they once held is either vacant or occupied by Buddhist squatters.

Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist and blogger based in Europe with contacts in northern Rakhine, said that according to witnesses, the Myanmar military, border guard police and Rakhine villagers came to Ah Lel Than Kyaw and burned the houses from Monday to Wednesday.

On Aug. 25, he said, young men with swords and knives tried to attack the border guard outpost in Aley Than Kyaw but failed. The authorities took away all Buddhist villagers, and many Rohingya villagers fled on their own.

Nay San Lwin said the remaining villagers left after the military warned them they would be shot if they did not leave.

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Myanmar's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has dismissed the Rohingya crisis as a misinformation campaign. According to her office, she said such misinformation helps promote the interests of "terrorists," a reference to the Rohingya insurgents who attacked security posts on Aug. 25.

The crisis response director for Amnesty International called Suu Kyi's response "unconscionable."

On Thursday, Suu Kyi told reporters her government was working to improve security and livelihoods for Rohingya, but that "it's a little unreasonable to expect us to resolve everything in 18 months" since her administration took office.

With Rohingya fleeing by the thousands daily across the border, pushing existing camps in Bangladesh to the brink, the government in Dhaka pledged to build at least one more.

The International Organization for Migration has pleaded for \$18 million in foreign aid to help feed and shelter tens of thousands now packed into makeshift settlements or stranded in a no man's land between the two countries' borders.

U.N. agencies said they were distributing food to new arrivals, about 80 percent of whom were women and children, joining about 100,000 who had already been sheltering in Bangladesh after fleeing earlier convulsions of violence in Myanmar.

Aid workers said many were arriving with violence-related injuries, severe infections or childbirth complications.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Thursday that her country offered refuge to Rohingya on humanitarian grounds, but called it a "big burden for us".

The "international community must take the responsibility," she said.

Hasina's government has taken an initiative to identify the refugees to prevent terrorists from entering Bangladesh under disguise, the local Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha news agency reported, quoting the prime minister's Press secretary Ihsanul Karim.

With so many Rohingya fleeing, it is unclear how many remain in Myanmar amid reports of soldiers burning villages and killing civilians.

Before the recent violence, aid experts estimated about 1 million Rohingya were living in northern Rakhine state. But aid agencies have been unable to access the area since.

Turkish First Lady Emine Erdogan and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu visited a Rohingya camp in Bangladesh and then met with Hasina.

They said Myanmar agreed to allow its aid officials to enter Rakhine state with a ton of food and goods for Rohingya. They also pledged continuing support for the Rohingya.

Associated Press writers Muneeza Naqvi in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Grant Peck in Bangkok, Ashok Sharma in New Delhi and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

No collusion with Russians, Trump Jr. insists to Congress

By **MARY CLARE JALONICK, ERIC TUCKER and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's eldest son cast his meeting with a Russian lawyer last year as simply an opportunity to learn about Hillary Clinton's "fitness, character or qualifications," insisting Thursday to Senate investigators behind closed doors that he did not collude with Russia to hurt her campaign against his father.

Donald Trump Jr.'s description of the June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower in New York, delivered in a statement at the outset of a Senate panel's staff interview, provided his most detailed account yet of an encounter that has drawn close scrutiny from Congress and special counsel Robert Mueller.

He tried to dismiss concerns about one comment he made in emails leading up to the meeting. He said he was just being polite when he emailed "I love it" to Rob Goldstone, the publicist who was setting up the meeting with a Russian who was said to have election-season dirt on Clinton.

Trump Jr. said it was "simply a colloquial way of saying that I appreciated Rob's gesture."

Thursday's interview at the Capitol was the first known instance of Trump Jr. giving his version of the

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meeting in a setting that could expose him to legal jeopardy. It's a crime to lie to Congress.

Multiple congressional committees and Mueller's team of prosecutors are investigating whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to influence the outcome of the election. A grand jury used by Mueller as part of his investigation has already heard testimony about the meeting, which besides Trump Jr., included the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his then-campaign chairman, Paul Manafort.

Trump Jr. spoke to the Senate Judiciary Committee for about five hours, leaving in the midafternoon, out of view of reporters. In a statement released afterward, he appeared to suggest he would not testify publicly before the committee, saying he trusted that "this interview fully satisfied" the panel's inquiry.

In July, the committee's chairman, Republican Chuck Grassley of Iowa, said he wanted Trump Jr. to appear at a public hearing, though in recent days he's declined to say whether that will still happen. California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the top Democrat on the panel, said Wednesday that she and Grassley had agreed in July to subpoena Trump Jr. if he wouldn't appear willingly in public.

Trump Jr. and the Judiciary Committee had negotiated for him to appear privately on Thursday and to be interviewed only by committee staff. Senators were allowed to sit in but not ask questions.

According to one person with knowledge of what was said, Trump Jr. told committee staff that he didn't inform his father about the June 2016 meeting.

He also said he didn't know or didn't recall the details of any White House involvement in his response to the first reports of that meeting, the person said. The White House has said the president was involved in drafting a statement saying the meeting primarily concerned a Russian adoption program.

The person declined to be identified because the meeting was private.

In prepared remarks obtained by The Associated Press, Trump Jr. did not address the drafting of the statement. Instead, he sought to explain the emails that showed him agreeing to the meeting, which had been described as part of a Russian government effort to help his father's campaign.

He said he was skeptical of the outreach by music publicist Goldstone but thought he "should listen to what Rob and his colleagues had to say."

"To the extent they had information concerning the fitness, character or qualifications of a presidential candidate, I believed that I should at least hear them out," Trump Jr. said.

He said the Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, gave vague information about possible foreign donations to the Democratic Party but then quickly changed the subject to a sanctions law, known as the Magnitsky Act, which the Russian government opposes.

On the day of the meeting, Trump Jr. said he didn't know who would be attending because Goldstone didn't give him a list ahead of time. He said Trump Tower security also didn't keep a record. Goldstone was able to bring the "entire group up" by only giving his name to a guard in the lobby, he said.

"There is no attendance log to refer back to and I did not take notes," Trump Jr. said.

He said he remembers seven people in the meeting, though eight have been publicly reported.

The attendees Trump Jr. identified were himself, Goldstone, Manafort, Kushner, Veselnitskaya, a translator and Irakli Kaveladze, who worked for a Russian development company headed by Aras Agalarov and his son, Emin, who partnered with Trump to bring the Miss Universe pageant to Moscow in 2013.

He did not mention Russian-American lobbyist Rinat Akhmetshin, who has told multiple news outlets, including the AP, that he attended the meeting at Veselnitskaya's invitation. In recent weeks, Akhmetshin has testified about his recollection of the meeting before a Washington grand jury used by Mueller.

The top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, California Rep. Adam Schiff, released a statement responding to reports of the meeting and said Trump Jr.'s statement "raises more questions than it answers" and "highlights how significant the campaign viewed the promise of dirt on their opponent from the Russian government."

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., who briefly sat in on the interview, released a statement later containing the federal statute barring lying to Congress. The statement was addressed to "Interested parties" regarding "Donald Trump Jr. testimony today."

Associated Press writer Chad Day contributed to this report.

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Read Trump Jr.'s prepared statement: <http://apne.ws/VTCJCVr>

It's a 'great thing' to deal with Democrats, Trump now says

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and ERICA WERNER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Frustrated with his own party's leaders in Congress, President Donald Trump talked up his suddenly cozier relationship with Democrats on Thursday, raising the prospect of new deals on government spending and even posting one of his tweets at their behest.

"I think that's a great thing for our country," Trump said, describing his new and "different relationship" with Democrats.

In public, Republican leaders glossed over the striking turn of events, but lawmakers in both parties were privately puzzling over how Trump's approach might affect the fate of the party's agenda. And some conservatives openly criticized the deal-making, ideologically flexible president who defied GOP leaders in striking an agreement Wednesday to keep the government operating and raise the nation's debt limit for just three months.

Democrats, privately leery about how long this new Trump might last, were upbeat in public.

As for Trump, after a series of legislative failures he has fumed to associates for months about Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan. On Thursday, he predicted a "much stronger coming together" of the two parties and pronounced himself ready to work with Democrats.

"I think that's what the people of the United States want to see: They want to see some dialogue, they want to see coming together to an extent at least," he told reporters.

Trump, a longtime Democrat who lived most of his life in deep blue New York City, has never closely adhered to Republican orthodoxy and has routinely shown a willingness to shift positions to seal deals. But his embrace of Democrats in recent days has been startling.

He overruled Republican leaders and his own treasury secretary on a debt ceiling agreement. He courted a Democratic senator with a flight to her home state on Air Force One. He offered reassurances on Thursday to young immigrants at the request of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, tweeting that those covered by the federal program he has promised to end "have nothing to worry about" over the next six months.

Trump also signaled a willingness to permanently do away with debt ceiling votes and move ahead on a stand-alone measure on the young immigrants, two suggestions opposed by most Republicans.

Trump's unhappiness with GOP leaders has been building for months.

He has harshly criticized both McConnell and Ryan for failing to pass legislation to repeal the Obama health care law and for not doing more to shield him from the ongoing Russia investigations.

Then, wasting no time after Congress returned from summer break this week, Trump waved off Republicans who lobbied during a Wednesday Oval Office meeting for an 18-month debt ceiling extension, then 12 months and then six. When Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin continued to press an economic argument in favor of a longer-term deal, Trump cut him off mid-sentence.

Instead, Trump sided with Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and Pelosi — "Chuck and Nancy," as he referred to them later. That deal was underscored by a photo taken through the window of the Oval Office showing an animated Schumer pointing his finger in Trump's face as the president smiled with his hands on Schumer's arms.

Schumer, said Pelosi, "could speak New York to the president."

Trump's budget director, Mick Mulvaney, asked if the president was annoyed with the GOP leadership, said, "He probably is."

"And believe me, as a Republican, so am I. As a citizen, I am too. I was promised that they would have repealed and replaced Obamacare by now," Mulvaney told Fox Business Network.

House Speaker Ryan played down the tensions, saying the deal that Trump cut with Democrats on spending, the debt and Hurricane Harvey made sense as the nation deals with two major storms.

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Ryan said the president didn't want to have "some partisan fight in the middle of the response."

While Ryan grimaced through his answers, Democrat Pelosi beamed as she told reporters that Trump had been acting at her request when he tweeted assurances Thursday that young immigrants won't be targeted for deportation during the six-month phase-out period for a program that shields them from deportation. The administration announced this week that it is rescinding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), though giving Congress six months to address the issue.

Trump also spoke by phone Thursday with McConnell, Ryan and Schumer. And Schumer met with him again, this time about possible federal involvement in a rail link between New York and New Jersey.

"The president is committed to working across the aisle and doing what is needed to best serve the American people," said spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

Trump later dined with Ryan at the White House, discussing the fall legislative agenda. The White House said after the dinner that Trump looked forward to "working together with Congress on bipartisan solutions."

Trump told associates he was delighted with the positive news coverage of his foray into bipartisanship and boasted of the good press in calls to Pelosi and Schumer. But some Republicans were anything but pleased.

"Yesterday we saw Washington's swamp continue to rise: Chuck Schumer wrote the art of the steal by taking hurricane relief hostage to guarantee a December showdown that favors Democratic spending priorities," said Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska.

Republican Rep. Bill Flores of Texas suggested that Trump would come to regret working with the Democratic leaders.

"There may be a feeling of euphoria today, but then there is always the hangover that comes the next day," he said.

And the No. 2 Senate GOP leader, John Cornyn of Texas, poured cold water on any idea that Trump's split with his party this week would affect his campaigning in 2018.

"He can count," Cornyn said. "And he'd much rather have (Republican Arizona Sen.) Jeff Flake, despite their disagreements, than he would have a Democrat and have us be in the minority."

Lemire reported from New York. Associated Press writers Julie Bykowicz, Ken Thomas, Alan Fram, Marcy Gordon and Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire> and Werner at <http://twitter.com/@ericawerner>

Late-season wildfires choke US cities, towns with smoke

By KEITH RIDLER, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Heavy winter snow and a very wet spring in the Western U.S. generated predictions the 2017 wildfire season would be tame. But it's shaping up to be one of the worst in U.S. history in land burned.

Across the region, smoky haze in cities and towns prevented people from going outside except for short periods and prompted potential bans of high school football games. In some areas where homes have burned, people have stayed in makeshift shelters for weeks.

Some of the biggest fires this year started in early September, when the wildfire season usually starts winding down.

A look at the impact of the fires across the region:

IDAHO

High school soccer games have been canceled this week because of smoky air — and now football stadiums could remain vacant for the biggest games this Friday night.

That's because Idaho air quality is so bad in some places that children and teens must be kept indoors and activities like football and soccer must be avoided, said the state Department of Health and Welfare.

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"There would be a lot of disappointed kids and disappointed parents if games are canceled," said Kathleen Tuck, spokeswoman for the Nampa School District in southwestern Idaho. "But our top priority is the safety of our students."

Northern Idaho residents are now breathing some of the worst air in the U.S. with an air quality indicator over 460 Thursday morning. A rating above 150 is considered unhealthy and levels above 300 are hazardous, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The smoky air hasn't affected Idaho's important farming sector because most crops have been harvested and the fall planting season has not started yet.

But "you look outside and it's like a thick fog. It's definitely impacting our sports, football and everything. Practices have been in the gym," said Kim Johnson, community relations manager at St. Mary's Hospital in the northern prairie city of Cottonwood.

Her sister last year was hospitalized with respiratory failure from wildfire smoke, recovered and "learned her lesson this year," Johnson said.

The hospital itself is serving as a safe haven for people having trouble breathing and who show up to hangout because it has air conditioning and a cafeteria.

"We've pretty much had people in every day," Johnson said.

MONTANA

Ted Linford doesn't like to leave the filtered air inside his home for long, but stepped outside Thursday for some bow practice just in case the hazardous air stubbornly clinging to the town of Seeley Lake lifts while there's still some hunting season left.

Seeley Lake, in a valley next to the Bob Marshall Wilderness, usually empties of summer tourists and fills up with hunters at this time of the year. But this year has been anything but normal because of the thick smoke surrounding the area.

"It's like a ghost town," Linford said. "It's more like winter, when you just see local people."

Air quality hurt by a wildfire burning less than 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from Seeley Lake got so bad that health officials last month recommended that people sleep elsewhere. Most of the town of 1,600 was evacuated when the fire threatened to spread from the ridge where it was burning.

Linford and his wife live just outside the evacuation zone and took in a family a few weeks ago.

The fire threat eased this week but the smoke persists. Linford and his wife installed heavy duty filters in their forced-air heating system three weeks ago and the white filters have turned gray.

He spends most of the day inside and gets winded if he spends more than a couple of hours outside.

"It's just getting really old," Linford said.

OREGON

Fires have already scorched an area half the size of the U.S. state of Rhode Island and the smoky haze is even bad in cities with no major wildfires nearby.

Pendleton, a small city in eastern Oregon, has had air quality that ranked as unhealthy or hazardous all week even though it is 165 miles (265 kilometers) away from a major fire burning in the state's famed Columbia Gorge.

Images of the city's downtown in an East Oregonian newspaper on Monday showed clear air and crisp visibility. A photo taken from the same vantage point Tuesday showed so much smoke that the outlines of buildings were barely visible.

Pendleton's residents are suffering from stinging eyes, sore throats, headaches and coughs. Visibility is reduced to three-quarters of a mile (1.2 kilometers) sometimes, said Klaus Hoehna, a regulatory specialist for the city's environmental programs. People are trying to stay inside and not exert themselves, he said.

"It's just a sea of smoke everywhere. If you take a deep breath you can feel it in your chest," Hoehna said. "If you had to run a 100-yard (91-meter) dash, you'd probably start hacking at the end of it."

Another fire in southwest Oregon that ranks among the biggest U.S. blazes forced school officials to delay the start of classes for children a week in the town of Brookings, a small coastal community near

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the California state line.

CALIFORNIA

Helena, once a 19th century mining camp, is on the Trinity River in far northwestern California and is typical of the many small, rural communities throughout the state enduring the severe fire season.

More than 30 square miles (78 square kilometers) of forest and 72 homes have burned since August and as many as 15 displaced residents have stayed each night at a Red Cross shelter at the First Baptist Church in nearby Weaverville.

"A lot of them don't have homes anymore," shelter worker Karen Hammer said Thursday.

There has been such a big assistance response that some places taking donations have asked donors to temporarily stop giving, Hammer said.

More than 9,500 firefighters were fighting two dozen large California wildfires and authorities warned of potential for more in the far north as thunderstorms produced dry lightning.

Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency in Madera, Mariposa and Tulare counties due to wildfires that have burned for several days.

WASHINGTON

Relief is finally in sight for Seattle metropolitan area residents who have suffered through days of smoky skies from wildfires.

Several large wildfires continue to burn in Washington state, but are not growing much. And the National Weather Service says air conditions should start getting better.

"It's a very gradual process right now," meteorologist Dustin Guy told The Seattle Times.

But eastern Washington state residents will likely have to wait longer for better air.

A lightning-caused wildfire east of Mount Rainier National Park stood at 68 square miles (176 square kilometers) on Thursday and was 8 percent contained by 370 firefighters. The fire prompted a closure of the east portion of Mount Rainier for fear flames would cross into the park and threaten hikers.

The state's largest fire is burning in northern wilderness and has crossed the border into Canada. It covers 164 square miles (424 square kilometers).

COLORADO

Smoke from wildfires has postponed softball tournament games and a youth mountain bike race in Steamboat Springs.

Steamboat Today reported that a 100-mile (160-kilometer) ultramarathon and a mountain bike race for Rocky Mountain Enduro Series are still scheduled for Friday through Sunday.

The ski resort and outdoors destination of Steamboat Springs is downwind from two wildfires burning in northwestern Colorado. But smoke and haze from fires burning in the Pacific Northwest that has been carried into Colorado is also shrouding the state.

Associated Press writers Gillian Flaccus in Portland, Oregon; Rebecca Boone in Boise, Idaho; Nicholas K. Geranios in Spokane, Washington; John Antczak in Los Angeles; and Matt Volz in Helena, Montana, contributed to this report.

Officers, medics sue over chemical plant fire after Harvey

By FRANK BAJAK, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Seven sheriff's deputies and medical emergency responders who say they were sickened by a chemical fire at a plant outside Houston that flooded during Harvey sued the owner Thursday for gross negligence, seeking \$1 million in damages.

A state judge granted a temporary restraining order to prevent plant owner Arkema Inc. from removing evidence or altering the scene, said Kimberly Spurlock, the attorney for the plaintiffs. She said a hearing

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was set for Sept. 22.

The suit alleges Arkema failed to properly store the estimated 18 tons of chemicals that burned or prepared for a major flood even though it was a foreseeable event.

Record rains from Harvey flooded the plant 25 miles northeast of Houston with six feet of water, according to a report Arkema filed with the state. The storm knocked out power, and therefore the refrigeration needed to keep the chemicals stable.

Spurlock called Arkema's preparations "woefully inadequate" and questioned why the first responders did not know what chemicals were blowing up or the risks.

"They weren't told to wear masks, They weren't told to go in there with safety equipment and they're suffering as a result," Spurlock said.

Arkema said in a statement that it will "vigorously defend" the lawsuit.

"We reject any suggestion that we failed to warn of the danger of breathing the smoke from the fires at our site or that we ever misled anyone," the company said.

The chemical compounds — organic peroxides used to make a gamut of products from plastics to paints — became unstable and exploded in flames more than 30 feet high early on Aug. 31, spewing an acrid plume of black smoke.

The Harris County sheriff's deputies who sued were manning the 1.5-mile (2.41-kilometer) perimeter of an evacuation zone set two days earlier after plant workers abandoned the facility, warning of impending disaster.

The suit says they doubled over vomiting, gasped for air and "began to fall ill in the middle of the road."

No one from Arkema warned of toxic fumes, it says, and when medical personnel arrived to help they were overcome "even before exiting their vehicle."

Some deputies jumped inside their vehicles and drove themselves to the hospital.

Later that day, local authorities told reporters 15 officers were treated for respiratory irritation and released.

The last of the organic peroxides were ignited Sunday by fire officials in a controlled burn. Neighbors were allowed to return home the following day.

Neither Arkema, Texas nor the federal Environmental Protection Agency have released results of air monitoring done by the EPA during the fire. Texas environmental regulators have declined to provide The Associated Press with a list of the Arkema plant's chemical inventory, saying they are confidential under the state homeland security act.

A 2016 analysis led by Texas A&M University researchers identified Arkema's facility as one of biggest risks in a corridor with the country's greatest concentration of petrochemical plants.

In accident plans Arkema submitted to the EPA in 2014, executives identified hurricanes and power loss as potential hazards. Yet the plans, which were supposed to address worst-case scenarios, didn't explain what Arkema would do if faced with either.

Texas' environmental commission penalized the plant at least three times.

In June 2006, Arkema failed to prevent unauthorized emissions during a two-hour warehouse fire. In February, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined Arkema more than \$90,000 for 10 serious safety violations found during an inspection.

Associated Press writers Reese Dunklin in Dallas and Michael Biesecker in Washington contributed to this report.

HURRICANE NEWSLETTER — Get the best of the AP's all-formats reporting on Irma and Harvey in your inbox: <http://apne.ws/ahYQGtb>

Harvey's floodwaters give way to festering piles of garbage

By BRIAN MELLEY and PAUL J. WEBER, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Roiling waters in the streets have given way to festering piles of garbage on the curbs. Harvey's record-setting rains created heaps of ruined possessions that now line entire neighborhoods, some nearly up to the rooftops of the homes that were swamped. All that sodden drywall, flooring, furniture, clothing and toys adds up to an estimated 8 million cubic yards in Houston alone, enough to fill the Texans' football stadium two times over.

Texas and city officials have pledged to make a priority of the monumental task of cleaning it all up, though they stopped short of giving specific timelines, mindful that such cleanups have dragged on longer than anticipated after other major storms.

"We want to get it removed as quickly as possible," Texas Gov. Greg Abbott told reporters Thursday.

For now, the piles big and small have become evidence, of sorts, of the losses from more than 200,000 damaged homes up and down the Texas coast.

Not only are the heaps eyesores, but they are starting to give off a musty funk. And the longer they sit, officials warn, they could become havens for mold, not to mention snakes, rats, skunks and other critters. The junk could also turn into projectiles if, heaven forbid, another hurricane strikes.

"I just can't stand it anymore," said Peggy Lanigan, who took a break from clearing out her Houston home that flooded for the first time in 22 years.

The city is pushing to complete a "first pass" of debris removal within 30 days, said Derek Mebane, deputy assistant director of Houston's solid waste department. He said collecting subsequent piles could take months and warned that if Hurricane Irma causes extensive damage in Florida, the cleanup in Houston could be slowed if resources are diverted. While local crews do the pickups, FEMA covers 90 percent of the costs.

As it stands now, clearing even just one Houston street can take days. Some piles are so massive that a single stack of debris from one home can fill an entire truck.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner this week pleaded for help, asking for anyone with heavy equipment suitable for debris removal to reach out.

The trash will go into the city's existing landfills. San Antonio trucks have been sent in as part of an agreement between the two cities to help each other in disasters, the mayor said.

Soon after the storm hit, state officials suspended some environmental rules on waste removal that they said could impede the pace of disaster recovery, which raised concerns among environmentalists.

Trash looters are another concern. Some homeowners spray-painted messages on mattresses to leave them alone because the debris is needed for insurance claims. Others posted signs saying they were just drying out items they intended to save.

Mike Martinez said a king-sized mattress that had been floating in his bedroom days earlier was taken from his yard along with a La-Z-Boy sectional couch. The \$5,000 sofa still looked brand new after the flood but was like a sponge if you sat on it. He couldn't understand why anyone would take it because it's contaminated with floodwater and probably mold.

"It was like a parade of people going by looking at the devastation," Martinez said. "Then there was a parade of people picking up the garbage."

Overtaken sofas, listing mattresses and toppled chairs dominate the rubble while smaller, more intimate items hide in the cracks.

The piles also created a sort of archaeological record of the households from which they came. There's a moldering red cooler, a beat-up blue kiddie pool, a pornography stash spilling onto the street. Brand-new golf balls, a full jar of mangoes and a twisted artificial Christmas tree. A book titled "The Inheritance of Loss" seemed particularly poignant.

Sherry Blatt's main concern is that it could be a long wait before the mess is carted away. "This is too long," she said. "Once all the stuff is gone, I'll feel safe."

Almost on cue, a garbage truck rumbled around the corner. But it wasn't there for flood debris — only for the trash that hadn't been picked up in a week and was adding its own odor to the mix.

Weber reported from Austin, Texas. Associated Press writer Juan A. Lozano in Houston contributed to this report.

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

Get the best of the AP's all-formats reporting on Irma and Harvey in your inbox: <http://apne.ws/ahYQGtb> .

Gene Michael, architect of 1990s Yankees dynasty, dies at 79

By RONALD BLUM, AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Gene Michael, the slick-fielding shortstop nicknamed Stick who went on to manage the New York Yankees and then as an executive built a power that won four World Series in five years, died Thursday. He was 79.

Michael had a heart attack and died at his home in Oldsmar, Florida, his wife, Joette, said.

At 6-foot-2 and about 180 pounds in his playing days, Michael hit just .229 with 15 home runs in 10 big league seasons, seven with the Yankees from 1968-74 in one of the worst eras in team history. He was known for pulling off the hidden ball trick, which he was said to have done five times.

He made a far bigger impact during two terms as manager, two as general manager and then an adviser relied on by Brian Cashman, the team's GM since 1998. He also managed the Chicago Cubs for two seasons.

"A baseball man to his core," baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement. "Stick was vital to the franchise's renaissance in the '90s, balancing his incredible scouting intuition with analytical thinking that is prevalent throughout the game today."

A Yankees lifer, Michael maintained durability during George Steinbrenner's decades of tumult. During his second term as general manager, Michael put together the core of a roster that won World Series titles in 1996 and from 1998-2000.

"He was able to project so well what players would become, and he did it through sitting and watching with his eyes." Yankees manager Joe Girardi said. "He just had a great feel for the game."

After watching the Yankees fall short in the 1980s with high-priced free agents, Michael preached patience with youth and nurtured Derek Jeter, Bernie Williams and other prospects. He installed an organization philosophy of patience at the plate to run up pitch counts.

"Gene Michael was not only largely responsible for the success of the Yankees organization, but also for my development as a player," Jeter said in a statement.

Michael gave Buck Showalter his first major league managing job. Showalter, now Baltimore's manager, called Michael "blatantly honest" and the "best baseball guy that I ever saw."

Showalter also said Michael "never missed on an infielder."

"Jeter had made like 40-some errors, but he tells me this guy is going to be an All-Star shortstop. He said he's got a little footwork issue," Showalter recalled. "How do you project those things and stand by them?"

Michael also acquired key veterans who contributed to the 1996 title, including Paul O'Neill, Jimmy Key, Wade Boggs and David Cone. He promoted a young staffer to assistant general manager. Cashman went on to become general manager for two decades.

"He was both a friend and mentor to me," Cashman said in a statement. "And I relied upon his advice and guidance throughout my career."

Michael quit as general manager after the 1995 season and became a key adviser.

"Stick was a pillar of this organization for decades," Yankees owner Hal Steinbrenner said in a statement. "He knew the game of baseball like few others did, and was always willing and excited to talk about it with anyone in earshot. His contributions to the Yankees over the years have been immeasurable."

Michael signed with Pittsburgh before the 1959 season out of Kent State. He made his big league debut in July 1966, and then was traded after the season with third baseman Bob Bailey to the Dodgers for Maury Wills, a five-time All-Star shortstop.

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After one season in Los Angeles, he was purchased by the Yankees. He arrived for Mickey Mantle's final season and got to pitch three shutout innings against the California Angels in a lopsided loss that ended an August doubleheader. He was released in 1975, the year before the Yankees made it back to the World Series led by Thurman Munson.

Michael played a final season with Detroit. He signed with Boston ahead of the 1976 season, but was released by the Red Sox in May without playing in a big league game and joined the Yankees as a coach for the rest of the season. He became an administrative assistant during the next two years, when George Steinbrenner was at his bombastic height, and then managed the Yankees' Triple-A Columbus Clippers to the 1979 regular and postseason International League titles.

Michael replaced Cedric Tallis as general manager after the 1979 season. When Dick Howser led the Yankees to the AL East title and a 103 wins in his first season as a manager but was forced out by Steinbrenner when the team was swept by Kansas City in the playoffs, Michael replaced Howser.

He led the team to a 34-22 record before players struck, but the Yankees started just 14-12 when they returned and Steinbrenner fired Michael and replaced him with Bob Lemon.

Michael was the Yankees' third-base coach from 1984-86, leaving in June 1986 to replace Jim Frey as the Chicago Cubs manager. They went 46-56 and were 68-68 in 1987 when he quit on Sept. 8.

He was back with the Yankees as third-base coach in 1988 and was a scout when Steinbrenner reinstated him as general manager on Aug. 20, 1990, the last day before Steinbrenner started serving a suspension from baseball that stretched until May 1993.

Holding the job until October 1995, Michael promoted Williams to the major league roster, nurtured the rise of Jeter, Mariano Rivera, Jorge Posada and Andy Pettitte through the farm system.

"Gene Michael always supported me when I was a young up-and-coming player and, despite some struggles along the way, always believed that I would become a significant part of the Yankees organization," Williams said in a statement. "I never forgot that."

After Steinbrenner returned, Michael quit as general manager after the 1995 season and was followed by Bob Watson, who quit before the 1998 season and was replaced by Cashman.

Spending much of the year in Florida, where he often played golf, Michael served as vice president of major league scouting from 1996-2002. He then became vice president and adviser until 2006, when his title changed to vice president and senior adviser.

The Yankees will wear black armbands on their jerseys for the rest of this season.

In addition to his wife, Michael is survived by sons Mark and Matthew and daughters Sandra and Haley.

AP Sports Writer David Ginsburg in Baltimore contributed to this report.

Ex-Trump strategist: White House aides must defend president

By CATHERINE LUCEY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's ex-strategist is blasting White House aides who publicly distance themselves from the president's response to Charlottesville — yet stick it out in the West Wing.

Steve Bannon, in a CBS interview weeks after he was pushed out from the administration, singled out Trump economic adviser Gary Cohn, saying, "If you don't like what he's doing and you don't agree with it, you have an obligation to resign."

Cohn, in an interview with The Financial Times, had sharply denounced Trump for saying that "many sides" were to blame for the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, and criticized the administration's response to incident.

Bannon's take: "You can tell him, 'Hey, maybe you can do it a better way.' But if you're going to break, then resign. If you're going to break with him, resign."

Asked if Cohn should have quit, Bannon said: "Absolutely."

Bannon, a favorite among the farther-right in the GOP, was jettisoned from his post in August after a turbulent seven months in the West Wing. He returned to Breitbart News, which he led before joining

Trump's campaign.

Calling himself a "street fighter," Bannon said "that's why Donald Trump and I get along so well. I'm going to be his wing man outside for the entire time."

In the interview, he accused the Republican establishment of trying to "nullify the 2016 election," identifying Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell "and, to a degree, Paul Ryan," as trying to prevent Trump's "populist, economic nationalist agenda to be implemented." He said they'd be held accountable if they don't support Trump.

Bannon also used the "60 Minutes" interview to criticize the Roman Catholic church, after church leaders denounced Trump's decision to end a program that protected hundreds of thousands of young immigrants from deportation. He said bishops "need illegal aliens to fill the churches."

Bannon, who is Catholic, said the bishops, "have an economic interest in unlimited immigration, unlimited illegal immigration. ... This is not doctrine at all."

That drew a sharp response from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which said it was "preposterous to claim that justice for immigrants isn't central to Catholic teaching."

"Our pro-immigration stance is based on fidelity to God's word and honors the American dream. For anyone to suggest that it is out of sordid motives of statistics or financial gain is outrageous and insulting," said James Rogers, a spokesman for the conference.

Kevin Appleby, who oversaw migration policies for the U.S. bishops for 16 years, said their position is, in fact, rooted in "2,000 years of church teaching."

"For them, this is ultimately a justice issue," said Appleby, now with the Center for Migration Studies, a think tank and advocacy organization started by a Catholic religious order.

AP Religion Writer Rachel Zoll in New York contributed to this report.

Pope urges forgiveness in Colombia after decades of conflict

By NICOLE WINFIELD and JOSHUA GOODMAN, Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Pope Francis urged young Colombians on Thursday to take the lead in promoting forgiveness to help their country heal from a half-century of conflict, saying they should "look to the future without the burden of hatred" that their elders often carry.

From the halls of the presidential palace to the green hills of Bogota's Simon Bolivar park, Francis brought his message of reconciliation to a country still bitterly divided over the peace deal with leftist rebels that is seeking to end Latin America's longest-running armed rebellion. And he demanded that its leaders now address the gross inequalities that sparked the conflict to begin with.

"Let us not forget that inequality is the root of social ills," he told a crowd at Bogota's presidential palace that included disabled children and soldiers with amputated limbs.

While his appeal for forgiveness may be hard for some to swallow, Francis was nevertheless given a rock star's welcome on his first full day in Colombia. Young choir members abandoned their positions in the palace courtyard and threw their arms around him as he arrived. In Bogota's main Plaza Bolivar, thousands of young people interrupted him repeatedly with cheers. And officials estimated 1.3 million people flocked to Bogota's main park for his open-air Mass, far more than the 700,000 expected.

History's first Latin American pope took the crowds, interruptions, protocol hiccups and security breaches in stride, seemingly relishing in the adoration of one of the continent's most staunchly Roman Catholic countries.

His message though was stern, urging the country's elite and ordinary to resist the temptation for vengeance, the "corrupting darkness" of self-interest, and instead build bridges to help the nation heal.

"The solitude of always being at loggerheads has been familiar for decades, and its smell has lingered for a hundred years," he said, alluding to the most famous work of Colombia's Nobel laureate, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. "We do not want any type of violence whatsoever to restrict or destroy one more life."

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One year after the government signed a peace accord with rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, better known by its Spanish acronym FARC, the guns have fallen silent and 7,000 rebels are transitioning back to civilian life. But Colombians remain badly divided over the accord, with conservative opponents seeing it as too generous for the guerrillas who were behind scores of atrocities during the conflict.

In all, the fighting left more than 250,000 people dead, 60,000 missing and millions more displaced.

Francis is expected to press his call for forgiveness further on Friday when he travels to Villavincencio, south of Bogota, where he is to preside over a meeting of reconciliation between victims of the conflict and those who victimized them.

"It's a great message for all of the country, especially because of the moment we are living in," said Maria Juliana Higuera, one of more than 20,000 people who packed Bogota's central Plaza Bolivar for a papal blessing. "It's very important to us as Catholics."

Francis appealed to Colombia's youth to take the lead in promoting forgiveness, saying young people more than adults are able to "leave behind what has hurt us and look to the future without the burden of hatred."

"You make us see the wider world which stands before us, the whole of Colombia that wishes to grow and continue its development," he said.

Looking ahead, Francis insisted that Colombia now needed to enact "just laws" to resolve the structural causes of poverty and inequality to "overcome the conflicts that have torn apart this nation for decades."

The FARC formed as a Marxist army in the mid-1960s to overthrow Colombia's economic and social system and open the way to redistributing land.

While the first year of the accord's implementation has seen the FARC disarm, it also has been marked by the state's failures to bring services to hard-to-reach communities where the government has historically had little presence and where rebels are beginning a new chapter as civilians. Former guerrillas arriving at many of the 26 demobilization zones found little more than fields of mud, and months later many remain living in tents rather than the buildings with running water and electricity that the government promised.

Colombia is the most unequal country in terms of land distribution in Latin America, itself the worst region in the world. Large agricultural holdings of more than 500 hectares represent around 0.4 percent of all farms in Colombia but control more than 67 percent of the productive land, according to an Oxfam report last year.

The peace deal and an earlier land reform are supposed to redistribute the land and compensate victims driven from their homesteads by illegal armed groups. But authorities overseeing the process have been slow to hand out titles, and peasant farmers in far-flung regions face numerous threats asserting their rights. Last year, 59 human rights defenders — many of them land rights activists — were killed yet only a handful of their murders ever solved, according to the United Nations.

President Juan Manuel Santos, who won last year's Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end the conflict, urged Colombians to let go of lingering resentments.

"Silencing the guns is worthless if we remain armed in our hearts," he told the crowd. "Ending the war is worthless if we still see each other as enemies."

In between his main events Thursday, Francis met with bishops from around the region, including his first encounter with clergy from neighboring Venezuela who are looking for the pope to demand accountability from their country's socialist government and deliver a message of hope to that nation torn by political and economic turmoil.

Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino, archbishop of Caracas, said the situation was "truly desperate," with people eating garbage and dying for lack of medicine. "So we want to remind the pope of this again and especially the serious political situation because the government is doing everything possible to establish a state system, totalitarian and Marxist," he said.

Associated Press writers Trisha Thomas, Cesar Garcia and Juan Zamorano contributed.

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Asian shares mostly lower on hurricane, North Korea worries

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares mostly slipped Friday as worries remained about the damage from Hurricane Irma in the U.S., as well as lingering fears about ballistic missile launches and nuclear weapons in North Korea.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 slid 0.3 percent to 19,340.25 in early trading, as GDP data that got revised lower also dampened sentiments. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 0.2 percent to 5,676.10. South Korea's Kospi lost 0.2 percent to 2,341.71. Hong Kong's Hang Seng added nearly 0.6 percent to 27,673.34, while the Shanghai Composite was little changed at 3,366.80.

JAPAN ECONOMY: The Japanese economy grew at a slower pace in the April-June quarter, not the surprisingly strong spurt indicated by an earlier estimate, according to revised government data. The Cabinet Office said the gross domestic product or GDP — the total value of a nation's goods and services — grew at an annualized rate of 2.5 percent. That second preliminary reading is a dramatic adjustment from the first preliminary reading, released last month, of 4.0 percent growth.

HURRICANE DAMAGE: U.S. insurance companies' shares have plunged as investors weigh the prospects of big losses caused by Hurricane Irma, which has slammed the north Caribbean and is projected to reach Florida this weekend.

WALL STREET: The Standard & Poor's 500 index edged down 0.44 points to 2,465.10. The Dow Jones industrial average dipped 22.86 points, or 0.1 percent, to 21,784.78. The Nasdaq composite rose 4.55 points, or 0.1 percent, to 6,397.87.

THE QUOTE: "Anxieties ahead of Saturday's North Korea founders day and another potential missile launch appear to have kept investors off the South Korea and Japan bourses this morning. Meanwhile, the final figures from Japan's Q2 GDP had also significantly dampened the Japanese market," said Jingyi Pan, markets strategist at IG.

EUROPE ECONOMY: The European Central Bank left its key interest rates and bond-purchase stimulus program unchanged, but investors expect the bank to start reducing its stimulus program soon as the European economy continues to improve.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude added 6 cents to \$49.15 a barrel. It fell 7 cents to \$49.09 a barrel in New York Thursday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, gained 12 cents to \$54.61 a barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The dollar is falling after the European Central Bank raised its economic growth forecast for the region this year. The euro strengthened to \$1.2024 from \$1.1925. The dollar fell to 108.42 yen from 109.08 yen late Thursday.

AP Markets Writer Marley Jay contributed to this report and can be reached at <http://twitter.com/MarleyJayAP>

His work can be found at <https://apnews.com/search/marley%20jay>

AP Business Writer Alex Veiga contributed to this story from Los Angeles.

AP Business Writer Yuri Kageyama can be reached at <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

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

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, Sept. 8, the 251st day of 2017. There are 114 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On September 8, 1892, an early version of "The Pledge of Allegiance," written by Francis Bellamy, appeared in "The Youth's Companion." It went: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which

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it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

On this date:

In 1504, Michelangelo’s towering marble statue of David was unveiled to the public in Florence, Italy.

In 1761, Britain’s King George III married Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz a few hours after meeting her for the first time.

In 1900, Galveston, Texas, was struck by a hurricane that killed an estimated 8,000 people.

In 1921, Margaret Gorman, 16, of Washington, D.C., was crowned the first “Miss America” in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

In 1935, Sen. Huey P. Long, D-La., was shot and mortally wounded inside the Louisiana State Capitol; he died two days later. (The assailant was identified as Dr. Carl Weiss, who was gunned down by Long’s bodyguards.)

In 1941, the 900-day Siege of Leningrad by German forces began during World War II.

In 1951, a peace treaty with Japan was signed by 49 nations in San Francisco.

In 1966, the science-fiction series “Star Trek” premiered on NBC; the situation comedy “That Girl,” starring Marlo Thomas, debuted on ABC.

In 1974, President Gerald R. Ford granted a “full, free, and absolute pardon” to former President Richard Nixon covering his entire term in office.

In 1985, Pete Rose of the Cincinnati Reds tied Ty Cobb’s career record for hits, singling for hit number 4,191 during a game against the Cubs in Chicago.

In 1987, former Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart admitted during an interview on ABC’s “Nightline” that he had committed adultery, and said he had no plans to resume his White House bid.

In 1994, USAir Flight 427, a Boeing 737, crashed into a ravine as it was approaching Pittsburgh International Airport, killing all 132 people on board.

Ten years ago: Sheriff’s deputies in Logan County, West Virginia, removed Megan Williams, a 20-year-old black woman, from a house in Big Creek, where she’d endured what authorities described as days of torture. (Seven white men and women pleaded guilty in connection with the case. In a strange twist, Williams recanted her accusations in 2009; however, one of the defendants, Frankie Brewster, said, “It did happen.”) Top-ranked Justine Henin (EH’-nen) overwhelmed Svetlana Kuznetsova (svet-LAH’-nah kooz-NET’-so-vah) 6-1, 6-3 to win her second U.S. Open women’s title and seventh Grand Slam championship.

Five years ago: Strong storms pummeled the East Coast, spawning a pair of tornadoes in the New York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, while temperatures at Washington Dulles International Airport plunged 25 degrees in one hour, falling from 89 degrees to 64. A suicide bomber struck near NATO headquarters in Kabul, killing at least six Afghan civilians in an attack that officials blamed on the Haqqani network.

One year ago: California and federal regulators fined Wells Fargo a combined \$185 million, alleging the bank’s employees illegally opened millions of unauthorized accounts for their customers in order to meet aggressive sales goals. U.S. aviation safety officials took the extraordinary step of warning airline passengers not to turn on or charge a new-model Samsung smartphone, the Galaxy Note 7, during flights following numerous reports of the devices catching fire. Serena Williams was upset in the U.S. Open semifinals for the second year in a row, beaten 6-2, 7-6 (5) by 10th-seeded Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic. Greta Zimmer Friedman, identified as the woman in an iconic photo seen kissing an ecstatic sailor in Times Square celebrating the end of World War II, died in Richmond, Virginia, at age 92.

Today’s Birthdays: Ventriloquist Willie Tyler is 77. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., is 76. Actor Alan Feinstein is 76. Pop singer Sal Valentino (The Beau Brummels) is 75. Author Ann Beattie is 70. Secretary of Defense James Mattis is 67. Cajun singer Zachary Richard (ree-SHARD’) is 67. Musician Will Lee is 65. Actress Heather Thomas is 60. Singer Aimee Mann is 57. Pop musician David Steele (Fine Young Cannibals) is 57. Actor Thomas Kretschmann is 55. Rhythm-and-blues singer Marc Gordon (Levert) is 53. Gospel singer Darlene Zschech (chehk) is 52. Alternative country singer Neko (NEE’-koh) Case is 47. TV personality Brooke Burke-Charvet is 46. Actor Martin Freeman is 46. Actor David Arquette is 46. TV-radio personality Kennedy is 45. Rock musician Richard Hughes (Keane) is 42. Actor Larenz Tate is 42. Actor Nathan

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Corddry is 40. Rhythm-and-blues singer Pink is 38. Singer-songwriter Eric Hutchinson is 37. Actor Jonathan Taylor Thomas is 36. Rapper Wiz Khalifa is 30. Dance music artist AVICII is 28. Actor Gaten Matarazzo (TV: "Stranger Things") is 15.

Thought for Today: "Censorship is the height of vanity." — Martha Graham, American modern dance pioneer (1893-1991).