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25

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes and gravy, carrots, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cereal, yogurt, fruit, milk and juice.

School Lunch: BBQ Chicken sandwiches, fries, cucumber with dip, fruit.

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

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Cross Country: Groton Invite, 4 p.m., at Olive Grove Golf Course

JV Football: at Roncalli, 5 p.m.

Boys Golf: Regions at Dell Rapids.

26

Senior Menu: Chili, cornbread, coleslaw, lime pear Jell-O.

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

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans, broccoli with dip, fruit.

Soccer: First Round Playoffs

8th Football: at Aberdeen Central, 4 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study at 10 a.m.

Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Ladies Bible Study, 10 a.m.

27

Senior Menu: Baked chicken breast, baked potato with sour cream, green beans, chocolate cake, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: French toast, sausage links, fruit, milk and juice.

School Lunch: Meatballs, mashed potatoes, cooked carrots, romaine salad, fruit.

Emmanuel: Confirmation, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Coffee fellowship, 9 a.m.

Lions Bar Bingo: 6:30 p.m. at the Groton Legion.

Christian & Missionary Alliance: 7 p.m.: Program for children up to sixth grade, youth group for 7th-12th grade, adult Bible Study.

Official Notices

- Brown County (updated 8-31)**
- Frederick Area School (updated 8-29)**
- Groton City (updated 8-29)**
- Groton Area School (updated 8-29)**
- Westport Town (updated 8-21-17)**
- Other Notices (updated 8-21)**
- Frederick Town (Updated 8-15)**
- Groton Area School (updated 8-7)**
- Claremont Town Official Notices Book**

Open: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

The cardboard/paper
recycling trailer at the school is **Open**

Groton Chiropractic Clinic

Carol McFarland-Kutter, D.C.
1205 N 1st St., Groton 397-8204

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"BLESSED ARE THOSE
WHO CAN GIVE WITHOUT
REMEMBERING
AND TAKE WITHOUT
FORGETTING."

-AUTHOR UNKNOWN



Chicken Soup
for the Soul.

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

When people talk about us from the Midwest, the most common phrase tossed around is “Minnesota nice”. I’m not sure those in Florida believe that anymore. The Minnesota Vikings welcomed the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to town Sunday, then proceeded to dominate them in every phase of the game – although I’m sure they did it in a nice way.

Vikings quarterback Sam Bradford was out for the second straight week, so it was once again the Case Keenum show. Keenum seems to always play great against the Bucs, and he saved his best for Sunday, throwing for three touchdowns and a career high 369 yards. Stefon Diggs was the biggest beneficiary of Keenum’s throws, as he caught eight passes for 173 yards and two touchdowns. Adam Thielen got in on the action as well, catching five passes for 98 yards. Keenum’s 369 yards were the most by a Vikings QB since week 16 of last year against the Green Bay Packers, when Sam Bradford threw for 382 (although he needed 50 pass attempts to do it, compared to Keenum’s 33 attempts on Sunday).

The Vikings defense played lights out against the explosive Buccaneers offense. For the past couple seasons the Vikings defense’s Achilles heel has been stopping the run, but they held Tampa Bay to only 26 rushing yards – the lowest total the Vikings have given up since week three of the 2011 season. The Vikings did give up 328 passing yards and two touchdowns to Jameis Winston, but they also picked him off three times. The Vikings fearsome defensive line was only able to bring Winston down for a sack twice, but they were constantly putting pressure on him and making him uncomfortable in the pocket.

The biggest improvement for the Vikings this season is clearly the offensive line. While they are far from perfect, they are much improved over last season. The Bucs have a good defense, so it’s impressive the Vikings offensive line didn’t allow a single sack on the day. The line was also opening holes for Dalvin Cook, allowing him to run for 97 yards and a touchdown on 27 carries.

Speaking of Cook, he continues to make plays all over the field. Not only did he accumulate 97 yards on the ground, he also caught all five of the passes thrown his direction for 72 yards. Adrian Peterson was one of the best pure running backs in NFL history, but Dalvin Cook is proving he is a more complete player. Not only can he hit open running lanes with authority, but he can also catch the ball and pass protect. He is already a special player, and he should only get better as time goes on.

Looking ahead, the Minnesota Vikings will host the Detroit Lions on Sunday, October 1. The game will start at noon Central Time. Both teams are 2-1, with the Lions coming off a heart-breaking loss against the Atlanta Falcons. The Vikings lost both games to the Lions last season, but if you look over the last 10 times these teams have played, they are 5-5. It remains to be seen if Sam Bradford will play in week 4, but if he can’t, I’m confident the coaching staff will come up with another masterful game plan that will give the Vikings the best chance to succeed with Case Keenum under center. Skol!

Have any questions or comments? Reach out to me on Facebook ([facebook.com/SkolJWright](https://www.facebook.com/SkolJWright)) or on Twitter (@SkolJWright)

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All auto owners!

Save \$2-\$4 /tank

& grow your local economy
by choosing low carbon

Super Premium E30's

94 octane, more power,
same mileage, fewer
carbon deposits, lower
maintenance costs,
slashed benzene & related
genotoxic, carcinogenic
tailpipe emissions;

*see sdfu.org's E30 tab for
info, E30 prices\locations.

***Farmers Union's**

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

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We are Hiring Nurses – RN or LPN,
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CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER

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

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Today in Weather History

September 25, 1981: A late September tornado touched down briefly 14 miles west of Pierre during the early evening hours with no damage occurring.

September 25, 1996: An early fall storm over the Black Hills of northeast Wyoming and western South Dakota re-acquainted area residents with their winter driving techniques. Snow totals ranged from 4 to 8 inches. U.S. Highway 385, south of Deadwood South Dakota, was temporarily closed after a semi-truck jack-knifed on Strawberry Hill. Numerous minor accidents were reported in the Black Hills due to slick roads. Heavy wet snow closed the Needles Highway and Iron Mountain Road in the central/southern Black Hills until snowplows could clear the roads.

1848: The Great Gale of 1848 was the most severe hurricane to affect Tampa Bay and is one of two major hurricanes to make landfall in the area. This storm produced the highest storm tide ever experienced in Tampa Bay when the water rose 15 feet in six to eight hours.

1939 - A west coast hurricane moved onshore south of Los Angeles bringing unprecedented rains along the southern coast of California. Nearly five and a half inches of rain drenched Los Angeles during a 24 hour period. The hurricane caused two million dollars damage, mostly to structures along the coast and to crops, and claimed 45 lives at sea. "El Cordonazo" produced 5.66 inches of rain at Los Angeles and 11.6 inches of rain at Mount Wilson, both records for the month of September. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Hurricane Emily crossed the island of Bermuda during the early morning. Emily, moving northeast at 45 mph, produced wind gusts to 115 mph at Kindley Field. The thirty-five million dollars damage inflicted by Emily made it the worst hurricane to strike Bermuda since 1948. Parts of Michigan and Wisconsin experienced their first freeze of the autumn. Snow and sleet were reported in the Sheffield and Sutton areas of northeastern Vermont at midday. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)








1988 - Low pressure off the Northern Pacific Coast brought rain and gale force winds to the coast of Washington State. Fair weather prevailed across most of the rest of the nation. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Twenty-three cities in the south central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Topeka KS with a reading of 33 degrees, and Binghamton NY with a low of 25 degrees. Showers and thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. drenched Atlanta GA with 4.87 inches of rain, their sixth highest total of record for any given day. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)


1998: Four hurricanes were spinning simultaneously in the Atlantic basin: Georges, Ivan, Jeanne, and Karl. That was the first time this had happened since 1893.

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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
						
20%	50%	20%				
Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Slight Chance Showers	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny
High: 55 °F	Low: 44 °F	High: 59 °F	Low: 41 °F	High: 70 °F	Low: 46 °F	High: 69 °F

Cool Today
then a Slow Warm Up through Thursday



Wednesday
around 70°

Tuesday
around 60°

Thursday
66-73°

Today
50s

Friday
60s


THE Work Week forecast

High Temperatures
warmest across central South Dakota

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/Aberdeen

Updated: 9/25/2017 5:25 AM Central

Published on: 09/25/2017 at 5:26 AM



Scattered showers will return to much of the region by late afternoon, and continue into early Tuesday as an upper level disturbance nears from the southwest. The best chance of rainfall, totaling around a quarter of an inch, will be across far eastern portions of South Dakota and western Minnesota. Dry weather will then be the rule Tuesday afternoon through the rest of the work week. Look for afternoon temperatures to slowly warm to near seasonal values by Thursday.

Broton Daily Independent

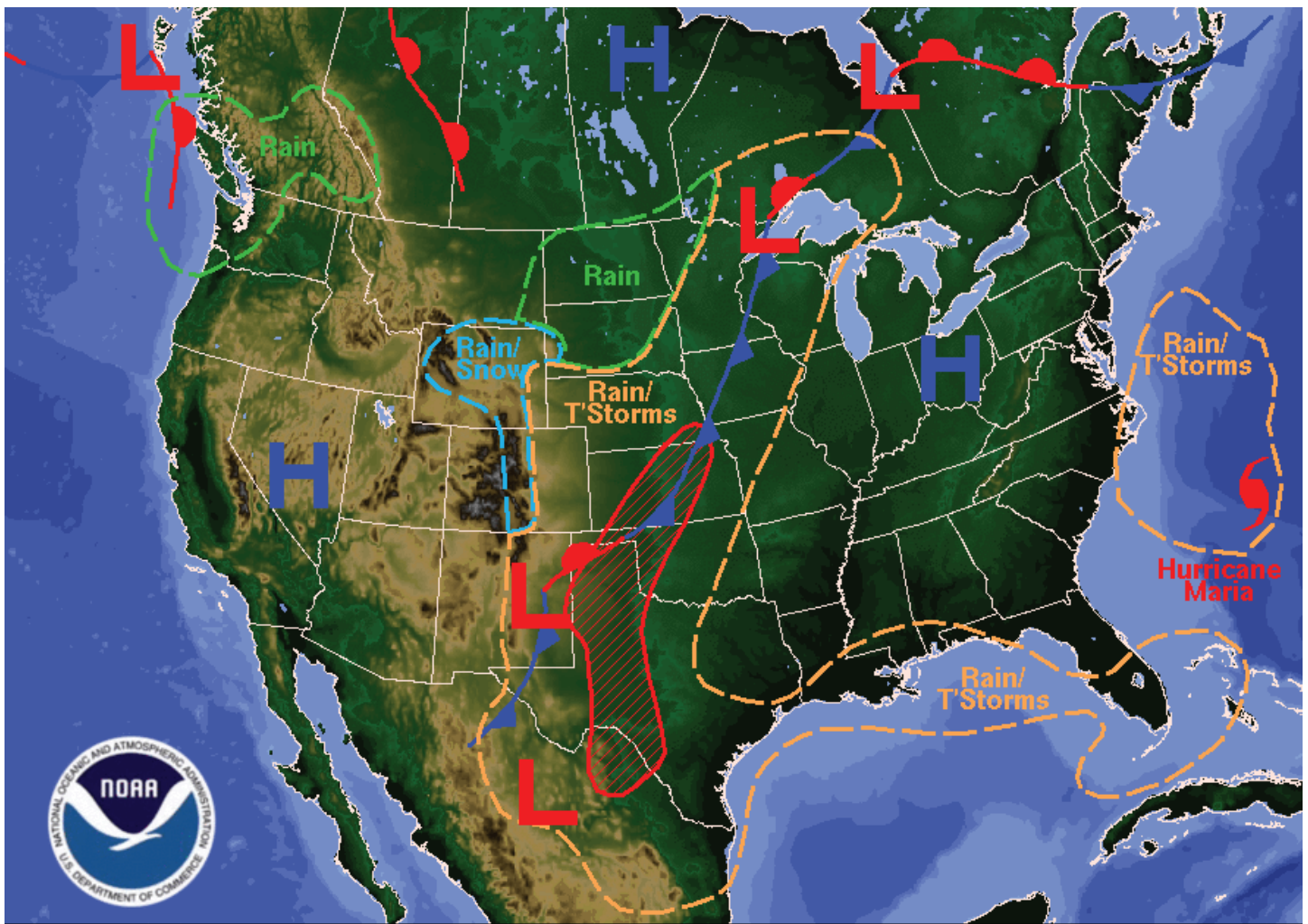
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 55.6
Low Outside Temp: 50.5
High Gust: 14
Precip: 0.25

Today's Info

Record High: 95° in 1938
Record Low: 19° in 1926
Average High: 68°F
Average Low: 42°F
Average Precip in Sept: 1.83
Precip to date in Sept: 3.32
Average Precip to date: 18.12
Precip Year to Date: 12.84
Sunset Tonight: 7:24 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:26 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Mon, Sep 25, 2017, issued 6:41 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds 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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ATURN NOW!

"At the next intersection make a complete 'u' turn and follow the direction to return to your original route," said a calm voice wanting to correct the driver who failed to follow the "commands" coming from his GPS. "Then, in five hundred feet, make a left turn and resume your route." It was not normal to listen to an unknown and unfamiliar voice to provide information that would direct a driver to a destination he had never seen before.

Following directions from an unknown source is risky. Trust becomes a critical – if not the most critical – factor. How do we know if the person who is giving us advice is credible and trustworthy? Is that person looking out for our best interests or wanting to play a game with our life in the balance? No doubt all of us, at one time or another, have found ourselves on a route that was wrong – either by being careless or by making a mistake.

David decided to follow a route that would take him in the wrong direction. He went against God's GPS. As a result, he ended up being guilty of a series of sins that came from giving in to a powerful temptation. It set in motion a chain reaction that follows the normal sequence of sin: first, he faced temptation; secondly, he refused to listen to the warning of the Holy Spirit; thirdly, he refused His route of escape; fourth, he committed the sin and then suffered the consequences of the sin on himself and others. What a tragic route he followed. But out of this tragedy there was his triumph. A "voice" said to him, "you have sinned!" And he was listening.

When David heard God's voice, (His GPS), he admitted his sins and made a "u" turn. He asked God to forgive him and He did. "Have mercy on me," he cried, "and blot out my transgressions." If we, like David, listen to His voice and follow His "commands," He will lead us safely in paths of righteousness. Are you listening to God's voice?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your mercy and unfailing love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

News from the Associated Press

Public invited to vote on Main Street preservation projects

By The Associated Press

A preservation group is inviting the public to vote on projects to improve Main Streets around the U.S. Twenty-five cities from Seattle to Miami are vying for funding to preserve or improve theaters, parks, landmarks and other venues in downtowns, historic neighborhoods and cultural districts.

One proposal would create a park for vintage neon signs in Casa Grande, Arizona. Another would preserve the Formosa Cafe on Route 66 in West Hollywood, California. Several cities seek funding to preserve historic theaters, like the Woodward Theater in Cincinnati and the Yale Theatre in Oklahoma City.

The program, called Partners in Preservation: Main Streets, is supported by American Express, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Main Street America.

National Geographic is hosting the <http://VoteYourMainStreet.org> website, where the public may vote once a day for up to five projects through Oct. 31. Winners will be announced Nov. 2. The sites with the most votes will get grants of up to \$150,000 each, with as many projects funded as possible from a pool of \$1.5 million.

The 25 proposed projects are:

- Alabama Theatre marquee, Birmingham, Alabama
- Vintage Neon Sign Park, Casa Grande, Arizona
- Marquee, Market Street Mall, Richmond, California
- Stevens-Hartley Annex, San Diego
- Formosa Cafe, Route 66, West Hollywood, California
- Caboose, Creative District, Steamboat Springs, Colorado
- Manuel Artime Theater, Miami's Little Havana neighborhood
- Bryant Graves House, Sweet Auburn district, Atlanta
- 1893 cable car building, Hyde Park, Illinois
- Lyric Theater, West Des Moines, Iowa
- Old McCrory's Store, New Orleans
- Pierce Building and Streetcar Comfort Station, Boston's Dorchester Arts and Culture Innovation District
- The Treehouse, Detroit's northwest Livernois/6 Mile corridors
- Bandstand and park, Ivers Square, Cape Girardeau, Missouri
- E. Romero Hose and Fire Building, Las Vegas, New Mexico
- Restoration Plaza, Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, Brooklyn, New York
- Carolina Theatre, Greensboro, North Carolina
- Woodward Theater marquee, Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood
- Yale Theatre, Oklahoma City
- Trower Building, Parker Hall and other African-American landmarks in Philadelphia's Germantown neighborhood
- Dr. McPhail Building, Franklin, Tennessee
- Collin County Courthouse exterior, McKinney, Texas
- Historic buildings, Granary District, Salt Lake City
- Fading signs on historic buildings in Seattle's Chinatown
- James Hughes Building, Washington, D.C.

Owner shuts down SD radio station after adverse state ruling

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The owner of a South Dakota radio station has shut down the station and closed his remaining properties after a ruling from state banking regulators.

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Owner Chuck Brennan took KBAD-FM off the air Saturday night. A statement on the radio station's home page says KBAD and all of the remaining Badlands Entities properties are closed and up for sale.

The announcement comes 10 days after South Dakota banking regulators revoked the lending license for Brennan's Dollar Loan Center stores in Sioux Falls and Rapid City. The state Division of Banking shut down the stores after learning the short-term loan company was charging 36 percent interest and charging late fees if loans were not repaid in a week.

Brennan's empire once included a motor speedway, a rock 'n' roll academy and a sprawling pawnshop.

Rural South Dakota community struggles 2 years after crime

PLATTE, S.D. (AP) — A sense of normalcy is beginning to return to surrounding school districts two years after a murder-suicide put a rural South Dakota community in the spotlight for a high-profile corruption case involving stolen education funds.

Scott Westerhuis fatally shot his wife and four children before killing himself in 2015. The state later found that Westerhuis embezzled more than \$1 million from his business, Mid-Central Educational Cooperative, at the expense of the schools in the group.

Mid-Central dissolved this summer, forcing member districts to form a new cooperative that provides special education services.

Mid-Central administered Gear Up, a federal program aimed at helping low-income middle and high school students prepare for college. In South Dakota, the program focused on Native Americans.

The state sued the 13 rural districts in June, saying they should foot the bill if the U.S. Department of Education decides to make the state refund a \$4 million grant from Mid-Central. Many of the districts have set aside extra money for attorney costs, and the threat of the lawsuit could linger over them for years.

"Obviously it's stressful because nobody knows what's going on," said Robert Schroeder, superintendent for White Lake Schools.

But things are returning to normal, at least on the playground and in classrooms, the Argus Leader reported.

"Our kids are doing great," said Jennifer Knecht, Platte's elementary school principal. "It hasn't affected us day-to-day."

Members of the new cooperative, Core Educational, said students are still getting the same services under the new co-op.

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

Iraqi Kurds vote in referendum on independence from Baghdad

By SUSANNAH GEORGE and BALINT SZLANKO, Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — Iraqi Kurds cast ballots on Monday in their autonomous region and in a wide sweep of captured territories on whether to seek independence from Baghdad, a historic vote that has also raised tensions and fears of instability.

The referendum is non-binding and will not immediately bring independence, but it would mark a definitive stance by the Kurds to break away, and Kurdish leaders say they will use a "yes" vote to press for negotiations with Iraq's central government to win statehood.

From Ankara, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened military intervention in Iraq in response to the vote, stressing that Kurdish independence was unacceptable to his country and that this was a "matter of survival."

The Iraqi Kurdish push for independence has been made even more combustible because Kurdish forces captured extensive territories in fighting with the Islamic State group in the past year. Those territories run from northwest Iraq across the country to the Iranian border on the east — including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. Baghdad claims those territories, but the Kurds say they are part of their zone and residents there are participating in Monday's vote.

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More than 3 million people are expected to vote across the three provinces that officially make up the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region and in the disputed territories, according to the Independent High Elections and Referendum Commission, the body overseeing the vote.

Lines began forming early in the day at polling stations across Irbil, the Kurdish regional capital. Tahsin Karim was one of the first people to vote in his Irbil neighborhood.

"Today we came here to vote in the referendum for the independence of Kurdistan," he said. "We hope that we can achieve independence."

The Kurdish region's president, Masoud Barzani, also voted at a polling station packed with journalists and cameras. On the eve of the referendum, Barzani said he believed the vote would be peaceful, though he acknowledged that the path to independence would be "risky."

"We are ready to pay any price for our independence," he said.

The referendum is being carried out despite mounting opposition from Baghdad and the international community.

The United States, a key ally of Iraq's Kurds, has warned the vote will likely destabilize the region amid the fight against IS. The Iraqi central government has also come out strongly against the referendum, demanding on Sunday that all airports and borders crossings in the Kurdish region be handed back to federal government control.

In a televised address from Baghdad on Sunday night, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that "the referendum is unconstitutional. It threatens Iraq, peaceful coexistence among Iraqis and is a danger to the region."

"We will take measures to safeguard the nation's unity and protect all Iraqis," he added.

Turkey said on Monday that it doesn't recognize the referendum and declared its results would be "null and void."

Erdogan, speaking at a conference in Ankara, pointed to Turkish military exercises underway along Turkey's border with the Iraqi Kurdish region and said that "our military is not (there) for nothing."

"We could arrive suddenly one night," he said, adding that Turkey would take political, economic as well as military measures against Iraqi Kurds' steps toward independence. He also suggested that Turkey could halt oil flows from a pipeline from northern Iraq.

Ankara called on the international community and especially regional countries not to recognize the vote either and urged Iraq Kurdish leaders to abandon "utopic goals," accusing them of endangering peace and stability for Iraq and the whole region.

On Saturday, Turkey's parliament met in an extraordinary session to extend a mandate allowing Turkey's military to send troops over its southern border if developments in Iraq and Syria are perceived as national security threats.

Initial results from the poll are expected on Tuesday, with the official results to be announced later in the week.

At his press conference, Barzani also said that while the referendum will be the first step in a long process to negotiate independence, the region's "partnership" with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad is over.

He detailed the abuses Iraq's Kurds have faced by Iraqi forces, including killings at the hands of former leader Saddam Hussein's army that left more than 50,000 Kurds dead.

Iraqi Kurds have long dreamed of independence — something the Kurdish people were denied when colonial powers drew the map of the Middle East after World War I. The Kurds form a sizable minority in Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. In Iraq, they have long been at odds with the Baghdad government over the sharing of oil revenues and the fate of disputed territories like Kirkuk.

The Kurds have been a close American ally for decades, and the first U.S. airstrikes in the campaign against IS were launched to protect Irbil. Kurdish forces later regrouped and played a major role in driving the extremists from much of northern Iraq, including Mosul, the country's second largest city.

But the U.S. has long been opposed to Kurdish moves toward independence, fearing it could lead to the breakup of Iraq and bring even more instability to an already volatile Middle East.

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In Baghdad, residents strongly criticized then referendum, saying it would raise sectarian tensions and create an "Israel in Iraq." An Arabic newspaper headline said "Kurdistan into the unknown," a reference to the name Kurds use for their region.

"This is a division of Iraq," said journalist Raad Mohammad while another Baghdad resident, Ali al-Rubayah, described the referendum as a "black day in the history of the Kurds."

Lawyer Tariq al-Zubaydi said the referendum was inappropriate amid the "ongoing threat of terrorism and Islamic State" militants. "The country is going through a difficult period, this requires a coming together of our efforts, he said. "A unified country is better for all."

Voting was also underway on Monday morning in Kirkuk. The oil-rich city has large Kurdish, Arab, Turkmen and Christian communities and has seen some low-level clashes in the days leading up to Monday's vote. "I feel so great and happy, I feel we'll be free," said Suad Pirot, a Kirkuk Kurdish resident, after voting. "Nobody will rule us, we will be independent."

Associated Press writers Ali Abdul-Hassan in Irbil, Iraq, Bram Janssen in Kirkuk, Iraq, and Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, contributed to this report.

10 Things to Know for Today By The Associated Press

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. TRUMP'S TRAVEL BAN LIST EXPANDS

The rules set to go into effect Oct. 18 will impose strict new restrictions on the citizens of Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria and Yemen and certain officials from Venezuela and their families.

2. WHY TRUMP'S WORDS ON ANTHEM PROTESTS CUT DEEP

The president implores NFL owners to "get that son of a bitch off the field," rankling a league where the majority of players are black and many of them grew up in tough neighborhoods, raised by strong women.

3. MERKEL FACES TRICKY TASK TO BUILD GOVERNMENT

The German chancellor is embarking on a complicated quest to form a new government and find answers to the rise of a nationalist, anti-migrant party.

4. HEALTH CARE BILL TEETERS, GOP WOOS DISSIDENTS

In a late stab at attracting votes, Republicans are adding \$14.5 billion to the measure including extra funds for states of dissenting GOP senators, AP learns.

5. IRAQI KURDS VOTE FOR INDEPENDENCE

The historic but non-binding vote to separate from Baghdad raises regional tensions and fears of instability.

6. MEXICO CITY HOPING FOR RETURN TO NORMALCY

Mexicans aim to return to work in the earthquake-ravaged capital while officials say they have so far cleared only 103 of the city's nearly 9,000 schools to reopen.

7. WHAT FORMER FOLLOWERS SAY ABOUT MALIGNED CHURCH

North Carolina-based Word of Faith Fellowship's plan to beat the recession and keep tithes flowing in involved filing fraudulent unemployment claims at companies owned by congregants, AP finds.

8. CONTRACTORS ACCUSE IRAQ OF SHAKEDOWNS TO FORCE TAX PAYMENTS

They warn the Trump administration that the practice is hampering the fight against Islamic State extremists, an AP investigation finds.

9. HOW RESEARCHERS PLAN TO CUT COOKIE-CUTTER HEALTH CARE

The pilot program would recruit more than 1 million people for a study to learn how our genes, environments and lifestyles interact — and to customize ways to prevent and treat disease.

10. TENNESSEE CHURCH GUNMAN CHARGED WITH MURDER

Witnesses and police describe a chaotic scene as a masked attacker armed with two guns shot seven people, including one fatally, in a suburban Nashville church before he was subdued.

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Church stoked tithing with unemployment scam, ex-members say

MITCH WEISS and HOLBROOK MOHR, Associated Press

SPINDALE, N.C. (AP) — When Randy Fields' construction company faced potential ruin because of the cratering economy, he pleaded with his pastor at Word of Faith Fellowship church to reduce the amount of money he was required to tithe every week.

To his shock, Fields said church founder Jane Whaley proposed a divine plan that would allow him to continue tithing at least 10 percent of his income to the secretive evangelical church while helping his company survive: He would file fraudulent unemployment claims on behalf of his employees. She called it, he said, "God's plan."

Fields and 10 other former congregants told The Associated Press that they and dozens of employees who were church members filed bogus claims at Word of Faith Fellowship leaders' direction, and said they had been interviewed at length about the false claims by investigators with the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The unemployment allegations were uncovered as part of the AP's ongoing investigation into Word of Faith, which has about 750 congregants in rural North Carolina and a total of nearly 2,000 members in its branches in Brazil and Ghana and its affiliations in Sweden, Scotland and other countries.

Some of the ex-members said they turned critical documents related to the unemployment claims over to authorities, even though they knew they could be charged with defrauding the government.

The former members estimated the fraudulent claims — some filed by the business owners' wives and other family members — would have drawn payments totaling in the hundreds of thousands of dollars over a six-year period.

The Department of Homeland Security referred questions to the U.S. attorney's office in Charlotte, which cited an "ongoing investigation into allegations against Word of Faith Fellowship" and would not elaborate. The State Bureau of Investigation said the agency would not comment "due to the overall investigation" involving the church.

Whaley and church attorney Josh Farmer did not respond to numerous requests for comment.

In February, the AP cited more than three dozen former Word of Faith Fellowship members who said congregants were regularly punched and choked in an effort to beat out devils. The AP also revealed how, over the course of two decades, followers were ordered by church leaders to lie to authorities investigating reports of abuse.

Last month, the AP outlined how Word of Faith created a pipeline of young laborers from its two Brazilian congregations who say they were brought to the U.S. and forced to work at businesses owned by church leaders for little or no pay.

The AP's stories have triggered investigations in both the United States and Brazil.

Over the years, church leaders have owned and operated more than two dozen businesses. The interviews with former followers, along with documents reviewed by the AP, indicate at least six companies owned by leaders were involved with filing fraudulent unemployment claims between 2008 and 2013. Most of those businesses' employees are congregants, the AP found.

The AP reviewed individual checking account records that showed unemployment benefits deposited by the state, along with income tax records summarizing how much money some of the former followers interviewed received annually in such payments.

Fields, who spent 24 years in the church before leaving in 2015, said his employees kept working without pay while collecting unemployment benefits. "Basically, their unemployment checks would become their paychecks," he said.

It is illegal for employers or employees to knowingly file fraudulent unemployment claims. Since Dec. 1, 2012, violators in North Carolina can face felony fraud charges if the illegal benefits totaled more than \$400. Before Dec. 1, 2012, filing false claims was only a misdemeanor.

If investigators believe employers or employees were involved in a conspiracy, however, they could be charged with serious state and federal felony charges.

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Fields said he knew the plan was illegal but went along with it because of intense pressure from Whaley, who founded the church with her husband in 1979.

"I'm not proud of what I did, but I have to make this right," he said.

The price of the refusal, Fields said, could be beatings administered by fellow church members and public shaming by Whaley. The church also might mandate that he be cut off from any contact with his family, he said.

"You knew it was wrong, but you knew you couldn't say a word," said Rick Cooper, who acknowledged falsely filing for unemployment from April 2011 to April 2012.

In North Carolina, companies pay a quarterly unemployment tax based on the number of their workers, with the money going into a fund used to pay out claims, according to Larry Parker, spokesman for the Division of Employment Security, which oversees the program.

When a worker files for unemployment, the agency checks with the employer to learn the reason. If an employer says a worker was let go because of the poor economy, payments usually are approved quickly, Parker said.

During the recession, which started in 2007 and was driven by the housing meltdown, laid-off workers could receive state and federal extensions increasing unemployment to 99 weeks with a maximum weekly check of \$535. But in 2013, North Carolina legislators tied benefits to the state's unemployment rate. Currently, laid-off workers can receive up to 26 weeks of unemployment, with a maximum payment of \$350 a week, Parker said.

And, he emphasized, a worker must have been laid off to collect unemployment.

"If a company is trying to make workers work while they collect unemployment, that's a potential fraud situation," Parker said.

The former congregants said that not only were they coerced into continuing to work while collecting unemployment, the money fell short of what they needed to pay their bills.

"The unemployment checks never equaled what you were making," said Cooper, who worked for Diverse Corporate Tech Inc., a manufacturing company owned by church leader Kent Covington.

"I was making about \$700 a week, but I only collected \$235 a week in unemployment," Cooper said. "So I'm working the same hours — many times, much longer hours — for less. It was devastating for my family."

Church members were expected to keep tithing regardless of their financial situations and Whaley kept close tabs on "who was giving what," Cooper said.

Some of those interviewed by the AP said they learned about the practice at meetings with company officials, but that Whaley herself also promoted it.

"Jane was heavily involved. She was always asking questions about it," said Rachael Bryant, who calculated that she had received unemployment benefits of about \$200 a week for 18 months while still working for a Word of Faith minister.

"I remember after I was on unemployment for a few months and Jane said, 'You're still on unemployment, right?' And I said 'yes.' And she said, 'Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!'" Bryant said.

Workers receiving unemployment benefits must check in every week and demonstrate they are actively seeking work by providing the names of businesses where they filed job applications, and the former Word of Faith members told the AP that church leaders had a plan for that.

"Every week we'd go to the unemployment office and put down that we looked for work at other companies operated by Word of Faith Fellowship leaders," Rick Cooper said. "Those companies would vouch for the Word of Faith members at the unemployment offices. It was a conspiracy. What's amazing to me is that this went on for years and no red flags ever went off."

Cooper said Whaley told him Covington's business needed the money because "the devil had been attacking the company's finances" and the minister might lose his house.

Rick Cooper's son Jeffrey, an attorney and accountant who also has broken with the church, worked for Covington's company, too. Jeffrey Cooper said he was so uneasy about the practice that he called the

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Division of Employment Security to ask what he labeled a "hypothetical question."

"I said, 'Can an employee file for unemployment while they were still working for a company?'" he told the AP. He said the state official replied that he hoped it was only a hypothetical question because the practice was illegal and anyone involved with it could face serious charges.

Cooper said he relayed the information to Covington, who exploded. "He started screaming at me at the top of his lungs that I was wicked," Cooper said.

As a result, Cooper said he was publicly rebuked by Whaley and completely segregated from his wife for six months. Other church members interviewed by the AP corroborated his story.

Rick and Jeffrey Cooper that they and nearly three dozen employees at Diverse Corporate Tech and Covington's other company, Integrity Marble and Granite, filed false unemployment claims over the course of several years.

Covington did not return several phone messages from the AP.

Benjamin Cooper, Jeffrey's brother, told the AP that Whaley touted the success of the unemployment tactic from the pulpit in 2009.

"There was a church service and Jane got up and started saying that Kent had heard from God of a means to save God's companies' money," Benjamin Cooper said. "She needed to have a meeting after church with all the business owners. I knew what she was referring to. That's why I remember it. We were already on unemployment at that point."

Rachael Bryant said she was pressured into filing false unemployment claims in 2008 after her boss, a medical professional who was a leader in the church, was audited by Medicare and told he owed money because of coding errors.

Bryant said one of her boss' sons told her the company wouldn't be able to pay her for a while, but that Whaley refused to let her look for another job. Eventually, she said, Whaley said they had a plan to help both the doctor and his employees.

"She said, 'Rachael, God found a way where you can make some money. Kent's done it with some of his businesses. So we're going to put you on unemployment,'" Bryant said.

Some of her boss' family members also filed for unemployment while continuing to work at the business, she said.

"I remember that I went to Jane after being on it for like three or four months and I remember asking her if I could apply for a job opening in another doctor's office. Well, she started screaming at me, 'You're wicked! There's nothing but the money devil in you!'" said Bryant, who had been making about \$500 a week before being reduced to only unemployment checks.

Bryant said she was too scared to leave.

Looking back, Fields — whose oldest daughter and grandchild remain in the church — said he struggles with his decision to knuckle under pressure and participate in the plan. And he regrets it.

"The businesses helped support the church," he said. "We would make large donations. Without the businesses, they would have been in trouble."

He paused for a moment to collect his thoughts.

"At the time, it just seemed like the right thing to do. But I was wrong," he said. "We were all wrong."

Mohr reported from Jackson, Mississippi. AP researcher Rhonda Shafner contributed to this report.

Tennessee church shooting suspect charged with murder

By KRISTIN M. HALL and JOHN RABY, Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Witnesses and police described a chaotic scene as a masked attacker armed with two guns shot seven people, killing one, in a Tennessee church before he was subdued.

Burnette Chapel Church of Christ member Minerva Rosa said members were talking about the success of their yard sale the previous day when they heard gunshots outside.

The church pastor, David Spann, 60, shouted, "Run, run, gunshots!" as congregants hid under pews or

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in bathrooms, according to a witness.

A masked gunman carrying two guns entered the church from the back after fatally shooting a woman outside, police said. He then walked through the church silently, shooting six more people before he was subdued by an usher, police said. Police later recovered another pistol and a shotgun from the suspect's vehicle.

Rosa said the reading that day had been from Luke, Chapter 8, and she recalled the part about a woman who touched Jesus and was cured of bleeding.

By the end of the shooting, she was on her knees, her dress stained with blood, putting pressure on the gunshot wound in Pastor Spann's chest. She and others got on their phones to call 911.

Another church member, a 22-year-old usher named Robert Engle, tackled the gunman and suffered injuries when he was pistol whipped. In the struggle, the shooter shot himself, although it wasn't clear if it was on purpose or an accident. Engle retrieved his own gun from his car and held the man until police arrived, police said.

"He's amazing," Rosa told reporters about Engle. "Without him I think it could be worse. He was the hero today." Authorities identified the attacker as Emanuel Kidega Samson, 25, of Murfreesboro, who came to the United States from Sudan in 1996 and is a legal U.S. resident.

No motive was immediately determined. Church members told investigators the suspect had attended services a year or two ago, said Don Aaron, a spokesman for the Metro Nashville Police Department. Nashville police did not immediately comment on several bizarre posts on the suspect's Facebook page in the hours before the shooting.

The gunman pulled into the church's parking lot as services were ending. Melanie Smith, 39, of Smyrna, Tennessee, was killed when the shooter opened fire in the parking lot. Spann's wife, Peggy, 65, was also shot as well as William and Marlene Jenkins, 83 and 84 respectively, Linda Bush, 68, and Katherine Dickerson, 64. Police said none of the surviving victims suffered life-threatening injuries.

Aaron called Engle "an extraordinarily brave individual."

But in a statement Engle said he did not want to be labeled a hero.

"The real heroes are the police, first responders and medical staff and doctors who have helped me and everyone affected." Engle asked for prayers for all those injured as well as the shooter.

Blake Langford, 21, got a text from his father telling him not to come to the church where his family attended after the shooting. "My grandmother hid under a church pew. My stepmom and my aunt, they barricaded themselves in the bathroom," Langford said he learned from his father, who arrived at the church seconds after the shooting ended.

Langford said he knew Engle and believed his actions saved lives.

"He's 6 foot 5, a really big guy, but a gentle giant," Langford said. "He's always been that kind of person to put others before himself."

Forty-two people were at the church at the time of the shooting, Aaron said.

The church describes itself on its website as a "friendly, Bible-based group of folks who love the Lord and are interested in spreading his word to those who are lost."

Photos on the church's Facebook page show a diverse congregation with people of various ages and ethnicities.

On Samson's Facebook page, a post in the hours before the shooting read, "Everything you've ever doubted or made to be believe as false, is real. & vice versa, B."

Another post read, "Become the creator instead of what's created. Whatever you say, goes."

And a third post read, "You are more than what they told us."

Police charged Samson Sunday night with one count of murder and said multiple charges were pending. He was ordered held without bond by a judicial commissioner.

After the attack, the nearby New Beautiful Gate Church opened its doors to Burnette Chapel churchgoers as they reunited with loved ones. New Beautiful Gate Pastor Michael Mosby said he is neighbors with Spann.

"As a pastor myself, you come with the expectation of sitting down and having a service and not thinking about what can happen around you," Mosby said. "You never know who is going to come to the door

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or what reasons they would come to the door, come to your church and do something like that. We're always on guard. We just thank God many more weren't hurt."

Raby reported from Charleston, West Virginia.

Health care bill teeters, GOP adds money to woo dissidents

By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Republicans are adding money to their staggering effort to repeal the Obama health care law and say they're pushing toward a climactic Senate faceoff this week. Yet their path to succeeding in their last-gasp effort has grown narrower, perhaps impossible.

GOP senators' opposition to their party's drive to scrap President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act swelled to lethal numbers Sunday. Moderate Sen. Susan Collins all but closed the door on supporting the teetering bill and conservative Sen. Ted Cruz said that "right now" he doesn't back it.

President Donald Trump has pressed for a fresh vote, and White House legislative liaison Marc Short and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., one of the measure's sponsors, said Republicans would move toward a vote this week. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has said he intends to consider the measure but hasn't firmly committed to a vote.

The Congressional Budget Office was expected to release its analysis of the legislation early this week.

But the CBO, which is lawmakers' nonpartisan fiscal analyst, has said that it doesn't have time to determine the bill's impact on coverage and premiums, major factors for some lawmakers deciding their votes. Instead, the office is expected to only detail its estimates of the measure's effect on federal deficits.

A vote must occur this week for Republicans to have any chance of prevailing with their narrow Senate majority. Next Sunday, protections expire against a Democratic filibuster, bill-killing delays that Republicans lack the votes to overcome.

Already two GOP senators, Rand Paul of Kentucky and John McCain of Arizona, have said they oppose the legislation. All Democrats will vote against it. "No" votes from three of the 52 GOP senators would kill the party's effort to deliver on its perennial vow to repeal "Obamacare" and would reprise the party's politically jarring failure to accomplish that this summer.

In a late stab at attracting votes, Republicans were adding \$14.5 billion to the measure including extra funds for states of dissenting GOP senators, according to documents obtained late Sunday by The Associated Press.

A chart Republicans circulated said the legislation's grants would provide 14 percent more money for Arizona than under Obama's law; 4 percent more for Kentucky; 49 percent more for Texas; 3 percent more for Alaska, home to undecided GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski; and 43 percent more for Maine, home to Collins. Some extra money is specifically directed at sparsely populated states.

The numbers are misleading, partly because they omit GOP Medicaid cuts from clamping per-person spending caps on the program, said Matt House, spokesman for Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. In a statement, Schumer said the measure would "throw our health insurance system into chaos."

Collins' criticisms included the bill's cuts in the Medicaid program for low-income people and the likelihood that it would result in many losing health coverage and paying higher premiums.

"It's very difficult for me to envision a scenario where I would end up voting for this bill," said Collins.

The conservative Cruz also voiced opposition, underscoring the bill's problems with both ends of the GOP spectrum.

"Right now, they don't have my vote," Cruz said at a festival in Austin, Texas. He suggested the measure doesn't do enough to reduce premiums by allowing insurers to sell less comprehensive coverage than Obama's law allows.

Paul said even though the bill transforms federal health care dollars into block grants that states would control, the GOP bill left too much of that spending intact.

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McCain has complained that Republicans should have worked with Democrats in reshaping the country's \$3 trillion-a-year health care system and cited uncertainty over the bill's impact on consumers.

Murkowski has remained uncommitted, saying she's studying the bill's impact on Alaska. Her state's officials released a report Friday citing "unique challenges" and deep cuts the measure would impose on the state. She and Collins were the only Republicans who voted "no" on four pivotal votes on earlier versions of the GOP legislation in July.

The bill now in play would repeal much of the 2010 law, including its tax penalties on people who don't buy insurance and on larger employers not offering coverage to workers. States could loosen coverage requirements under the law's mandates, including prohibiting insurers from charging seriously ill people higher premiums and letting them sell policies covering fewer services.

It would eliminate Obama's expansion of Medicaid and the subsidies the law provides millions of people to reduce their premiums and out of pocket costs, substituting block grants to states.

Collins was on CBS' "Face the Nation" and CNN's "State of the Union," Graham appeared on ABC's "This Week" and Paul was on NBC's "Meet the Press," and Short was on CBS, NBC and "Fox News Sunday."

Associated Press writer Catherine Lucey in Somerset, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

Germany's Merkel faces tricky task to build government

By GEIR MOULSON, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Angela Merkel was embarking Monday on a complicated quest to form a new government for Europe's biggest economy and find answers to the rise of a nationalist, anti-migrant party.

Sunday's election left Merkel's conservative Union bloc weakened after a campaign that focused squarely on Germany's leader of the past 12 years. However, the result leaves no other party able to lead a new government, and Merkel herself lacks any obvious internal challenger.

The center-left Social Democrats — Merkel's partners since 2013 in a "grand coalition" of Germany's two traditionally dominant parties — vowed to go into opposition after a heavy defeat.

Caucus leader Thomas Oppermann doubled down on that pledge Monday, saying that "we will not conduct coalition talks, because voters have decided that the Social Democrats' place is in opposition."

"All of us, all the parties have the responsibility of giving this country a stable government," Peter Tauber, the general secretary of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, told ZDF television. "And a coalition can only be successful if it is able to make compromises."

Germany has no tradition of minority governments, and Merkel has already made clear she doesn't want to try that option — which would in any case be a tall order, as her bloc has only 246 of the new parliament's 709 seats.

That means the only politically plausible option is a three-way coalition with the pro-business Free Democrats and the traditionally left-leaning Greens. The combination, called a "Jamaica" coalition because the parties' colors match those of the Caribbean nation's flag, hasn't been tried in a national government.

Merkel faces lengthy talks to secure an alliance with parties that have a tradition of mutual suspicion as well as differences on issues including migration, European financial policy and the auto industry's future.

At the same time, she faces pressure from conservative allies for an effective response to the third-place finish of the nationalist Alternative for Germany, or AfD, which entered parliament for the first time after a campaign that centered on harsh criticism of Merkel and her 2015 decision to allow in large numbers of migrants.

AfD took voters from Merkel's bloc and to a lesser extent from the Social Democrats, while also mobilizing large numbers of people who didn't previously vote.

"Of course I want to win back everyone who voted for AfD and previously voted for us," Tauber said. "To do that, we have to confront AfD clearly and show that we have the better answers."

AfD won 94 seats in the new parliament — but long-standing splits inside the party emerged on Monday,

as one of its most prominent figures announced that, "after long reflection," she wouldn't join the AfD caucus, and walked out of a news conference with fellow leaders.

Party co-chairwoman Frauke Petry has been sidelined by other leaders over recent months after urging her party to exclude members who express extremist views, with the aim of attracting moderate voters.

Petry said she wants to make the party ready for government in 2021, while others have made clear their priority is no-holds-barred opposition.

"We should be open about there being differences of substance in AfD," Petry said. "An anarchic party ... can be successful in opposition, but it cannot make voters a credible offer for government."

She left without taking questions. Other leaders continued calmly with their news conference.

"I'd like to apologize in the name of my party," co-chairman Joerg Meuthen said. "This wasn't discussed with us."

Studying 1 million people to end cookie-cutter health care

By LAURAN NEERGAARD, AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. researchers are getting ready to recruit more than 1 million people for an unprecedented study to learn how our genes, environments and lifestyles interact.

Today, health care is based on averages, what worked best in short studies of a few hundred or thousand patients. The massive "All of Us" project instead will push what's called precision medicine, using traits that make us unique to forecast health and treat disease.

The goal is to end cookie-cutter health care.

A pilot is under way now. If all goes well, the National Institutes of Health plans to open enrollment early next year.

Participants will get DNA tests, and report on their diet, sleep, exercise and numerous other health-affecting factors. It's a commitment: The study aims to run for at least 10 years

The pilot testing now under way involves more than 2,500 people who already have enrolled and given blood samples. More than 50 sites around the country — large medical centers, community health centers and other providers like the San Diego Blood Bank and, soon, select Walgreens pharmacies — are enrolling patients or customers in this invitation-only pilot phase.

If the pilot goes well, NIH plans to open the study next spring to just about any U.S. adult who's interested, with sign-up as easy as going online.

The goal is to enroll a highly diverse population, people from all walks of life — specifically recruiting minorities who have been under-represented in scientific research.

And unusual for observational research, volunteers will receive results of their genetic and other tests, information they can share with their own doctors.

"Anything to get more information I can pass on to my children, I'm all for it," said Erricka Hager, 29, as she signed up last month at the University of Pittsburgh, the project's first pilot site. A usually healthy mother of two, she hopes the study can reveal why she experienced high blood pressure and gestational diabetes during pregnancy.

Heading the giant All Of Us project is a former Intel Corp. executive who brings a special passion: How to widen access to the precision medicine that saved his life.

In college, Eric Dishman developed a form of kidney cancer so rare that doctors had no idea how to treat him, and predicted he had months to live. Only two studies of that particular cancer had ever been done, on people in their 70s and 80s.

"They didn't know anything about me because they'd never seen a 19-year-old with this disease," said Dishman.

Yet he survived for two decades, trying one treatment after another. Then, as he was running out of options, a chance encounter with a genetics researcher led to mapping Dishman's DNA — and the stun-

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ning discovery that his kidney cancer was genetically more like pancreatic cancer. A pancreatic cancer drug attacked his tumors so he could get a kidney transplant.

"I'm healthier now at 49 than I was at 19," said Dishman. "I was lucky twice over really," to be offered an uncommon kind of testing and that it found something treatable.

Precision medicine is used most widely in cancer, as more drugs are developed that target tumors with specific molecular characteristics. Beyond cancer, one of the University of Pittsburgh's hospitals tests every patient receiving a heart stent — looking for a genetic variant that tells if they'll respond well to a particular blood thinner or will need an alternative.

The aim is to expand precision medicine.

"Why me?" is the question cancer patients always ask — why they got sick and not someone else with similar health risks, said Dr. Mounzer Agha, an oncologist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

"Unfortunately I don't have answers for them today," said Agha, who says it will take the million-person study to finally get some answers. "It's going to help them understand what are the factors that led to their disease, and it's going to help us understand how to treat it better."

And NIH Director Francis S. Collins expects surprises. Maybe, he speculates, Type 2 diabetes will turn out to be a collection of genetic subtypes that require varied treatments.

"This looks at individual responses to treatment in a way we couldn't do previously with smaller studies."

The study starts simply: Volunteers get some standard health checks — weight, blood pressure and heart rate. They answer periodic questionnaires about their health, background and habits, and turn over electronic health records. They give a blood sample that, if they agree, will undergo DNA testing sometime next year.

Eventually, researchers will ask some participants to wear sensors that may go beyond today's Fitbit-style health trackers, such as devices that measure blood pressure while people move around all day, or measure environmental exposures, Collins said.

In Pittsburgh, the Rev. Paul Abernathy made a health change after signing up for the pilot study: Surprised to learn his BMI was too high despite regular weight-lifting, he began running.

"I'm praying I have the discipline to continue that, certainly in midst of a busy schedule," said Abernathy, who directs the nonprofit Focus Pittsburgh that aids the poor and trauma victims.

"We have a chance really to influence history, to influence the future of our children and our children's children," added Abernathy, who hopes the study will help explain racial disparities such as lower life expectancies between African-Americans and whites who live in the same areas.

At NIH, Collins plans to enroll, too. He's had his DNA mapped before but can't pass up what he's calling a one-in-a-million experience to be part of a monumental study rather than the scientist on the other side.

"I'm curious about what this might teach me about myself. I'm pretty healthy right now. I'd like to stay that way."

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Trump replaces 90-day ban with new travel restrictions

By JILL COLVIN and MATTHEW LEE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has signed a proclamation imposing strict new restrictions on travelers from a handful of countries, including five that were covered by his expiring travel ban. Administration officials say the new measures are required to keep the nation safe.

The indefinite restrictions apply to citizens of Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and North Korea. As part of the presidential proclamation signed Sunday, the U.S. will also bar the entry of certain Venezuelan government officials and their immediate families.

The changes will take effect October 18.

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The announcement came the same day that Trump's temporary ban on visitors from six Muslim-majority countries was set to expire, 90 days after it went into effect. That ban had barred citizens of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen who lacked a "credible claim of a bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States" from entering the U.S. Only one of those countries, Sudan, will no longer be subject to travel restrictions.

"Making America Safe is my number one priority. We will not admit those into our country we cannot safely vet," Trump tweeted late Sunday after the new policy was announced.

Unlike the first iteration of Trump's travel ban, which sparked chaos at airports across the country and a flurry of legal challenges after being hastily written with little input outside the White House, officials stressed they had been working for months on the new rules, in collaboration with various agencies and in conversation with foreign governments.

To limit confusion, valid visas would not be revoked as a result of the proclamation. The order also permits, but does not guarantee, case-by-case waivers for citizens of the affected countries.

The restrictions are targeted at countries that the Department of Homeland Security says fail to share sufficient information with the U.S. or haven't taken necessary security precautions.

DHS has spent recent months working to develop a new security baseline, which includes factors such as whether countries issue electronic passports with biometric information, report lost or stolen passports to INTERPOL, an international law enforcement body, and share information about travelers' terror-related and criminal histories.

Citizens of countries that don't meet the standard will face restrictions until they make changes to bring them into compliance.

The new rules include the suspension of all immigrant visas for nationals of Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, Yemen and Somalia, and the suspension of non-immigrant visas, such as for business and tourism, to nationals of Chad, Libya, North Korea, Syria and Yemen.

Citizens of Iran will not be eligible for tourism and business visas, but remain eligible for student and cultural exchange visas if they undergo additional scrutiny. Such additional scrutiny will also be required for Somali citizens applying for all non-immigrant visas.

Critics have accused Trump of overstepping his legal authority and violating the U.S. Constitution's protections against religious bias each time he has ordered new travel restrictions.

And the inclusion of Venezuela and North Korea appeared to be an attempt to block challenges from advocacy groups and others who have called the restrictions a ban on Muslims. Trump during his campaign called for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States."

The U.S. had already imposed wide-ranging sanctions on certain high-ranking Venezuelan government officials to protest the government's attempts to consolidate power.

"The fact that Trump has added North Korea — with few visitors to the U.S. — and a few government officials from Venezuela doesn't obfuscate the real fact that the administration's order is still a Muslim ban," said Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, which has been challenging the ban in court. "President Trump's original sin of targeting Muslims cannot be cured by throwing other countries onto his enemies list."

But administration officials argue the measure is necessary to keep Americans safe.

Associated Press writer Mark Sherman contributed to this report.

Don't talk about mom: NFL players angry over Trump's insult

By ARNIE STAPLETON, AP Pro Football Writer

President Donald Trump probably didn't realize he'd struck such a nerve with NFL players when he implored team owners to "get that son of a bitch off the field" for protesting during the national anthem.

The line drew loud applause at the president's political rally in Huntsville, Alabama, but the words cut deep into America's most popular sports league, where the majority of players are black and many of

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them grew up in tough neighborhoods, raised by strong women.

"I'm a son of a queen," an emotional Falcons defensive lineman Grady Jarrett said.

"There are no SOB's in this league," Lions coach Jim Caldwell said Sunday, when at least 200 NFL players either knelt, sat, stretched or prayed during the "Star Spangled Banner" to protest Trump's remarks. Three teams didn't even take the field until the national anthem was over.

The protest campaign that started last year with former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick was down to just six players last week. But Trump's weekend attack on athletes sparked angry reactions from around the sports world and drew defiance from most of the NFL.

He suggested the NFL was going soft for cracking down on big hits. He uninvited the NBA champions Golden State Warriors to the White House after Stephen Curry and other players indicated they weren't sure they would accept the invitation.

Players, owners and commissioners past and present chastised the president for his divisive remarks, but the angriest responses came from players upset that he'd insulted their mothers.

"Once again, this is a tragedy in this country that we have to sit here and still have these discussions," Browns rookie quarterback DeShone Kizer said following a 31-28 loss to the Indianapolis Colts. "I know for a fact that I'm no son of a bitch, and I plan on continuing forward and doing whatever I can from my position to promote the equality that's needed in this country."

After calling for NFL players who protest to be fired, Trump tweeted Sunday that the league should make it mandatory to stand for the national anthem and that fans should shun anyone who doesn't.

"It just amazes me with everything else going on in this world, especially involving the U.S., that's what you're concerned about, my man? You're the leader of the free world and this is what you're talking about?" said Dolphins safety Michael Thomas. "So, as a man, as a father, as an African-American man, as somebody in the NFL and one of those 'sons of bitches,' yeah, I took it personally."

The issue reverberated across the Atlantic, where about two dozen players took a knee during the playing of the U.S. anthem at an NFL game between the Ravens and Jaguars in London.

"We stand with our brothers," Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs said. "They have the right, and we knelt with them today. To protest, non-violent protest, is as American as it gets, so we knelt with them today to let them know that we're a unified front. There ain't no dividing us. I guess we're all son-of-a-bitches."

Buccaneers wide receivers Mike Evans and DeSean Jackson, who knelt at the Bucs-Vikings game, said Trump's remarks were especially disturbing when juxtaposed to his recent comments equating white supremacists marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, with counter-protesters.

"Why is he singling out athletes?" Evans asked. "I really don't really see him tweeting about all the other things going on, the neo-Nazis, the situation in Charlottesville. I don't really see him talking about that much. But he has the time and the nerve to call out the Golden State Warriors, Stephen Curry, all of us in the NFL that took a knee out of protesting. He has the time to do that? It's not right."

"And he called us SOB's, so that was very disrespectful."

Jackson said, "It's just blatant disrespect. I look at it as my mom's the queen. (We're) not sons of any 'B's.'"

Bills linebacker Lorenzo Alexander said he'll go back to standing for the anthem next week but was eager to join in the protests Sunday, noting that he supports the military, considers himself a patriot and loves his country.

He said he just wanted to show solidarity with his colleagues "especially in the backdrop of our president making the comments about our players, about their mothers. And then you put that in conjunction with how he tried to gray-area Nazism and KKK members as being fine people, I had to take a knee."

Linebacker Brandon Marshall, who hands out winter coats in Denver alongside his mother as part of his charity work, said the Broncos gathered Saturday night to talk about their reaction.

"We talked about the fact that while he called the (white supremacists in) Charlottesville very fine people, but we are sons of bitches," said Marshall, who received the 2017 Courage Award from the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Alumni of Color for his stance against social injustice.

Marshall was a college teammate of Kaepernick, who remains unsigned. Many supporters believe teams

are avoiding Kaepernick because of his protests.

On Sunday, some Dolphins players wore shirts supporting Kaepernick and even league owners and officials stood with players. Almost universally, owners and coaches criticized Trump's comments.

"For me to single out any particular group of players and call them SOB's, to me, that is insulting and disgraceful," Former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue said. "So I think the players deserve credit for what they do. And when it comes to speech they are entitled to speak. And we are entitled to listen. We are entitled to agree or disagree. But we're not entitled to shut anybody's speech down."

For more NFL coverage: <http://www.pro32.ap.org> and http://www.twitter.com/AP_NFL

AP Pro Football Writers Rob Maaddi, Teresa M. Walker and Dave Campbell and AP Sports Writers John Wawrow, Michael Marot and Berne Wilson contributed.

Follow Arnie Melendrez Stapleton on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/arniestapleton>

Lawyer: Kushner used personal email for some WH messages

By ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, used his personal email account on dozens of occasions to communicate with colleagues in the White House, his lawyer said Sunday.

Between January and August, Kushner either received or responded to fewer than 100 emails from White House officials from his private account, attorney Abbe Lowell said in a statement that confirmed Kushner's use of a personal address in the first months of the administration.

The use of a private email account to discuss government matters is a politically freighted issue that factored prominently in last year's presidential election. Trump repeatedly attacked Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton for setting up a private email server as secretary of state, a decision that prompted an FBI investigation that shadowed her for much of the campaign.

In Kushner's case, Lowell said, the emails to and from his private account usually involved "forwarded news articles or political commentary and most often occurred when someone initiated the exchange by sending an email to his personal, rather than his White House, address."

The attorney said Kushner, a key aide to Trump, uses his White House address to discuss White House business and that any non-personal emails were forwarded to his official account and "all have been preserved in any event."

Politico first reported Kushner's use of a personal email account.

Trump repeatedly argued during the campaign that Clinton deserved to be prosecuted for mishandling classified information, frequently deriding her as "Crooked Hillary," and has continued to suggest that even after being elected president.

Former FBI Director James Comey said that though Clinton and her aides were "extremely careless" in their handling of classified material, there was no evidence that anyone intended to break the law, and he recommended against criminal prosecution. The Justice Department accepted that conclusion.

At a political event in Alabama on Friday, Trump responded to supporter chants of "lock her up" by saying, "You've got to speak to (Attorney General) Jeff Sessions about that."

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Republicans make desperate bid to save health care bill

By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican opposition to the GOP health care bill swelled to near-fatal numbers Sunday as Sen. Susan Collins all but closed the door on supporting the last-ditch effort to scrap the Obama

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health care law and Sen. Ted Cruz said that "right now" he doesn't back it.

In a late bid to win votes and stave off defeat, Republicans were adding \$14.5 billion to the measure for states, according to documents obtained late Sunday by The Associated Press.

White House legislative liaison Marc Short and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., one of the measure's sponsors, said Republicans would press ahead with a vote this week. But the comments by Collins and Cruz left the Republican drive to uproot President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act dangling by an increasingly fraying thread.

A vote must occur this week for Republicans to prevail with their narrow Senate majority. Next Sunday, protections expire against a Democratic filibuster, bill-killing delays that Republicans lack the votes to overcome.

President Donald Trump seemed to distance himself from the showdown, saying his "primary focus" was his party's drive to cut taxes.

"I don't know what they're doing," Trump told reporters about the bill's GOP opponents as he prepared to fly back to Washington after a weekend at his New Jersey golf club. "But you know what? Eventually we'll win, whether it's now or later."

Two GOP senators, Rand Paul of Kentucky and John McCain of Arizona, have already said they oppose the legislation. All Democrats will vote against it. "No" votes from three of the 52 GOP senators would kill the party's effort to deliver on its perennial vow to repeal "Obamacare" and would reprise the party's politically jarring failure to accomplish that this summer.

Collins cited the bill's cuts in the Medicaid program for low-income people and the likelihood that it would result in many losing health coverage and paying higher premiums. The Maine moderate also criticized a provision letting states make it easier for insurers to raise premiums on people with pre-existing medical conditions.

"It's very difficult for me to envision a scenario where I would end up voting for this bill," said Collins.

The conservative Cruz also voiced opposition, underscoring the bill's problems with both ends of the GOP spectrum.

"Right now, they don't have my vote," Cruz said at a festival in Austin, Texas. He suggested the measure doesn't do enough to reduce premiums by allowing insurers to sell less comprehensive coverage than Obama's law allows.

Cruz said he doesn't think fellow conservative Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, backs the GOP bill. Lee spokesman Conn Carroll said Lee wants "technical changes" but hasn't finalized his position.

A chart Republicans circulated Sunday said the legislation's grants would provide 14 percent more for Arizona than under Obama's law, 4 percent more for Kentucky 49 percent more for Texas and 3 percent more for Alaska, home to home to undecided GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski, and Maine, home to Sen. Collins, would get 43 percent more." Some extra money is specifically directed at sparsely populated states.

The numbers are misleading, partly because they omit GOP Medicaid cuts from clamping per-person spending caps on the program, said Matt House, spokesman for Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. In a statement, Schumer said the measure would "throw our health insurance system into chaos."

"We're moving forward and we'll see what happens next week," Graham said earlier Sunday.

Paul said even though the bill transforms federal health care dollars into block grants states would control, the GOP bill left too much of that spending intact.

"Block granting Obamacare doesn't make it go away," Paul said.

McCain has complained that Republicans should have worked with Democrats in reshaping the country's \$3 trillion-a-year health care system and cited uncertainty over the bill's impact on consumers.

Murkowski has remained uncommitted, saying she's studying the bill's impact on Alaska. Her state's officials released a report Friday citing "unique challenges" and deep cuts the measure would impose on the state. She and Collins were the only Republicans who voted "no" on four pivotal votes on earlier versions of the GOP legislation in July.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has said he intends to have a vote this week but has stopped short of firmly committing to it. The White House's Short said he expects a vote Wednesday.

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The bill would repeal much of the 2010 law, including its tax penalties on people who don't buy insurance and on larger employers not offering coverage to workers. States could loosen coverage requirements under the law's mandates, including prohibiting insurers from charging seriously ill people higher premiums and letting them sell policies covering fewer services.

It would eliminate Obama's expansion of Medicaid and the subsidies the law provides millions of people to reduce their premiums and out of pocket costs, substituting block grants to states.

Collins was on CBS' "Face the Nation" and CNN's "State of the Union," Graham appeared on ABC's "This Week" and Paul was on NBC's "Meet the Press," and Short was on CBS, NBC and "Fox News Sunday."

Associated Press writer Catherine Lucey in Somerset, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

President's criticisms spark more protests at NFL games

By ARNIE STAPLETON, AP Pro Football Writer

President Donald Trump's criticism of players who kneel during the national anthem sparked angry protests around the National Football League Sunday, as about 200 players sat, knelt or raised their fists in defiance.

A week ago, just six players protested.

Most NFL players on Sunday locked arms with their teammates — some standing, others kneeling — in a show of solidarity. A handful of teams stayed off the field until after "The Star-Spangled Banner" to avoid the issue altogether.

As he prepared to board Air Force One to return to Washington from New Jersey, Trump said the players protesting the anthem were "very disrespectful to our country" and called again on owners to stop what he considers unpatriotic displays in America's most popular sport.

"This has nothing to do with race," Trump said. "This has to do with respect for our country."

The president's attack on athletes turned the anthems — usually sung during commercials — into must-watch television shown live by the networks and Yahoo!, which streamed the game in London. In some NFL stadiums, crowds booed or yelled at players to stand. There was also some applause.

The NFL and its players, often at odds, used Sunday's anthems to show unity. One of Trump's biggest supporters in the NFL, Patriots owner Robert Kraft, joined the chorus when he expressed "deep disappointment" with Trump.

"I like Bob very much. He's my friend. He gave me a Super Bowl ring a month ago. So he's a good friend of mine and I want him to do what he wants to do," Trump said. "... We have great people representing our country, especially our soldiers our first responders and they should be treated with respect.

"And when you get on your knee and you don't respect the American flag or the anthem."

The protests started more than a year ago when former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick refused to stand during the anthem as a protest of police treatment of minorities. This season, no team has signed him, and some supporters believe NFL owners are avoiding him because of the controversy.

A handful of white players didn't stand Sunday, but the vast majority of those actively protesting were black.

Defensive star Von Miller was among the large group of Denver Broncos who took a knee in Buffalo Sunday, where Bills running back LeSean McCoy stretched during the anthem.

"We felt like President Trump's speech was an assault on our most cherished right, freedom of speech," said Miller, who normally steers clear of politics and social issues.

Dozens of more players protested before the Raiders-Redskins game, the final one of the day and not far from the White House in Landover, Maryland. All but a handful of Raiders sat on their bench and seven Redskins took a knee while their teammates stood arm-in-arm along with owner Dan Snyder and president Bruce Allen.

In Chicago, the Pittsburgh Steelers stayed in the tunnel except for one player, Army veteran Alejandro Villanueva, who stood outside with a hand over his heart. Both the Seahawks and Titans stayed inside until after the national anthem was over in Nashville, a throwback to the pre-2009 NFL when teams, not

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the league, set pre-game policy regarding players standing on the sideline for the anthem.

A handful of NFL players had been continuing Kaepernick's protest this season, but that ballooned Sunday following Trump's two-day weekend rant. It began with the president calling for NFL protesters to be fired and continued Saturday when he rescinded a White House invitation for the NBA champion Golden State Warriors over star Stephen Curry's criticism.

The president's delving into the NFL protests started by Kaepernick brought new attention and angered many players who took one insult as a personal attack on their mothers.

"Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, you'd say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired,'" Trump said to loud applause Friday night at a rally in Huntsville, Alabama.

"I'm a son of a queen," Falcons defensive lineman Grady Jarrett said.

Super Bowl MVP Tom Brady was among the New England Patriots who locked arms in solidarity in Foxborough, Massachusetts. Aaron Rodgers did the same with his teammates in Green Bay.

"Standing with locked arms is good, kneeling is not acceptable. Bad ratings!" Trump tweeted Sunday.

In Detroit, anthem singer Rico Lavelle took a knee at the word "brave," lowering his head and raising his right fist. In Nashville, anthem singer Meghan Linsey, took a knee as she finished singing.

Jets Chairman and CEO Christopher Johnson, whose brother, Woody, is the ambassador to England and one of Trump's most ardent supporters, called it "an honor and a privilege to stand arm-in-arm unified with our players during today's national anthem" in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

The issue reverberated across the Atlantic, where about two dozen players took a knee during the playing of the U.S. anthem at Wembley Stadium.

"We stand with our brothers," Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs said. "They have the right and we knelt with them today. To protest, non-violent protest, is as American as it gets, so we knelt with them today to let them know that we're a unified front."

Jaguars owner Shad Khan and players on both teams who were not kneeling remained locked arm-in-arm throughout the playing of the anthem and "God Save The Queen." No players knelt during the British anthem.

"Me taking a knee doesn't change the fact that I support our military, I'm a patriot and I love my country," Bills linebacker Lorenzo Alexander said. "But I also recognize there are some social injustices in this country and today I wanted to take a knee in support of my brothers who have been doing it."

Alexander said he'll go back to standing for the anthem next week.

"I just wanted to show them that I was with them today, especially in the backdrop of our president making the comments about our players, about their mothers," Alexander said. "And then you put that in conjunction with how he tried to gray-area Nazism and KKK members as being fine people, I had to take a knee."

The National Hockey League's reigning champion Pittsburgh Penguins announced Sunday they've accepted a White House invitation from Trump. The Penguins said they respect the office of the president and "the long tradition of championship team visiting the White House."

Before Game 1 of the WNBA Finals in Minneapolis on Sunday, the Los Angeles Sparks left the floor while the Minnesota Lynx stood arm-in-arm. The Sparks returned to a chorus of boos when the song was finished.

Trump also mocked the league's crackdown on illegal hits, suggesting the league had softened because of its safety initiatives.

Kahn, who was among the NFL owners who chipped in \$1 million to the Trump inauguration committee, said he met with his team captains before kickoff in London "to express my support for them, all NFL players and the league following the divisive and contentious remarks made by President Trump."

Among the strongest criticisms of the president Sunday was this from Saints coach Sean Payton: "I'm disappointed in the comments that were made. I think we need a little bit more wisdom in that office," he said of the White House. "I want that guy to be one of the smarter guys in the room and it seems like every time he's opening up his mouth it's something that is dividing our country and not pulling us together."

For more NFL coverage: <http://www.pro32.ap.org> and http://www.twitter.com/AP_NFL

AP Sports Writers Dennis Waszak Jr., Steve Reed, Larry Lage, Teresa M. Walker, John Wawrow and Stephen Whyno and Associated Press Writer Zac Boyer contributed.

Follow Arnie Melendrez Stapleton on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/arniestapleton>

Gunman opens fire in Nashville church; 1 dead, 7 wounded

By KRISTIN M. HALL and JOHN RABY, Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A masked gunman opened fire at a Nashville church Sunday, walking silently down the aisle as he shot unsuspecting congregants. At least one person was killed and seven others wounded, authorities said.

An usher confronted the shooter, who apparently shot himself in the struggle before he was arrested, police said.

The FBI said Sunday night it has opened a civil rights investigation into the shooting at the Burnette Chapel Church of Christ.

No motive was immediately determined. Church members told investigators that the suspect had attended services a year or two ago, said Don Aaron, a spokesman for the Metro Nashville Police Department. Nashville police did not immediately comment on several bizarre posts on the suspect's Facebook page in the hours before the shooting.

The gunman pulled into the church's parking lot as services were ending. He fatally shot a woman who was walking to her vehicle, then entered the rear of the church with two pistols and kept firing, hitting six people, Aaron said. Police said they later recovered another pistol and a rifle from the suspect's car.

Authorities identified the attacker as Emanuel Kidega Samson, 25, of Murfreesboro, who came to the United States from Sudan in 1996 and was a legal U.S. resident.

It was unclear whether the self-inflicted wound to the chest was intentional, Aaron said.

The gunman was discharged hours later from Vanderbilt University Hospital but remained in police custody. The Metropolitan Nashville police tweeted Sunday night that Samson will be charged with one count of murder and that multiple "additional charges will be placed later." He was ordered held without bail by a judicial commissioner.

Witness Minerva Rosa said the usher was "a hero."

"He's amazing," said Rosa, a member of the church for eight years. "Without him, I think it could be worse."

The suspect said nothing as he fired. While the gunman made his way down the aisle, Rosa said, the pastor started shouting, "Run! Run! Gunshots!"

Aaron called the usher, 22-year-old Robert Engle, "an extraordinarily brave individual."

The woman who was killed in the parking lot was identified as Melanie Smith, 39, of Smyrna, Tennessee.

The gunman and six others were treated for gunshot wounds at nearby hospitals, along with Engle, who was pistol-whipped, Aaron said.

Among the wounded was Joey Spann, who is the church's pastor and is a Bible study teacher at Nashville Christian School.

After the attack, the nearby New Beautiful Gate Church opened its doors to Burnette Chapel churchgoers as they reunited with loved ones. New Beautiful Gate Pastor Michael Mosby said he is neighbors with Spann.

"As a pastor myself, you come with the expectation of sitting down and having a service and not thinking about what can happen around you," Mosby said. "You never know who is going to come to the door or what reasons they would come to the door, come to your church and do something like that. We're always on guard. We just thank God many more weren't hurt."

Forty-two people were at the church at the time of the shooting, and all victims were adults, Aaron said.

The small brick church describes itself on its website as a "friendly, Bible-based group of folks who love

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the Lord and are interested in spreading his word to those who are lost.”

Photos on the church’s Facebook page show a diverse congregation with people of various ages and ethnicities.

On Samson’s Facebook page, a post in the hours before the shooting read, “Everything you’ve ever doubted or made to be believe as false, is real. & vice versa, B.”

Another post read, “Become the creator instead of what’s created . Whatever you say, goes.”

And a third post read, “You are more than what they told us.”

Samson also posted several shirtless photos of himself flexing his muscles. In some he wears a tank top that reads “Beast Mode.”

Nashville Mayor Megan Barry said in a statement that the shooting was “a terrible tragedy for our city.” She said her administration “will continue to work with community members to stop crime before it starts, encourage peaceful conflict resolution and promote non-violence.”

Raby reported from Charleston, West Virginia.

Merkel wins 4th term as nationalists enter German parliament

By GEIR MOULSON and DAVID RISING, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Angela Merkel won a fourth term Sunday, but now faces the tricky prospect of forming a coalition with two disparate new partners after voters weakened her conservatives and a nationalist, anti-migrant party surged into parliament.

Merkel’s center-left challenger, Martin Schulz, conceded his Social Democrats had suffered a “crushing election defeat,” with projections showing the party’s worst performance in post-World War II Germany.

He vowed to take his party, the junior partner in Merkel’s outgoing “grand coalition” of Germany’s traditionally dominant parties, into opposition.

“We have a mandate to form a new government, and no government can be formed against us,” Merkel told cheering supporters. She added that it wasn’t a “matter of course” to finish first after 12 years in power, and that the past four years were “extremely challenging.”

Stressing that “we live in stormy times” internationally, she declared: “I have the intention of achieving a stable government in Germany.”

The biggest winner was the 4-year-old Alternative for Germany, or AfD. It finished third after a campaign that centered on shrill criticism of Merkel and her decision in 2015 to allow large numbers of migrants into Germany, but also harnessed wider discontent with established politicians.

One of AfD’s leaders, Alice Weidel, said it will provide “constructive opposition.” But co-leader Alexander Gauland struck a harsher tone, vowing that “we will take our country back” and promising to “chase” Merkel.

Final results released shortly before 4 a.m. (0200 GMT) on Monday showed Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union and their Bavaria-only allies, the Christian Social Union, winning 33 percent of the vote — down from 41.5 percent four years ago. It was one of their weakest post-war showings.

Schulz’s Social Democrats were trailing far behind, with 20.5 percent support, down from 25.7 percent in 2013 and undercutting their previous post-war low of 23 percent eight years ago.

AfD won 12.6 percent of the vote. It was followed by the election’s other big winner — the pro-business Free Democratic Party, which returned to parliament after a four-year break with 10.7 percent.

The Free Democrats were Merkel’s coalition partners in her second-term government from 2009-2013, but lost all their seats four years ago.

“In a country that is big on schadenfreude, our comeback is an encouraging message — after failure, a new beginning is possible,” party leader Christian Lindner told supporters.

The Left Party took 9.2 percent of the vote, coming slightly ahead of the traditionally left-leaning Greens who won 8.9 percent, completing a parliament that now has six caucuses rather than the previous four.

All mainstream parties have ruled out working with AfD and Merkel’s conservatives won’t form a coali-

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tion with the Left Party.

That means two politically plausible governments are mathematically feasible: continuing the “grand coalition” or a combination of Merkel’s Union bloc, the Free Democrats and Greens.

That alliance is known as a “Jamaica” coalition because the parties’ colors match those of the Caribbean nation’s flag. It has been tried, with mixed results, in state governments but never in a national government.

The Social Democrats were adamant Sunday night that they wouldn’t continue to serve under Merkel.

“It is completely clear that the role the voters have given us is as the opposition,” Schulz said.

Referring to AfD’s third-place finish, he said “there cannot be a far-right party leading the opposition in Germany.”

Cobbling together a “Jamaica” coalition is likely to be time-consuming. The Free Democrats and Greens are traditional rivals. Four years ago, Merkel’s conservatives and the Greens held exploratory talks on a two-party coalition but they came to nothing.

The underwhelming result also looks set to re-ignite pressure within Merkel’s bloc for a tougher conservative image. Bavarian Governor Horst Seehofer, who feuded with Merkel over the migrant influx before putting aside their differences this year, said the outcome showed that the conservatives need to close “an open flank to the right.”

Reiner Haseloff, the conservative governor of eastern Saxony-Anhalt state, said it would be wrong to ignore AfD’s strong result.

“We need an answer — there must be no democratic alternative to our right,” he added. “As long as it is there, we haven’t completely done our homework.”

AfD is the first party to the right of the conservatives to enter parliament in 60 years.

Merkel pledged a “thorough analysis, because we want to win back AfD voters by solving problems, by taking account of their concerns and fears, and above all with good policies.”

Outside AfD’s election party in Berlin after the results were announced, at least 500 protesters shouted “all Berlin hates the AfD,” “Nazi pigs,” and other slogans, while several protesters threw bottles as police kept them away from the building.

Similar protests broke out in Cologne, Hamburg and Frankfurt but police said they were mostly peaceful.

Major Jewish groups expressed dismay at the AfD’s showing, with the World Jewish Congress calling the party “a disgraceful reactionary movement which recalls the worst of Germany’s past.”

Mainstream parties’ leaders vowed a robust response to AfD’s entry into parliament. Greens co-leader Katrin Goering-Eckardt told supporters: “there will again be Nazis sitting in parliament.”

“We will not let one single attack on German democracy stand,” she said, to applause.

AfD leaders dismissed such talk. Asked by The Associated Press what signal the vote sends internationally, chairman Joerg Meuthen said: “That there is conservative politics in Germany again. And that there are patriots in the German parliament again.”

“I want to emphasize that there is absolutely no risk of extreme right politics in the German parliament,” he said.

Fellow European right-wing populists hailed AfD’s performance. The Netherlands’ Geert Wilders wrote on Twitter: “The message is clear. We are no Islamic nations.”

“Bravo to our allies from AfD for this historic score!” tweeted Marine Le Pen, the runner-up in France’s presidential election. “It’s a new symbol of the awakening of the peoples of Europe.”

Associated Press journalists Frank Jordans and Kirsten Grieshaber contributed to this story.

Official: Hurricane Maria set Puerto Rico back decades

By DANICA COTO, Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Puerto Rico’s nonvoting representative in the U.S. Congress said Sunday that Hurricane Maria’s destruction has set the island back decades, even as authorities worked to assess the extent of the damage.

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"The devastation in Puerto Rico has set us back nearly 20 to 30 years," said Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Jenniffer Gonzalez. "I can't deny that the Puerto Rico of now is different from that of a week ago. The destruction of properties, of flattened structures, of families without homes, of debris everywhere. The island's greenery is gone."

Engineers on Sunday planned to inspect the roughly 90-year-old Guajataca Dam, which holds back a reservoir covering about 2 square miles (5 square kilometers) in northwest Puerto Rico. The government said it suffered a large crack after Maria dumped 15 inches (nearly 40 centimeters) of rain on the surrounding mountains and that it "will collapse at any minute." Nearby residents had been evacuated, but began returning to their homes Saturday after a spillway eased pressure on the dam.

Puerto Rico's National Guard diverted an oil tanker that broke free and threatened to crash into the southeast coast, said Gov. Ricardo Rossello, and officials still had not had communication with nine of 78 municipalities.

"This is a major disaster," he said. "We've had extensive damage. This is going to take some time."

The death toll from Maria in Puerto Rico was at least 10, including two police officers who drowned in floodwaters in the western town of Aguada. That number was expected to climb as officials from remote towns continued to check in with officials in San Juan. Authorities in the town of Vega Alta on the north coast said they had been unable to reach an entire neighborhood called Fatima, and were particularly worried about residents of a nursing home.

Across the Caribbean, Maria had claimed at least 31 lives, including at least 15 on hard-hit Dominica.

Mike Hyland, a spokesman for the American Public Power Association, which represents the Puerto Rican power agency, said Sunday that restoration is a long ways off. The organization is working with U.S. Energy Department crews as well as New York Power Authority workers sent down by Gov. Andrew Cuomo to fly over the island and assess damage.

Crews hoped to get helicopters and drones in the air over the next two days to assess the damage, but Hyland said they need to be patient and let the military continue rescuing people before focusing on restoring power.

"We are trying to get an understanding of the extent of the damage over the next 48 hours to then begin to work with our federal partners to get the right crews and equipment down to Puerto Rico," Hyland said.

Large amounts of federal aid have begun moving into Puerto Rico, welcomed by local officials who praised the Trump administration's response but called for the emergency loosening of rules long blamed for condemning the U.S. territory to second-class status.

The opening of the island's main port in the capital allowed 11 ships to bring in 1.6 million gallons of water, 23,000 cots, dozens of generators and food. Dozens more shipments are expected in upcoming days.

The federal aid effort is racing to stem a growing humanitarian crisis in towns left without fresh water, fuel, electricity or phone service. Officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is in charge of the relief effort, said they would take satellite phones to all of Puerto Rico's towns and cities, more than half of which were cut off following Maria's devastating crossing of Puerto Rico on Wednesday.

The island's infrastructure was in sorry shape long before Maria struck. A \$73 billion debt crisis has left agencies like the state power company broke. As a result the power company abandoned most basic maintenance in recent years, leaving the island subject to regular blackouts.

A federal control board overseeing Puerto Rico's finances authorized up to \$1 billion in local funds to be used for hurricane response, but the governor said he would ask for more.

"We're going to request waivers and other mechanisms so Puerto Rico can respond to this crisis," Rossello said. "Puerto Rico will practically collect no taxes in the next month."

U.S. Rep. Nydia Velazquez of New York said she will request a one-year waiver from the Jones Act, a federal law blamed for driving up prices on Puerto Rico by requiring cargo shipments there to move only on U.S. vessels as a means of supporting the U.S. maritime industry.

"We will use all our resources," Velazquez said. "We need to make Puerto Rico whole again. These are American citizens."

A group of anxious mayors traveled to the capital to meet with Rossello to present a long list of items

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they urgently need. The north coastal town of Manati had run out of fuel and fresh water, Mayor Jose Sanchez Gonzalez said.

"Hysteria is starting to spread. The hospital is about to collapse. It's at capacity," he said, crying. "We need someone to help us immediately."

Across Puerto Rico, more than 15,000 people were in shelters, including some 2,000 rescued from the north coastal town of Toa Baja. Many Puerto Ricans planned to head to the mainland to temporarily escape the devastation.

AP reporter Christopher Gillette contributed from Guajataca, Puerto Rico.

Aid begins to flow to hurricane-hit Puerto Rico **By CHRISTOPHER GILLETTE and DANICA COTO, Associated Press**

GUAJATACA, Puerto Rico (AP) — Large amounts of federal aid began moving into Puerto Rico on Saturday, welcomed by local officials who praised the Trump administration's response but called for the emergency loosening of rules long blamed for condemning the U.S. territory to second-class status.

In northwest Puerto Rico, people began returning to their homes after a spillway eased pressure on a dam that cracked after more than a foot of rain fell in the wake of the hurricane.

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Authorities in the town of Vega Alta on the north coast said they had been unable to reach an entire neighborhood called Fatima, and were particularly worried about residents of a nursing home.

"I need to get there today," Mayor Oscar Santiago told The Associated Press. "Not tomorrow, today."

Rossello said Maria would clearly cost more than the last major storm to wallop the island, Hurricane George in September 1998. "This is without a doubt the biggest catastrophe in modern history for Puerto Rico," he said.

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Rossello and other officials praised the federal government for planning its response in detail before the storm hit, a contrast with what Puerto Rico has long seen as the neglect of 3.4 million Americans living in a territory without a vote in Congress or the electoral college.

"This is the first time we get this type of federal coordination," said Resident Commission Jenniffer Gonzalez, Puerto Rico's non-voting representative in Washington.

A dam upstream of the towns of Quebradillas and Isabela in northwest Puerto Rico was cracked but had not burst by Saturday night as water continued to pour out of rain-swollen Lake Guajataca. Federal officials said Friday that 70,000 people, the number who live in the surrounding area, would have to be evacuated. But Javier Jimenez, mayor of the nearby town of San Sebastian, said he believed the number was far smaller.

Secretary of Public Affairs Ramon Rosario said about 300 families were in harm's way.

The governor said there is "significant damage" to the dam and authorities believe it could give way at any moment. "We don't know how long it's going to hold. The integrity of the structure has been compromised in a significant way," Rossello said.

Some residents nonetheless returned to their homes Saturday as the water levels in the reservoir began to sink.

"There were a lot of people worried and crying, but that's natural, because the reservoir was about to break through," said Maria Nieves, 43. "They couldn't open the spillway until later in the night."

The 345-yard (316-meter) dam, which was built around 1928, holds back a man-made lake covering about 2 square miles (5 square kilometers). More than 15 inches (nearly 40 centimeters) of rain from Maria fell on the surrounding mountains.

Officials said 1,360 of the island's 1,600 cellphone towers were downed, and 85 percent of above-ground and underground phone and internet cables were knocked out. With roads blocked and phones dead, officials said, the situation may worsen.

At least 31 lives in all have been lost around the Caribbean due to Maria, including at least 15 on hard-hit Dominica. Haiti reported three deaths; Guadeloupe, two; and the Dominican Republic, one.

Across Puerto Rico, more than 15,000 people are in shelters, including some 2,000 rescued from the north coastal town of Toa Baja. Many Puerto Ricans planned to head to the mainland to temporarily escape the devastation.

Coto reported from San Juan.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Monday, Sept. 25, the 268th day of 2017. There are 97 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On September 25, 1957, nine black students who'd been forced to withdraw from Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, because of unruly white crowds were escorted to class by members of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division.

On this date:

In 1690, one of the earliest American newspapers, Publick Occurrences, published its first — and last — edition in Boston.

In 1775, American Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen was captured by the British as he led an attack on Montreal. (Allen was released by the British in 1778.)

In 1789, the first United States Congress adopted 12 amendments to the Constitution and sent them to the states for ratification. (Ten of the amendments became the Bill of Rights.)

In 1890, President Benjamin Harrison signed a measure establishing Sequoia National Park.

In 1917, baseball Hall of Famer Phil Rizzuto was born in Brooklyn, New York.

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In 1932, the Spanish region of Catalonia received a Charter of Autonomy (however, the Charter was revoked by Francisco Franco at the end of the Spanish Civil War).

In 1956, the first trans-Atlantic telephone cable officially went into service with a three-way ceremonial call between New York, Ottawa and London.

In 1962, Sonny Liston knocked out Floyd Patterson in round one to win the world heavyweight title at Comiskey Park in Chicago.

In 1978, 144 people were killed when a Pacific Southwest Airlines Boeing 727 and a private plane collided over San Diego.

In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor was sworn in as the first female justice on the Supreme Court.

In 1992, NASA's Mars Observer blasted off on a \$980 million mission to the red planet (the probe disappeared just before entering Martian orbit in August 1993).

In 1997, President Bill Clinton pulled open the door of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, as he welcomed nine blacks who had faced hate-filled mobs 40 years earlier.

Ten years ago: Warren Jeffs, the leader of a polygamous Mormon splinter group, was convicted in St. George, Utah, of being an accomplice to rape for performing a wedding between a 19-year-old man and a 14-year-old girl. (The conviction was later overturned by the Utah Supreme Court; prosecutors ended up dropping the charges, since Jeffs is serving a life sentence in Texas in a separate case.) Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (ah-muh-DEE'-neh-zahd), addressing the United Nations, announced "the nuclear issue of Iran is now closed," and indicated Tehran would disregard Security Council resolutions imposed by what he called "arrogant powers." Japan's lower house of parliament elected Yasuo Fukuda (yah-soo-oh foo-koo-dah) prime minister.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, speaking to the U.N. General Assembly, pledged U.S. support for Syrians trying to oust President Bashar Assad, calling him "a dictator who massacres his own people." A survey of consumer confidence reached its highest level since February on expectations that hiring would soon pick up. Singer and TV host Andy Williams died at his Branson, Missouri, home at the age of 84.

One year ago: Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump met separately in New York with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, giving each candidate fresh foreign policy talking points on the eve of their first presidential debate. Golf legend Arnold Palmer, 87, died in Pittsburgh. Jose Fernandez, 24, ace right-hander for the Miami Marlins, was killed in a boating accident with two friends off Miami Beach. Country singer Jean Shepard, a Grand Old Opry staple, died in Nashville at 82.

Today's Birthdays: Broadcast journalist Barbara Walters is 88. Folk singer Ian Tyson is 84. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates is 74. Actor Josh Taylor is 74. Actor Robert Walden is 74. Actor-producer Michael Douglas is 73. Model Cheryl Tiegs is 70. Actress Mimi Kennedy is 69. Movie director Pedro Almodovar is 68. Actor-director Anson Williams is 68. Actor Mark Hamill is 66. Basketball Hall of Famer Bob McAdoo is 66. Polka bandleader Jimmy Sturr is 66. Actor Colin Friels is 65. Actor Michael Madsen is 59. Actress Heather Locklear is 56. Actress Aida Turturro is 55. Actor Tate Donovan is 54. TV personality Keely Shaye Smith is 54. Actress Maria Doyle Kennedy is 53. Basketball Hall of Famer Scottie Pippen is 52. Actor Jason Flemyng is 51. Actor Will Smith is 49. Actor Hal Sparks is 48. Actress Catherine Zeta-Jones is 48. Rock musician Mike Luce (Drowning Pool) is 46. Actress Bridgette Wilson-Sampras is 44. Actress Clea DuVall is 40. Actor Robbie Jones is 40. Actor Joel David Moore is 40. Actor Chris Owen is 37. Rapper T. I. is 37. Actor Van Hansis is 36. Actor Lee Norris is 36. Actor/rapper Donald Glover (AKA Childish Gambino) is 34. Actor Zach Woods is 33. Actor Jordan Gavaris is 28. Olympic silver medal figure skater Mao Asada is 27. Actress Emmy Clarke is 26.

Thought for Today: "The richer your friends, the more they will cost you." — Elisabeth Marbury, American writer (1856-1933).