

Groton Daily Independent

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“Love yourself first and everything else falls into line. You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world.”

- Lucille Ball

Chicken Soup
for the Soul



Today's Event

NCRC Testing for seniors
State VB Tourney in Rapid City

Sperry Stump Removal Tyler: 605/216-8431
Over 30 Years of Combined Experience!
TJ: 605/380-7915 **TreeLine Tree Service**



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

The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **Open**

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Melvin Adams, a former Harlem Globetrotter, talked to a youth rally Wednesday evening at the GHS Arena. His spiritual message had much humor and had the crowd laughing a lot. (Photo by Julianna Kosel)



Nearly 51 Million Americans to Travel This Thanksgiving, Highest Volume in a Dozen Years

November 16, 2017 – AAA projects 50.9 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more away from home this Thanksgiving, a 3.3 percent increase over last year. The 2017 holiday weekend will see the highest Thanksgiving travel volume since 2005 with 1.6 million more people taking to the nation’s roads, skies, rails and waterways compared with last year.

For the ninth consecutive year, AAA is expecting more South Dakotans to take auto trips over Thanksgiving this year than they did the year before. According to the auto club’s projections, 139,900 South Dakotans will get to Thanksgiving destinations this year by motor vehicle, which represents 90 percent of all travel and a 3% percent increase over last year.

Airports in the state will be busy this Thanksgiving – AAA projects 6,650 South Dakotans will fly this year to spend the holiday with friends or family – or just to relax – which is a 4.8% percent increase over last year. In all, 147,000 South Dakotans will travel 50 miles or more from home over the long holiday weekend, 3.1 percent more than Thanksgiving, 2016.

“We believe this year’s increase in Thanksgiving travel is being driven by a strong economy and labor market which are generating rising incomes and higher consumer confidence,” said Marilyn Buskohl, spokesperson for AAA South Dakota.

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The Thanksgiving holiday travel period is defined as Wednesday, Nov. 22 to Sunday, Nov. 26.

By the Numbers: 2017 Thanksgiving Travel Forecast

Road trip ready: 89 percent of all travelers – 45.5 million – are planning a Thanksgiving road trip, an increase of 3.2 percent over last year.

Cheaper airfare: Consumers will pay the cheapest average airfare since 2013.

Fuller skies: The largest growth in holiday travel is by air travel, at five percent, with 3.95 million travelers.

Alternate travel: Travel by trains and other modes (including buses and cruises) is expected to increase 1.1 percent to 1.48 million travelers.

Fueling up: Drivers will pay the highest Thanksgiving gas prices since 2014.

Holiday high: Car rental daily rates will hit a five-year holiday high at \$70/day, which may be due to an increase in domestic demand and cost of newer vehicles.

Travelers still hitting the road despite higher gas prices

While AAA expects most U.S. drivers will pay the highest Thanksgiving gas prices since 2014, the vast majority of holiday travelers (89.3 percent) are still planning to hit the road. Automobile travel will grow by 3.2 percent this Thanksgiving, with 45.5 million Americans planning a holiday road trip. This November's national average price is \$2.54, which is 37 cents more than last November (1st-14th).

Highs and Lows: Car rentals, airfare and hotel rates

According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index, travelers taking to the skies will pay the lowest average in five years for a round-trip flight for the top 40 domestic routes. At \$157, on average, that is a 23 percent fare drop year-over-year.

Travelers can expect to spend any 'flight savings' on car rentals. At \$70/day, the daily car rental average is 34 percent more than last year and the highest rate for Thanksgiving weekend since 2013. The increase in rates may be attributed to an increase in domestic demand and cost of newer vehicles in the fleets with added features and benefits.

Travelers will pay more for AAA Three Diamond Rated hotels this holiday weekend. The average price increased by 14 percent to \$176/night. Conversely, the average rate for AAA Two Diamond Rated hotels has decreased five percent with an average nightly cost of \$117.

Top 10 Thanksgiving Destinations

Many travelers will seek theme-park and warm-weather destinations this Thanksgiving. Both Orlando, Florida, and Anaheim, California, top this year's top 10 holiday destinations based on AAA.com bookings. Compared to previous years, New York City, Las Vegas and San Francisco are gaining popularity as holiday spots.

Orlando, Florida

Anaheim, California

New York City, New York

Honolulu, Hawaii

Las Vegas, Nevada

Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

Cancun, Mexico

San Francisco, California

Kahului, Maui, Hawaii

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Lockouts, flat tires to strand 330,000 motorists this Thanksgiving

AAA expects to rescue more than 330,000 motorists this Thanksgiving weekend, with the primary rea-

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sons being lockouts, flat tires and battery-related issues. AAA recommends motorists have their vehicles inspected by a trusted repair shop, such as one of the more than 7,000 AAA Approved Auto Repair facilities across North America. Members can download the AAA Mobile app, visit AAA.com or call 1-800-AAA-HELP to request roadside assistance.

Over the 2016 Thanksgiving holiday period, AAA responded to 536 rescues in South Dakota.

Download the AAA Mobile app before a Thanksgiving getaway

Before setting out for the long Thanksgiving weekend, download the free AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. Travelers can use the app to map a route, find the lowest gas prices, access exclusive member discounts, make travel arrangements, request AAA roadside assistance, find AAA Approved Auto Repair facilities and more. Learn more at AAA.com/mobile.

With the AAA Mobile app, travelers can also find nearly 59,000 AAA Diamond Rated hotels and restaurants. AAA's is the only rating system that uses full-time, professionally trained evaluators to inspect each property on an annual basis. Every AAA Inspected & Approved establishment offers the assurance of acceptable cleanliness, comfort and hospitality, and ratings of One to Five Diamonds help travelers find the right match for amenities and services.

About the AAA travel forecast:

AAA's projections are based on economic forecasting and research by IHS Markit. The London-based business information provider teamed with AAA in 2009 to jointly analyze travel trends during major holidays. AAA has been reporting on holiday travel trends for more than two decades. The complete AAA/IHS Markit 2017 Thanksgiving holiday travel forecast is available [here](#).

As North America's largest motoring and leisure travel organization, AAA provides nearly 58 million members with travel, insurance, financial and automotive-related services. Since its founding in 1902, the not-for-profit, fully tax-paying AAA has been a leader and advocate for the safety and security of all travelers. Motorists can map a route, identify gas prices, find discounts, book a hotel and access AAA roadside assistance with the AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. Learn more at AAA.com/mobile. AAA clubs can be visited on the Internet at AAA.com.

About INRIX:

INRIX is the global leader in connected car services and transportation analytics. Leveraging big data and the cloud, INRIX delivers comprehensive services and solutions to help move people, cities and businesses forward. Our partners are automakers, governments, mobile operators, developers, advertisers, as well as enterprises large and small.

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Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Coyotes 8, Cheetahs 8, Jackelopes 6, Chipmunks 6, Shih Tzus 5, Foxes 3
Men's High Games: Brad Waage 243, Brad Larson 205, Randy Stanley 203, Ron Belden 201
Women's High Games: Nicole Kassube 176, Vicki Walter 169, 166, Michelle Johnson 164
Men's High Series: Brad Waage 574, Brad Larson 549, Ron Belden 536
Women's High Series: Vicki Walter 486, Dar Larson 435, Darci Spanier 434

The Life of Jerald Morehouse

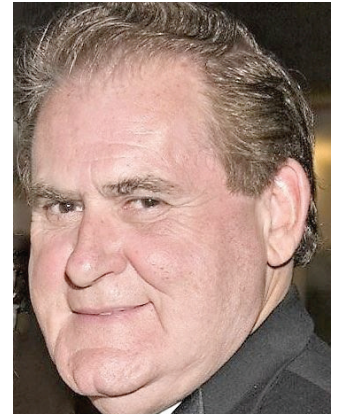
BRISTOL - Jerald "Jerry" Morehouse 77 of Seminole, FL and formerly of Bristol, passed away peacefully on October 29, 2017, surrounded by his family.

A memorial service will be held at Westside Wesleyan Church in Bristol, SD, on November 18th, 2017, at 2 pm. All are welcome to reminisce and support his family. Inurnment after the service will be at the Bristol Cemetery followed by lunch at the church.

Jerald A. Morehouse was born on June 8th, 1940, at the Webster Hospital in Webster, South Dakota. He was born to Charley and Helen (Stolsmark) Morehouse. He was a 1958 graduate of Bristol High School. He was blessed with two sons and two daughters. Jerry spent most of his adult life in Shakopee, Minnesota, and owned Bush Lake Industries, a plastic mold company where he advanced his talent for creating custom designed molds used for a vast variety of industries. He also started and owned J & A Tool. In 2000, Jerry relocated his permanent residence to Seminole, Florida, where he continued to do contract work in the same industry until August of 2016.

His interests included automobiles including convertibles and motorcycles and visiting with his many friends. Jerry and his significant other, Linda, enjoyed socializing in Florida and spending time outside in the gorgeous weather and beautiful surroundings. He often traveled back to Minnesota to visit his daughters and grandchildren as well as to South Dakota to visit his sons and extended family.

Jerry will always be lovingly remembered by his significant other, Linda Hergott, of Seminole, Florida and his daughters Melissa (Corey) Trebiatowski of Chaska, MN, and Jacqueline (Shane) Touhey of Cologne, MN; grandson, Logan, and granddaughters Emily, Lauren, Kendra, Ashley, Rylee, and Danielle. He is also survived by brothers, Jim (Yvonne) Morehouse of Dassel, MN, and Curtis (Marcia) Morehouse of Bristol, SD. Preceding him in death were his parents, Charley and Helen Morehouse; sons, David and Bryan Morehouse; and infant granddaughter Amanda.





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")**

No. 16 Vikings Outlast No. 9 Wolves in NSIC Tournament Opener

Aberdeen, S.D. – The No. 9 Northern State University volleyball team dropped their NSIC Tournament opener to No. 16 Augustana 3-1 from Wachs Arena. The Wolves drop to 23-6 overall, while the Vikings improved to 23-8 and advanced to the semifinal round of the NSIC Tournament.

Northern got out to a hot start in the first set hitting a match high .432 with 17 kills. They defeated the Vikings 25-19 in the set, but went on to fall 25-19, 25-19, and 25-21 in the final three sets. NSU hit .121 in the match with 45 kills, 44 assists, 92 digs, eight blocks, and three aces. The Wolves forced 25 Viking attack errors, however Augustana notched 15 more kills in the match. Northern out-played Augustana on defense with 92 digs to the Vikings 86 and eight blocks to their seven.

Hailey Busch led the team on both sides of the ball with 13 kills and a season high 25 digs. The junior averaged 3.25 kills and 6.25 digs per set, while adding one block. Laura Snyder was second on the team with 11 kills, hitting a team leading .250. Holly Vancura and Jenna Reiff followed offensively with nine and eight kills each, while Morgan Baufield and Regan Dennis followed with two apiece.

Ashley Rozell racked up 44 assists, averaging 11.00 per set. She led the team with two aces, and added two blocks and six digs. Snyder and Reiff led the team at the net with four blocks, followed by Baufield with three.

Jaiden Langlie was all over the floor with 23 total digs, averaging 5.75 per set. She was followed by Snyder with a season and career high ten. Vancura and Lexi Boesl each tallied nine digs, while Reiff and Baufield notched five and three respectively.

The Wolves will now await their fate with the NCAA selection show scheduled for next Monday evening at 6:30 p.m. (CT) on NCAA.com. Northern is currently ranked fourth in today's NCAA Central Region rankings.

Five Wolves Score in Double Figures in 13 Point Victory over Mustangs

Marshall, Minn. – The top picked Northern State Wolves faced off against the second picked Southwest Minnesota State mustangs in non-conference action on Wednesday evening, with the Wolves coming out on top 81-68. Northern improves to 81-68 overall and 65-25 all-time against the Mustangs.

It was a close game through the first 20 minutes of action, as the two teams entered the locker room with a 39-36 halftime score. Northern however broke things open in the second with 42 points, holding their largest lead of 17 with just 8:23 remaining in regulation. The Wolves shot 55.4 percent from the floor, 33.3 percent from the arc, and 83.3 percent from the foul line in the win.

NSU out-rebounded SMSU 37-29 in the game, notching 12 points off ten offensive boards. The added a season high 50 points in the paint, as well as 18 points off the bench and 13 points of eight turnovers. As a team, the Wolves tallied a game high seven blocks and 14 assists.

Logan Doyle led the team with a season high 17 points and eight rebounds. The senior shot 7-of-11 from the floor, while adding two blocks and one assist. He was followed by four players in double figures including Ian Smith, Carter Evans, Darin Peterka, and DJ Pollard. Smith notched 16 points, followed by Evans with a team leading 15 off the bench. Peterka and Pollard rounded out the group with 11 and ten points respectively.

Smith and Evans were second and third on the team with seven and six rebounds, while Pollard and Gabe King notched five each. King tallied nine points off his own, and recorded a team leading and career high five blocks. Andrew Kallman tallied the final three points for the team, notching one of the Wolves four 3-point baskets.

A total of five Wolves shot 50.0 percent or better from field goal range, led by Doyle with a 70.0 mark. Smith and King were both perfect from the foul line going 3-for-3 each, while Evans sunk his one and only attempt. Smith and Peterka each dished out a team leading four assists, with Evans tallied three and Pollard notched two.

Northern is back on the court this Friday in the 2017-18 home opener from Wachs Arena. Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m. between the Wolves and the visiting Jimmies of Jamestown. Prior to the game, NSU Athletics will host the first Sideliner Luncheon Series of the basketball season at 11:45 a.m. from Lager's Inn.

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Today in Weather History

November 16, 1996: An area of low pressure brought 6 to 9 inches of snowfall to most of central and parts of north-central South Dakota on the 16th, while widespread freezing rain associated with the warm front of the system, along with 4 to 10 inches of snow, fell in northeast South Dakota. Travel was significantly affected, and a few minor accidents occurred during the storm. Several sporting events and activities were postponed or canceled. Strong north winds late on the 16th into early the 17th resulted in near-blizzard conditions across northeast South Dakota. Some storm total snowfall amounts include, 9.0 inches 12SSW of Harrold; 8.5 inches near Highmore; 8.2 inches in Roscoe; 8.0 in Eureka; 7.9 inches near Mellette; 7.0 inches in Waubay; 6.5 inches in Murdo and Redfield; 6.0 inches in Kennebec and Miller; 5.5 inches near Victor; and 5.3 inches in Sisseton.

1958 - More than six inches of snow fell at Tucson, AZ. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1959 - The most severe November cold wave in U.S. history was in progress. A weather observing station located 14 miles northeast of Lincoln MT reported a reading of 53 degrees below zero, which established an all-time record low temperature for the nation for the month of November. Their high that day was one degree above zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - High winds and heavy snow created blizzard conditions across parts of eastern Colorado. Wind gusts reached 68 mph at Pueblo, and snowfall totals ranged up to 37 inches at Echo Lake. In Wyoming, the temperature dipped to 14 degrees below zero at Laramie. Strong thunderstorms in Louisiana drenched Alexandria with 16.65 inches of rain in thirty hours, with an unofficial total of 21.21 inches north of Olla. Flash flooding in Louisiana caused five to six million dollars damage. (15th-16th) (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)








1988 - A powerful low pressure system in the north central U.S. produced high winds across the Great Lakes Region, with wind gusts to 60 mph reported at Chicago IL. Heavy snow blanketed much of Minnesota, with eleven inches reported at International Falls. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Snow and gusty winds invaded the north central U.S. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced wind chill readings as cold as 25 degrees below zero, and blizzard conditions were reported in Nebraska during the late morning hours. High winds around a powerful low pressure system produced squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Whitefish Point MI, and snowfall totals in Michigan ranged up to 19 inches at Hart, north of Muskegon. (15th-16th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006: An early morning F3 tornado killed eight people, injured 20 others and left 100 people homeless in Riegelwood, North Carolina. This storm was the second deadliest tornado in the state in the past 50 years.

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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Breezy. Patchy Fog then Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Rain	Chance Rain/Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 43 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 43 °F	Low: 23 °F	High: 31 °F	Low: 16 °F	High: 43 °F

WINDY

Expect windy conditions over central South Dakota this morning to slide over eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota this afternoon and evening.

Winds will be out of the southeast between 20 and 30 mph, with gusts of 40 mph.

Where: across eastern SD and western MN this afternoon and evening.

High to Very High Grassland Fire Danger



FIRE DANGER



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

www.weather.gov/abr

Graphic Created:
11/16/2017 4:28 AM

Published on: 11/16/2017 at 4:31AM

Expect windy conditions over central South Dakota this morning to slide over eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota this afternoon and evening. Winds will be out of the southeast between 20 and 30 mph, with gusts of 40 mph. These winds will push the Grassland Fire Danger Index values into the High and Very High categories this afternoon. The highest temperatures in the 60s, and lowest relative humidity values between 25 and 30 percent will be southwest of Pierre. Elsewhere, temperatures will range from the upper 30s to the 50s. The lowest temperatures will be across far eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota.

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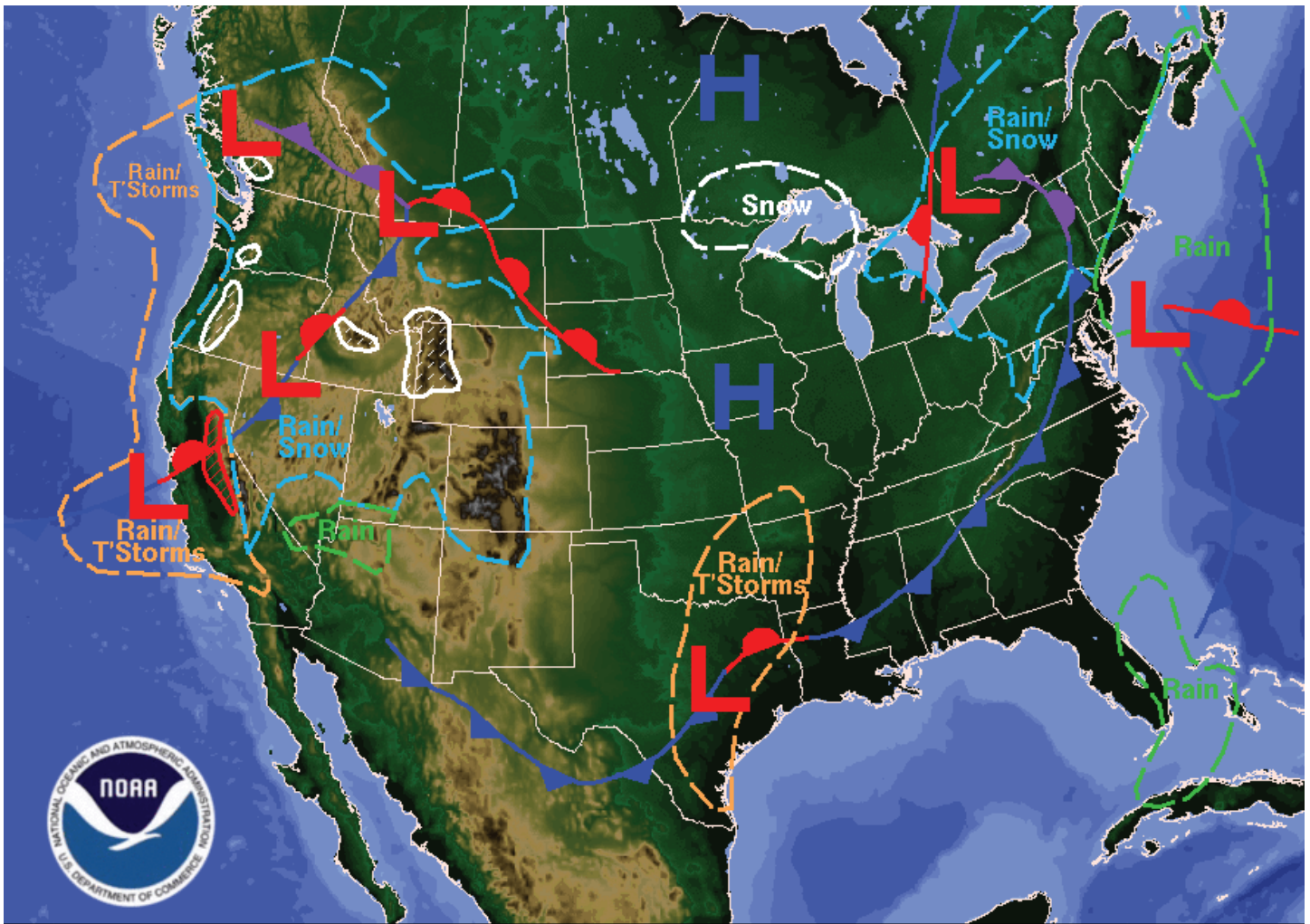
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 39
Low Outside Temp: 15.4
High Gust: 29
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 71° in 2001
Record Low: -12° in 1955
Average High: 39°F
Average Low: 19°F
Average Precip in Nov: .43
Precip to date in Nov: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 20.90
Precip Year to Date: 13.47
Sunset Tonight: 5:02 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:35 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Nov 16, 2017, issued 4:52 AM EST
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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QUALIFICATION FOR LEADERS

Books on leadership line the shelves of bookstores. Each month, it seems, there are new titles that describe some new technique that will make any leader a better leader. From the "who to," to the "how to," to the "where to," to the "what to," to the "why to" and the "when to" these books cover every imaginable leadership situation. But none of them ever give a money back guarantee with the promise that "if you do this you will become successful and rise to the top."

Solomon is recognized as a great leader. And as the author of Psalm 72 he describes the leadership qualities of a king that would be honored and blessed of God.

It is no wonder, then that he begins with justice and righteousness. It is almost impossible to imagine what it would be like if every leader at every level in every organization was committed to being just and righteous. Yet, this is what God wants and expects of leaders.

"Endow the king with Your justice, O God...May he judge Your people with righteousness!" Although our text reads justice, Solomon was asking God for leaders to set in motion a process that every leader would "do acts of justice, based on righteousness" that flowed from the top down. Solomon wanted everyone to be treated fairly.

Of course, we say, "That's not possible, Lord." But He says to each of us "as one of my disciples you must do this. Even if no one else demonstrates my justice and if no one else shows my righteousness to those around them then you, as my disciple, must set the example. You are accountable to me!"

Prayer: Help us, Father, to realize that we either bring others to You or drive them from You by the way we lead. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 72:1 Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

2018 Groton SD Community Events

- Groton Lion's Club Bingo- Wednesday Nights 6:30pm at the Groton Legion (Year Round)
- 11/18/2017-3/31/2018 Groton Lion's Club Wheel of Meat- Saturday Nights 7pm at the Groton Legion (Fall/Winter Months)
- 1/28/2018 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 3/24/2018 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 5/5/2018 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 5/28/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program at the Cemetery, Lunch to follow at the American Legion (Memorial Day)
- 6/14/2018 Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- 6/15/2018 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove
- 6/16/2018 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 7/4/2018 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 7/22/2018 Summer Fest (4th Sunday in July)
- 9/8/2018 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/6/2018 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/12/2018 Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2018 Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/10/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

- Best Ball Golf Tourney
- SDSU Golf Tourney
- Sunflower Golf Tourney
- Santa Claus Day
- Fireman's Stag
- Tour of Homes
- Crazy Dayz/Open Houses
- School Events

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News from the Associated Press

Pedestrian struck and killed crossing Rapid City avenue

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Rapid City police are investigating the death of a pedestrian. Authorities say the 43-year-old man was struck by a pickup truck about 5 p.m. Wednesday while crossing a city avenue, outside of a crosswalk. He died later at a hospital. The 81-year-old man driving the pickup wasn't injured. Neither man was immediately identified.

2nd trial scheduled for June in drunken boating incident

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Custer City man accused of running over a wakeboarder while boating drunk on Angostura Reservoir in 2015 has been scheduled for a new trial in June.

A Fall River County jury last month convicted 41-year-old Cory Schmitz of boating under the influence, but it couldn't reach a unanimous verdict on a felony charge of aggravated assault.

Authorities allege that Schmitz struck and seriously injured 31-year-old wakeboarder Michael Lemley of Rapid City.

The Rapid City Journal reports that Schmitz will be retried over four days, beginning June 18. His sentencing on the drunken boating conviction won't happen until after the trial.

Schmitz could face up to a year in jail on that charge, and up to 15 years in prison should he be convicted of aggravated assault.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash

06-16-27-31-34

(six, sixteen, twenty-seven, thirty-one, thirty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$54,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$95 million

Powerball

23-32-44-48-50, Powerball: 25, Power Play: 2

(twenty-three, thirty-two, forty-four, forty-eight, fifty; Powerball: twenty-five; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$103 million

Brodziansky 23 points as TCU wins 8th in row, 76-71 over SD

By STEPHEN HAWKINS, AP Basketball Writer

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — Vladimir Brodziansky scored 23 points and had a key assist late as TCU held on for its eighth straight victory, 76-71 over South Dakota on Wednesday night.

The winning streak by the Horned Frogs (3-0) includes their postseason run to the NIT championship last March. They opened this season, coach Jamie Dixon's second at his alma mater, by winning three

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games in six days.

"You know there are going to be some tough games and tonight was a good challenge for us," Brodziansky said.

Brodziansky passed inside the Kouat Noi for a basket with 2:53 left, right after South Dakota had tied the game for the only time after halftime. With a chance to get even after that, Coyotes guard Triston Simpson had his shot blocked by Alex Robinson.

Matt Mooney had 31 points and Tyler Hagedorn 21 for South Dakota (2-1), the defending Summit League champion that was also an NIT team last season.

"We knew when we scheduled them that they were good and that they were well coached," Dixon said. "We made some plays down the stretch."

Noi scored 10 of his 14 points before halftime, and Desmond Bane added 10 points.

The Coyotes also had a chance to take the lead with about 4 minutes left but Simpson's 3-point shot hit the rim and bounced up and over the backboard. Mooney did hit a jumper with 3:07 left that tied the game at 68-all before Brodziansky's feed to Noi.

"A year ago we were one of the youngest teams in the country, 10 newly eligible players, and a year ago at this time we were just hoping to play well," coach Craig Smith said. "We gave ourselves a chance and we've got to learn and grow from that."

BIG PICTURE

South Dakota: Hagedorn and Mooney needed some help if the Coyotes were going to knock off a team that is considered by many to be an upper-half Big 12 opponent. The two combined to shoot 20-of-40, and the rest of the team was 8-of-21.

TCU: While inconsistent at times, and never able to put away the Coyotes, TCU did what it was supposed to do in the opening stretch with three straight wins. The Horned Frogs shot only 39 percent from the field (10 of 26) in the second half.

NOT NIT

Had South Dakota won its opening-round game in the NIT last March, the Coyotes would have played TCU in the second round. Instead, South Dakota lost to Iowa, which then lost in overtime against the Horned Frogs in the second round of the NIT.

NOI'S QUICK SCORING

Noi scored eight points in an 85-second span before the half, his second 3-pointer in that span tying the game at 17-all. "Coach always tells me to be ready when I'm off the bench," said Noi. TCU never trailed after his layup with 3:46 left in the first half broke a 30-all tie.

BASKETBALL JUNKIES

When Smith was an assistant coach at Colorado State, he wrote three different letters to Dixon, who was then still at Pitt. "Not to try to get a job," Smith said. "I'm a basketball junkie and I like to think I work pretty damn hard, and that guy works his butt off."

Smith recalls being on the road during summer recruiting, seeing Dixon at 8 a.m. games, then still being in a gym at 10:30 p.m. still watching players.

"I just can't speak highly enough about Jaime," Smith said. "He's one of those guys you're proud to be associated with in this profession."

UP NEXT

South Dakota plays at home Saturday night against Grambling State.

TCU next plays Monday night at home against Omaha.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <http://collegebasketball.ap.org> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Alaska takes Canada mining concerns to Secretary Tillerson

By BECKY BOHRER, Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Officials in Alaska want the U.S. State Department to raise with the Canadian government concerns about the impacts of British Columbia mining on waters that flow across the border.

Gov. Bill Walker, Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott and Alaska's congressional delegation also asked Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to determine if the concerns should be brought to a special international commission.

The commission gets involved when asked to do so by the national governments.

The congressional delegation made similar requests under the Obama administration and found the response to be lacking.

The State Department in October 2016 said it was working with other federal agencies to determine what Canada's national government was doing to address U.S. concerns and committed to identifying the best way forward. Sen. Lisa Murkowski called the department's response a positive step but said more needed to be done.

In their letter to Tillerson this week, the Alaska officials said they are encouraged by how engaged the provincial government in British Columbia has been with the state. But they said they also see a complementary federal role.

They recommend a formal consultation process during environmental reviews that would involve state and federal agencies and tribes. They also urge the creation of a task force to develop recommendations and direct funding for river protection.

Chris Zimmer, Alaska campaign director with Rivers Without Borders, said it's good that Walker and Mallott are working with the congressional delegation to increase pressure on British Columbia.

Concerns persist with pollution from an abandoned mine in the province, underscoring a need for the state and U.S. government to work together to ensure that upstream mining does not harm downstream interests in Alaska, Zimmer said in a statement.

Rare cranes from Canada, Wisconsin, Maryland, in Louisiana

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY, Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A dozen young whooping cranes from Wisconsin, Maryland, and Alberta, Canada, are being gradually introduced to the wild in a Louisiana refuge.

The Audubon Species Survival Center's assistant curator, Richard Dunn, says Tuesday was a big day. He brought the rare, endangered birds to the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge on the southwest Louisiana coast and across the state from New Orleans, where three cranes hatched and were introduced to the others.

"You're hoping you're doing everything right to produce birds that can survive the world," he said. Dunn said the emotional response was rather like "All right! You got your kids to college!"

Another 11 juveniles were brought to the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) further north, on Nov. 9 to begin a similar adaptation.

That means 72 whooping cranes are now living in the wild in southwest Louisiana.

Whooping cranes, standing 5 feet 9 (1.5 meters) tall, are North America's tallest flying bird and among the world's rarest with only about 600 alive. About half are in the only natural flock, which migrates between Canada and Texas. Another 137 are captive and nearly 100 are in a flock taught to migrate from Wisconsin to Florida by following ultralight planes.

The 23 youngsters are becoming acclimated in pens covered with netting. After a while they'll be released into a larger uncovered pen that will protect them from most predators while allowing other birds to fly in and these — when they're ready — to fly out.

The 11 released at White Lake all came from the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin, according to a news release from the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Audubon staffers hatched three eggs taken from the wild in Wisconsin, where blackflies had driven parents from their nests. Dunn said they were able to place one chick with adult birds whose egg hadn't hatched. But staffers had to raise the others, wearing baggy costumes to disguise their human shapes

and manipulating crane "puppets" to show the chicks how to peck.

Another seven birds were raised at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and two at Canada's Calgary Zoo. They were brought together at Audubon to form a group that got along together.

Since these birds don't have parents to teach the survival skills, the cohort acts as a family to increase their chances, Dunn said.

The near-extinction of the species came about through hunting and habitat loss.

Documents: US Steel sought to keep chemical spill secret

PORTAGE, Ind. (AP) — Environmentalists are questioning why the public wasn't notified about an October chemical spill into a Lake Michigan tributary that U.S. Steel asked Indiana regulators to keep confidential.

Documents released by the University of Chicago's Abrams Environmental Law Clinic show that U.S. Steel's plant in Portage, Indiana, released 56.7 pounds (25.7 kilograms) of chromium on Oct. 25 after a wastewater treatment system malfunction. That's nearly double what the plant is permitted to release of the potentially cancer-causing chemical over 24 hours.

A company official wrote to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management on Oct. 31 asking that its submission about the release "be afforded confidential treatment under all applicable statutes."

Law students at the University of Chicago obtained the letter while tracking pollution violations at U.S. Steel and other factories along Lake Michigan as they prepare a planned lawsuit accusing the Pittsburgh-based company of repeatedly violating the federal Clean Water Act since 2011.

The same plant released nearly 300 pounds (135 kilograms) of hexavalent chromium in April because of a pipe failure, prompting closure of nearby Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore beaches and a drinking water intake for some communities in the area about 25 miles (40 kilometers) east of Chicago. Officials said that spill was almost 600 times the plant's release limit.

U.S. Steel said in a statement Tuesday it promptly communicated with the Indiana environmental agency on Oct. 27 about the second spill "and continues to work to ensure that there is no environmental impact." The company declined to comment about the potential lawsuit.

Unlike the April spill, U.S. Steel didn't report the latest incident to the National Response Center, a warning system overseen by the U.S. Coast Guard to alert local authorities about oil spills and chemical releases, records show.

The October spill wasn't serious enough to merit reporting "and did not pose any danger to water supply or human health," U.S. Steel said.

Company spokeswoman Meghan Cox said Wednesday that its confidentiality request was made "due to business sensitive material" and has since been waived.

The Indiana environmental agency is reviewing whether proper notification procedures were followed, but excessive chemical releases typically don't require spill notifications, spokesman Barry Sneed said.

Mark Templeton, director of the Abrams Environmental Law Clinic, said he's concerned about state and federal regulators not penalizing U.S. Steel since the April spill or notifying the public about the October release.

"The public obviously has a right to know," Templeton said. "It's been over six months and no penalties. In this political climate, it's important that polluters and government officials know we are holding everyone accountable."

Democratic Portage City Councilman Collin Czilli said the Indiana agency should have warned residents about the latest chemical release.

"Why was this hidden?" he said. "Why were we not told?"

Gaming panel approves tribe's plan for casino near Omaha

By JOSH FUNK, Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The National Indian Gaming Commission has again approved the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska's plan to build a casino near Omaha, but after a decade of court hearings, the project's future remains uncertain.

The commission's ruling this week came nearly 10 years after it first approved the proposed casino in Carter Lake, Iowa.

Ponca Tribal Chairman Larry Wright Jr. celebrated the latest decision because building the casino would give the tribe significant new resources to help its members.

"This is an economic engine that will help our tribe move forward and diversify into other areas," Wright said.

The tribe wants to build a casino with 2,000 slot machines, 50 table games and a 150-room hotel. It estimates the project would create 1,800 jobs.

Wright said he's confident the casino will move forward.

The casino was opposed by Iowa and Nebraska and the city of Council Bluffs, Iowa, which is already home to several casinos just over the Missouri River from Omaha.

Geoff Greenwood, spokesman for Iowa's attorney general, said the office is still reviewing the ruling and deciding whether to appeal. Suzanne Gage, spokeswoman for Nebraska's attorney general, said that office is still reviewing the decision.

Nebraska does not permit gambling, but Iowa does and an American Indian tribe can offer gambling on land that it owns as long as gambling is legal in that state.

A consultant for the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission estimated that in 2013 nearly one-quarter of the casino revenue in Iowa came from Nebraska residents who spent nearly \$327 million.

Carter Lake originally sat on the east side of the Missouri River, which separates Iowa and Nebraska. But shifting and flooding in the late 1800s left the city on the west side of the river, just northeast of Omaha. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1892 that the city still belonged to Iowa.

The Ponca Tribe lost its status as a federally recognized tribe in 1962 and its Nebraska reservation was sold off. But the recognition was restored in 1990, and the tribe was allowed to place up to 1,500 acres in Knox and Boyd counties in Nebraska in federal trust as "restored lands."

The tribe bought the 5-acre Carter Lake site in Iowa in 1999 and deeded it to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust for non-gambling purposes in February 2003. The tribe originally told Iowa officials that the land would be used for a health center.

The National Indian Gaming Commission decided that the promises the tribe's attorney made in 2003 don't prevent it from using the land for a casino now.

Chicken processor settles water pollution suit in Florida

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — A major chicken processing plant that has been cited for polluting the Suwannee River settled a lawsuit on Wednesday that was brought by environmental groups in Florida.

Pilgrim's Pride Corp. settled the suit with Environment Florida and the Sierra Club, agreeing to pay \$1.4 million and to upgrade equipment to help reduce the plant's waste.

The settlement still requires approval from a federal judge.

The plant, which cuts up and packages chickens for retail sale, is in the north Florida town of Live Oak.

Pilgrim's Pride is the second largest chicken producer in the world, and supplies chicken to fast-food restaurants and supermarkets.

The company was cited multiple times by Florida's Department of Environmental Protection for violating limits on the amount of wastewater it was legally permitted to discharge into the river. The most recent violation was in June of this year, for failing to meet deadline required by a 2015 violations.

It was a pollution pattern that the environmental groups claimed was not being stopped by Florida's enforcement.

So the groups filed suit in federal court last year, claiming the plant was still illegally polluting the Suwannee.

"Pilgrim's Pride wasn't complying with their permits, and the (state) wasn't holding the company accountable, so Environment Florida and citizen members stepped in to get them to clean up their act" said Jennifer Rubiello, state director of the group.

Under the settlement agreement, Pilgrim's Pride will make equipment upgrades, including to its wastewater treatment plant, study how to eliminate wastewater discharges into the river and create a sustainable farming fund.

The company did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Woman injured in pipeline protest still being investigated

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press**

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A New York City woman who suffered a serious arm injury while protesting the Dakota Access pipeline last year is preparing for her fifth surgery, even as she faces assertions by the government that she or her fellow protesters are at fault for an explosion they blame on police.

Recently unsealed court documents indicate the government last spring sought evidence that might implicate Sophia Wilansky of federal crimes dealing with homemade explosives by searching her Facebook account.

Wilansky was injured during a violent clash between protesters and police in November 2016 that's become the emblematic skirmish of the months-long protest in North Dakota against the recently finished pipeline that's carrying oil to Illinois.

Protesters tried to push past a blocked highway bridge near their main encampment but were turned back by authorities using tear gas, rubber bullets and water sprays. Police said protesters threw objects including rocks, asphalt and water bottles at officers.

Wilansky suffered a left arm injury in an explosion. Protesters allege the blast was caused by a concussion grenade thrown by officers, while police maintain it was caused by a propane canister that protesters rigged to explode.

"There is probable cause to believe that violations (of explosives laws) have been committed by Sophia Wilansky," FBI Special Agent Brian VanOosbree said in an affidavit accompanying the March 28 application for a search warrant for her Facebook account.

Eight months later, Wilansky hasn't been charged with any crimes, though the investigation is ongoing, according to the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Both agencies declined to comment. Assistant U.S. Attorney Gary Delorme didn't respond to requests for comment.

Delorme received permission from a federal magistrate judge in March to keep the Facebook search secret. It was unsealed in late October. The FBI sought information that took 1 1/2 pages to detail, from photos and videos to lists of friends.

"It did seem like one of the motivations of going after her Facebook account was to see her associates, to see her friends," said Wilansky's attorney Lauren Regan, who heads the Civil Liberties Defense Center.

Wayne Wilansky said he and his daughter weren't aware of the search but aren't surprised or worried by it.

"There's nothing on her Facebook page that would concern me," he said.

The family is planning to sue the FBI to obtain shrapnel that authorities took as evidence, hoping it will bolster an eventual lawsuit they plan to file against law enforcement seeking monetary damages.

Sophia Wilansky has limited use of her left arm and hand, which her father said is "totally disfigured." She's scheduled for tendon replacement surgery on Dec. 12.

Associated Press writer Amy Forliti in Minneapolis contributed.

Follow Blake Nicholson on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/NicholsonBlake> and Amy Forliti at <https://twitter.com/amyforliti>

Arctic refuge drilling closer as Senate panel backs bill

By **MATTHEW DALY**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Oil and gas drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge moved closer Wednesday as a key Senate panel approved a bill to open the remote refuge to energy exploration.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved the drilling measure, 13-10. Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia joined 12 Republicans to back the bill.

Opening the remote refuge to oil and gas drilling is a longtime Republican priority that most Democrats fiercely oppose. The 19.6-million acre refuge in northeastern Alaska is one of the most pristine areas in the United States and is home to polar bears, caribou, migratory birds and other wildlife.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, said drilling can be done safely with new technology, while ensuring a steady energy supply for West Coast refineries. The measure would generate about \$2 billion in royalties over the next decade, Murkowski said, with half the money going to her home state.

Murkowski, who chairs the Senate panel, said opening the refuge to drilling "will help keep energy affordable, saving families and businesses money every time they pay for fuel — essentially an energy tax cut." Democrats sharply disagreed.

"What a dramatic change this is," said Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash. "It turns this refuge into an oil field."

The wildlife refuge has been the focus of a political fight for nearly four decades. President Bill Clinton vetoed a GOP plan to allow drilling in the refuge in 1995, and Democrats led by Cantwell defeated a similar GOP plan in 2005.

The Trump administration and congressional Republicans are pushing to revive the drilling plan as a way to help pay for proposed tax cuts promised by President Donald Trump. The GOP-approved budget includes \$1 billion in revenue from drilling leases over 10 years.

Environmental groups and other critics call those projections wildly optimistic, saying low global oil prices and high exploration costs are likely to limit drilling revenue. Analysts say oil prices must be at least \$70 a barrel to justify drilling. A benchmark for crude oil is about \$56 a barrel.

The measure sponsored by Murkowski calls for at least two major lease sales over the next decade in at least 400,000 acres each in the refuge's coastal plain. Surface development would be limited to 2,000 acres.

The bill requires at least a 16.67 percent royalty rate evenly split between the federal government and Alaska.

Murkowski hailed the committee vote as clearing a "significant hurdle" and said she was optimistic the plan could be approved as part of larger tax measure being considered in the House and Senate.

Cantwell said after the vote it was "a tragedy that Republicans will run over something so precious as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — land that has stood undisturbed for thousands of years — all for a giveaway to oil corporations that allows them to ignore important environmental protections."

She and other Democrats said the GOP bill is especially unwise at a time when U.S. oil production is booming, with imports declining and exports reaching record levels.

If the Republican plan is approved, "we would be drilling in the Arctic Refuge in order to find more oil to export to other countries," said Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass. "We would spoil our own sacred land in order to help oil companies sell oil to China. That makes no sense."

Jason McFarland, president of the International Association of Drilling Contractors, said the plan would help the U.S. achieve President Donald Trump's goal of becoming "energy dominant" in the global market.

Opening a small portion of the refuge to drilling "represents an extraordinary opportunity to responsibly develop the vast resources that the area is believed to contain, allowing the country to develop more of its own natural resources and rely less on foreign oil," he said.

Idaho farm explores growing blueberries on commercial level

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — A farm in southwestern Idaho is attempting to grow blueberries on a commercial scale, making it one of the first producers in the state if the project proves successful.

A major hop grower and a University of Idaho researcher are coordinating efforts on figuring out how

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to make blueberries grow in the region, the Capital Press reported on Monday.

Brock and Phillip Obendorf Farms in Parma has been growing blueberries on 18 acres for a couple of years, but the results have been mixed. Phil Obendorf said the yield has not been enough to make the endeavor profitable.

The problem is with the soil's level of acidity, Obendorf said. Acidity is measured on the pH scale with lower numbers indicating higher acidity. High pH levels can prevent plants from absorbing some micro-nutrients, he said.

Essie Fallahi, a researcher of fruit cultivation at the university, has been looking for how to alter the soil to support the growth of blueberries.

"We are trying to grow blueberries but we are fighting with high pH problems," Fallahi said. "It's a major problem and causes damage to production."

Fallahi has been testing a solution that injects acid when watering the plants. The process brings the pH level down and makes the micronutrients available, but he said this process is expensive.

Obendorf said it takes up to five years for the plants to reach full production, and his plants are currently yielding about 10 percent of where they need to be in order to reach profitability.

Despite the pH issues, Obendorf said blueberries are in demand and could be another emerging crop to hit the local market.

"I think it's very promising," Obendorf said. "We're definitely hoping for a bigger crop next year. We're planning to keep expanding."

Information from: Capital Press, <http://www.capitalpress.com/washington>

Agricultural groups challenge California weed-killer warning

By DAVID A. LIEB, Associated Press

A coalition of a dozen national and Midwestern agricultural groups sued on Wednesday to overturn a California decision that could force the popular weed-killer Roundup to carry warning labels that it can cause cancer.

The lawsuit filed in federal court in Sacramento seeks an injunction barring the state from enforcing what the suit describes as a "false" and "misleading" warning.

It claims California's decision violates constitutional due-process and free-speech rights and should be superseded by federal regulations.

Roundup's main ingredient, glyphosate, is not restricted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and has been used widely since 1974 to kill weeds while leaving crops and other plants alive.

But the International Agency for Research on Cancer, based in Lyon, France, has classified it as a "probable human carcinogen." That prompted the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment to add glyphosate this summer to a list of chemicals known to cause cancer. The listing could lead to a requirement for warning labels on the product.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit include the national wheat and corn growers associations, state agriculture and business organizations in Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota and South Dakota, and a regional group representing herbicide sellers in California, Arizona and Hawaii. The plaintiffs also include St. Louis-based Monsanto Co., which makes Roundup.

The lawsuit contends that California's "false warning" has harmed Monsanto's reputation and its investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in the herbicide and glyphosate-tolerant seeds.

The suit also alleges a ripple-effect on food production across the country. It says entities that process crops for food products sold in California would have to stop using glyphosate-treated crops, add warning labels that could diminish demand for their products or engage in costly tests to show that any glyphosate residue is at safe levels.

California's cancer warning "would result in higher food costs, crushing blows to state and agricultural economies and lost revenue up and down the entire supply chain," Gordon Stoner, president of the National

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Association of Wheat Growers, said in a written statement.

Sam Delson, a spokesman for the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, said the agency hadn't yet reviewed the new filing but is confident its rules are legal.

In March, a California state court judge dismissed a separate lawsuit by Monsanto challenging California's cancer warning.

Midwestern states and interest groups also have challenged other California agricultural policies.

A federal appeals court panel ruled last year that six states — Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Alabama, Kentucky and Iowa — lacked the legal right to challenge a California law barring the sale of eggs from chickens not raised in accordance with California's roomier cage-space requirements. The U.S. Supreme Court declined this year to hear an appeal.

Follow David A. Lieb at: <http://twitter.com/DavidALieb>

'Pink slime' worker aid application deadline approaches

DAKOTA DUNES, S.D. (AP) — An aid fund application deadline is looming for workers laid off by South Dakota meat producer Beef Products Inc.

The company set up a \$10 million fund in September for employees who lost their jobs after the closures of three plants in 2012. The plants were shut down after media reports of a lean beef product that critics called "pink slime" led to a loss of millions of dollars in sales and a defamation lawsuit.

Applications for the support fund are due Saturday, the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan reported. The company has already received more than 600 applications, said Rich Jochum, BPI's general counsel.

The company laid off more than 700 workers and closed plants in Texas, Kansas and Iowa in 2012. BPI alleged that ABC News' coverage of the company's finely textured beef product misled consumers into believing the product was unsafe. ABC News defended its reporting.

BPI sought \$1.9 billion in a 2012 defamation lawsuit against ABC News. The damage award amount could have tripled under South Dakota's Agricultural Food Product Disparagement Act. BPI and ABC News reached a confidential settlement in June.

"As part of the figure received in its defamation lawsuit, BPI set up the \$10 million fund," said Christine Campbell, BPI spokesperson.

Applications will be evaluated based on a former employee's length of service, unemployment benefits or any other benefits received. Factors that indicate the impact of a plant's closure or job loss on an employee and their family will also be considered.

The company has not yet determined whether the application deadline will be extended.

Suit seeks to stop new union limits around farm operations

By GARY D. ROBERTSON, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina's only farmworker union is challenging a law limiting organized labor's activities in and around the state's vegetable and tobacco fields and other agricultural operations. Their lawsuit filed Wednesday called the restrictions unconstitutional and discriminatory.

A last-minute House amendment inserted into the General Assembly's annual farm law last summer prohibits farming operations from collecting union dues from workers. It also blocks any future legal settlements requiring a farm to enter into a collective bargaining agreement.

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, who signed the bill approved by the Republican-controlled legislature, is a defendant in the lawsuit filed in Greensboro federal court seeking to block enforcement of the anti-union language. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, the lawsuit plaintiff, lashed out at Cooper as he signed it in July, accusing him of refusing to side with migrant workers and the poor.

The restrictions don't apply to current agreements, but the farm labor group and two workers who also sued said they're designed to block the union's ability to organize and improve working conditions after

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recent successes. They also discriminate against a union membership that's nearly 100 percent Latino, in contrast to overwhelmingly white farm employers, the lawsuit filed by civil rights attorneys said.

The law "invidiously targets North Carolina farmworkers and their sole union and imposes legal disabilities and disadvantages not imposed on other workers or unions in the state," the lawsuit reads, adding that it creates "obstacles to constitutionally-protected speech and association."

Cooper's office didn't respond Wednesday to an email seeking comment on the lawsuit. In July, Cooper's spokesman said the governor had concerns with the bill but pointed out its bipartisan backing and that separate provisions benefited North Carolina's farming industry.

Larry Wooten with North Carolina Farm Bureau predicted Wednesday the law would be upheld. He said it doesn't halt union activities but rather prevents farmers from being forced to unionize or "serve as a treasurer for unions."

"This law reduces an unnecessary administrative burden on farmers," Wooten said in release. "It allows them to get back to what they do best — growing our nation's food and fiber."

While North Carolina remains near the bottom among states in the percentage of workers with union membership, the Ohio-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee has made strides in North Carolina over the past two decades. Amendment sponsor Rep. Jimmy Dixon, a farmer, said during House floor debate the restrictions were needed to protect the state's right-to-work laws and because of "continued harassment from out of state."

"There are predatory folks that make a good living coming around and getting people to be dissatisfied," Dixon said, according to the lawsuit.

Legislators aren't listed as defendants, but labor leaders criticized them in a news conference for the provisions. And FLOC Vice President Justin Flores said Cooper "certainly has culpability for signing the bill."

FLOC has two collective bargaining agreements in North Carolina covering 10,000 workers, including one involving 700 farms within the North Carolina Growers Association. The contracts expire in 2019 and 2020, so the law would apply to any future deals. Most of the laborers under the association contract are guest workers from Mexico.

Plaintiffs Victor Toledo Vences and Valentin Alvarado Hernandez allege the law will create hardships for them and other workers. Transient union members without bank accounts will have to hold on to cash before it's turned in, increasing the risk that they'll be robbed, the lawsuit said.

The law "effectively prevents FLOC from expressing and advancing the interests of its members," the lawsuit said.

Sen. Brent Jackson, a Sampson County farm operator, was a primary sponsor of the farm bill and a chief negotiator of the final compromise legislation that retained the House amendment. Jackson's farm company decided to leave the North Carolina Growers Association in 2014. He was sued last year by several former workers — FLOC members including Hernandez— seeking back wages and other financial damages. A financial settlement was reached. Jackson did not admit wrongdoing.

A farm worker advocate filed General Assembly ethics complaints against Jackson and another legislator last July over the anti-union language, but a legislative panel quickly dismissed them.

Wisconsin businessman creates fund for solar energy

EDGERTON, Wis. (AP) — A Wisconsin businessman has created a fund that awards grants to nonprofits trying to move toward solar energy.

Cal Couillard created Solar for Good, which awards the grants with the help of the advocacy group RE-NEW Wisconsin, Milwaukee Public Radio reported .

Couillard is president of Componex. He had solar panels installed at the Edgerton-based manufacturer this year. He's also contributed \$125,000 to start the fund and plans to give more over the next few years.

"I can't guarantee it forever but I'm hoping that I can continue to do that and stay at that level," he said. "And I'd like to see if maybe other people might like to do this as well."

Couillard said the price of going solar has dropped, so it makes financial sense for organizations to turn

to solar energy. He said transitioning to renewable energy is also good for the environment.

"The idea is that if we can install on churches and other nonprofits then all the people that are going there will also see this happening," he said. "So basically I want to spread the message that solar is not just green for the environment, it's green monetarily. You can actually save money doing it. It pays for itself. And I want to get that word out because I don't think a lot of people know it."

Ten nonprofits have applied for a grant and the first set of recipients will be announced soon. The next batch of applicants will be considered in the spring.

Information from: WUWM-FM, <http://www.wuwm.com>

Sioux Falls won't yet reveal bidders for event center review

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The city of Sioux Falls won't publicly release which companies have submitted bids to make sure flawed paneling is protecting the city's new \$117 million events center.

The Argus Leader reports that the Sioux Falls Public Works Department has received four submissions from companies vying for the review work.

But city officials won't name the companies yet or say when a selection will be made.

Sioux Falls Purchasing Manager Scott Rust tells the newspaper that the list of bidders for the request for proposals is public information but won't be shared publicly until after the city sends out a news release of its intent to award.

The flawed paneling on the Denny Sanford Premier Center was the subject of a city settlement with five construction companies in 2015.

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

3 arrested at Enbridge Line 3 pipeline site in Wisconsin

SUPERIOR, Wis. (AP) — Police have arrested three protesters at an Enbridge pipeline construction site in northwestern Wisconsin.

Authorities say 12 to 15 pipeline opponents gathered at the site in Superior about 9 a.m. Wednesday. Police Chief Matt Markon says one protester attached himself to a piece of equipment that had to be removed with a hand-held metal cutting wheel.

Markon says that protester and a woman were arrested for trespassing and resisting arrest. He says a third was arrested on an unrelated misdemeanor warrant.

It's the third time in two months that arrests have been made at the site in Superior, where Enbridge is replacing a segment of its aging Line 3 oil pipeline from Alberta. Minnesota regulators will decide in April whether to approve replacing the stretch that crosses northern Minnesota.

North Dakota regulators blame pipeline spill on human error

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — State regulators say human error caused a pipeline spill that leaked more than 11,000 gallons (42,000 liters) of oilfield wastewater in western North Dakota.

The Bismarck Tribune reports that the spill in Dunn County on Sunday was reported by Crestwood Midstream.

Department of Mineral Resources spokeswoman Alison Ritter says crews forgot to close a valve on the pipeline, which caused the produced water spill.

Produced water is a mixture of saltwater and oil that can contain drilling chemicals.

Regulators say the spill was contained within a pipeline trench and most of it had been recovered by Monday.

Information from: Bismarck Tribune, <http://www.bismarcktribune.com>

Organic-food purists assail the designation for hydroponics

By LISA RATHKE, Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Can a tomato grown in a nutrient solution instead of dirt be called “organic”? Some purists don’t think so.

The National Organic Standards Board, which advises the U.S. Department of Agriculture, voted this month against a proposal to exclude hydroponics and aquaponics — the raising of plants without soil and fish using the same water — from the USDA’s organic certification program.

Many traditional organic farmers and their supporters say allowing hydroponic farms to be certified organic erodes the integrity of the \$16 billion U.S. organic produce industry.

To them, organic farming is about far more than not using toxic pesticides; it’s rooted in enhancing the fertility of soils, a concept developed in the early 20th century by pioneering organic farmers. Organic farmers worked hard to create the National Organic Program in 2000, an achievement they say is now being watered down by allowing hydroponic farms to be part of it.

“Unfortunately those very things that it was created to do, which I think in the beginning it did do, is now really damaging because they’re certifying things that none of us believe are organic,” said Dave Chapman, of Long Wind Farm in East Thetford, Vermont.

Traditional organic farmers “feel like this is a complete slap in the face,” said Andrianna Natsoulas, executive director of Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York. “They feel that organic now is a complete joke and it means absolutely nothing, and their years of working and their dedication and their commitment is for naught.”

The Organic Trade Association said it did not support the proposal to prohibit hydroponics because of the way it was written.

Marianne Cufone, executive director of the Recirculating Farms Coalition, which represents hydroponic and aquaponic farmers, said the law left room for the meaning of organic to expand. She said she was shocked that so many people opposed hydroponic and aquaporin farming from being labeled as such.

“I thought it was an absolute no-brainer that hydroponics and aquaporin, when done well, can meet organic standard and why wouldn’t anyone want that included,” she said. “They’re excellent on water reduction. They’re excellent on space use. They’re excellent on intensive production, so we’re using less resources and creating more food. That just seems smart.”

Many such farms are interested in becoming certified organic because it’s a growing market, she said. “And it essentially puts this style of farming at a premium as well,” she said.

That leaves traditional organic farmers really concerned about the competition they’ll face in the marketplace, Natsoulas said.

Diane Nancekivell, of Middlebury, Vermont, typically pays that premium to get organic produce. While shopping at Healthy Living Market & Cafe in South Burlington, Vermont, she said she was excited to get hydroponic fruits and vegetables in the winter and has no problem with them not being grown in soil.

Fellow shopper Chrysanne Chotis, of South Burlington, Vermont, said she didn’t find the flavor of hydroponic produce as interesting as other produce she buys.

Some farmers are going to start working on finding an alternative to USDA certification that represents “real organic farmers,” Chapman said.

“It’s a tough thing. Nobody wants to do it ... but what else can we do? If you believe in it, what else can you do?”

Zimbabwe leader Robert Mugabe seemed invincible but era ends

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe seemed almost untouchable for much of his nearly four-decade rule. Shrewd and ruthless, he stayed in power despite advancing age, growing opposition, international sanctions and the dissolving economy of a once-prosperous nation.

Now that it seems to finally be here, the abrupt end of the Mugabe era is launching Zimbabwe into the unknown.

Mugabe, who at 93 is the world's oldest head of state, is confined to his home after a military takeover. It was the most dramatic development in a factional battle within the ruling ZANU-PF party in which first lady Grace Mugabe had been angling, with Mugabe's help, to take over the presidency in a dynastic succession.

Even if Zimbabwe's generals allow Mugabe to keep his job for a while, he would likely be a transitional figurehead, no longer wielding unchallenged authority over this southern African country.

It is a humbling close to the career of a man who crushed dissent or sidelined opponents after leading Zimbabwe since independence from white minority rule in 1980.

A master politician, Mugabe outmaneuvered challenges from within ZANU-PF during the war against Rhodesian rule. After independence Mugabe ruthlessly sidelined his rival Joshua Nkomo by isolating the opposition leader and sending army troops into Matabeleland, Nkomo's stronghold in southern Zimbabwe. The army rampage in Matabeleland from 1983 to 1987 is blamed for the deaths of between 10,000 and 20,000 people and is one of the darkest stains on Mugabe's rule.

Even as human rights concerns mounted and the economy deteriorated at home, Mugabe cast himself as a voice of pride and defiance in modern Africa, a message that resonated in countries where liberation-era movements held onto power for decades after Western colonialism ended.

"They are the ones who say they gave Christianity to Africa," Mugabe said of the West during a visit to South Africa in 2015. "We say: 'We came, we saw and we were conquered.'"

Spry in impeccably tailored suits, Mugabe maintained a schedule of events and international travel, despite his age, and could be pugnacious. But his firing of Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa earlier this month, in an apparent attempt to pave the way for Grace Mugabe's succession, seems to have been a serious miscalculation.

Mnangagwa was widely backed by the army. Days after Mnangagwa's ouster, Zimbabwe's army commander criticized instability in the ruling party, saying "counter revolutionaries" were plotting to destroy it.

A country once so full of promise now finds itself with weak institutions, collapsed industries, a splintered opposition, and a military whose dispatch of tanks and soldiers into city streets cast doubt on its pledges to work for democracy. In apparently backing the Mnangagwa faction, the military is staking out a political position that will be hard to undo ahead of scheduled 2018 elections.

The main opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, is ill with cancer and has lost much of the vigor he had when he joined a power-sharing government with Mugabe a decade ago after deadly election violence. The unity government ended with a disputed election in 2013, one in which Mugabe was re-elected president.

His longevity and frequently dashed rumors of ill health delighted supporters and frustrated opponents. Mugabe's busy travel schedule to international events drew criticism from Zimbabweans who said state money could be better spent at home. But recently, he was slowing down, often going to Singapore for medical treatment and seeming to doze at some public appearances.

He showed his old gusto in March 2016 when an interviewer from state television asked him about retirement plans, and who might succeed him.

"Do you want me to punch you to the floor to realize I am still there?" Mugabe replied.

In his early days as president, after a long war between black guerrillas and the white rulers of Rhodesia, as Zimbabwe was known before independence, Mugabe reached out to whites. A former schoolteacher, he stressed education and built new schools. Tourism and mining flourished. Zimbabwe was a regional breadbasket.

But around 2000, violent seizures of thousands of white-owned farms began, causing agricultural pro-

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duction to plunge. A land reform program was supposed to take much of the country's most fertile land and redistribute it to poor blacks, but Mugabe instead gave prime farms to ZANU-PF leaders and loyalists, relatives and cronies.

Earlier this year, when Mnangagwa was still vice president, he stuck to an official script that Mugabe was the only leader suitable for Zimbabwe, denouncing any "mad young people" in ZANU-PF who wanted him to oust Mugabe.

But after being booted as vice president and fleeing Zimbabwe, Mnangagwa told his countrymen that he "shall return to Zimbabwe to lead you."

Zimbabwe's ruling party is scheduled to hold a key congress in December, when Grace Mugabe was expected to be selected as vice president after the ouster of Mnangagwa. Now the event, if it goes forward, might serve as a chance for Mnangagwa or his allies to consolidate authority over ZANU-PF.

If Mnangagwa becomes a steward of Zimbabwe's political transition, he will face his own challenges as a figure with a dark past who was involved in the killing of thousands of perceived opponents by a North Korean-trained army brigade in western Zimbabwe in the 1980s.

Meanwhile, the future of the only leader that many Zimbabweans have ever known is cloudy.

Speaking slowly during an hour-long speech at his birthday party in February, Mugabe said that at times he felt alone, and he described his life as a "long, long journey."

AP journalist Andrew Selsky in Salem, Oregon, contributed

GOP braces for extended clash in Alabama

By STEVE PEOPLES and ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — With President Donald Trump standing on the sidelines, Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore and his allies on the ground in Alabama are bracing for an extended conflict — not with Democrats, but with their own party in Washington.

The divide between the state and national GOP reached new depths late Wednesday as more allegations of sexual misconduct surfaced against Moore, an outspoken Christian conservative. Already, the Republican National Committee, the Senate GOP campaign committee and the party's leading voices in Congress have called on the 70-year-old former judge to quit the race.

Ever defiant, Moore offered fighting words in a tweet addressed to the top Senate Republican: "Dear Mitch McConnell, Bring. It. On."

Chris Hansen, executive director of the national GOP's Senate campaign committee, fired back, "'Bring It On' is a movie about cheerleaders."

At least three new allegations of misconduct were reported on Wednesday, including one by Tina Johnson, who told AL.com that Moore groped her during a 1991 meeting in his law office. Two others told The Washington Post they were young women when Moore courted them as a district attorney in his 30s. Three other women told the newspaper last week that they were teens when Moore tried to initiate romantic relationships. One said she was 14 when Moore touched her over her bra and underwear.

"There's a special place in hell for people who prey on children," Ivanka Trump told the AP on Wednesday. "I've yet to see a valid explanation and I have no reason to doubt the victims' accounts."

Her father, however, dodged questions about the turmoil in the Alabama Senate race on Wednesday. President Donald Trump, who withstood allegations of sexual assault weeks before his own election, was uncharacteristically silent when faced with questions about the scandal.

Washington Republicans had looked to Trump as one of the few remaining hopes for pushing a fellow political rebel from the race.

Behind the scenes, aides described Trump as vexed by the Moore issue. Even if he should speak out, he might make an uncomfortable critic: The allegations against the bombastic former judge echo Trump's own political problems when he was accused weeks before the 2016 election of more than a dozen instances of sexual harassment. The Trump aides would not be named discussing the matter because they were

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not authorized to discuss private conversations.

To a great extent, the anti-establishment forces that propelled Trump to the White House are now strongly behind Moore, and Alabama Republican leaders are reluctant to enrage his loyal conservative supporters.

The Alabama Republican Party is expected to maintain support for their embattled candidate.

The state GOP's 21-member steering committee did not take a final vote after an hours-long meeting to discuss their options on Wednesday, which took place before new allegations of misconduct surfaced, according to three people familiar with the meeting who weren't authorized to speak publicly.

The state GOP has the power to revoke Moore's GOP nomination and ask election officials to ignore ballots cast for him, but that would risk a lawsuit and backlash from Moore supporters. The party has little interest in alienating Moore's followers a year before elections in which the governor's office and entire state Legislature will be in play.

Outside the state party headquarters, Moore's campaign chairman and personal attorney addressed reporters on Wednesday, trying to undercut the story of one of the women who has accused Moore of sexually accosting her when she was in high school.

The attorney, Phillip Jauregui, demanded that Beverly Nelson "release the yearbook" she contends Moore signed. The lawyer questioned whether the signature was Moore's and said it should be submitted for handwriting analysis. Neither the attorney nor the campaign manager addressed the original allegations from his other accusers. They did not take questions.

Gloria Allred, Nelson's attorney, later said her client would allow the yearbook to be examined only if Moore is questioned under oath by a Senate committee.

The unusual news conference suggested that Moore, a judge twice removed from his post as state Supreme Court chief justice, was digging in, leaving his party with two damaging potential election outcomes. His victory would saddle GOP senators with a colleague accused of abusing and harassing teenagers, a troubling liability heading into next year's congressional elections, while a loss to Democrat Doug Jones would slice the already narrow GOP Senate majority to an unwieldy 51-49.

It's too late to remove Moore's name from the ballot, so fielding a Republican write-in at this point would almost certainly hand the election to the Democrats unless he should withdraw and persuade his supporters to vote for that substitute.

According to internal polling conducted by the Senate GOP campaign arm and reviewed by The Associated Press, Moore trails Democrat Jones by 12 points — 39 percent to 51 percent — in the survey conducted on Sunday and Monday. Moore led by 9 points the week before in the National Republican Senatorial Committee's internal numbers.

National GOP leaders were openly discussing a write-in candidate, although they had not yet agreed on who it should be. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has encouraged Attorney General Jeff Sessions to step up. But Sessions, whose former Senate seat is at stake, has indicated he has no interest in that.

Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby said that he'll write in another name on Election Day and Sessions would be an "ideal candidate." But he also said "I don't see any movement" toward an effective effort with the election less than a month away.

Miller reported from Washington. AP reporters Kimberly Chandler in Montgomery, Alabama, Jay Reeves in Birmingham, Alabama and Alan Fram, Catherine Lucey, Andrew Taylor and Matthew Daly in Washington contributed to this report.

Trump exhorts UCLA trio to thank Xi for release in China

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is exhorting three suspended UCLA basketball players to thank Chinese President Xi Jinping (shee jihn-peeng) for their freedom following a shoplifting incident while they were in China.

Trump had tweeted Wednesday: "Do you think the three UCLA basketball p layers will say thank you President Trump. They were headed for 10 years in jail."

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The trio apologized later Wednesday and publicly thanked Trump, who was in Asia last week, for his help. On Thursday morning, the president sent another tweet saying, "You're welcome. go out and give a big Thank You to President Xi Jinping of China who made your release possible."

In the same tweet, Trump said, "HAVE A GREAT LIFE! Be careful, there are many pitfalls on the long and winding road of life!"

Freshmen LiAngelo Ball, Jalen Hill and Cody Riley were detained in Hangzhou for questioning following allegations of shoplifting last week before the Bruins beat Georgia Tech in their season-opening game in Shanghai. The rest of the UCLA team returned home Saturday.

Athletic director Dan Guerrero said the incident occurred when the team was given 90 minutes of free time on Nov. 6 in Hangzhou. He said the three visited several stores and took items from three stores.

Coach Steve Alford announced Wednesday the players were being suspended indefinitely and said they would have to earn their way back onto the team.

Cambodia's top court orders opposition party dissolved

By SOPHENG CHEANG, Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodia's Supreme Court ordered the main opposition party to be dissolved on Thursday, dealing a crushing blow to democratic aspirations in the increasingly oppressive Southeast Asian state. The decision clears the way for the nation's authoritarian leader to remain in power for years to come.

The verdict, which was widely expected, comes amid a growing push by the administration of Prime Minister Hun Sen to neutralize political opponents and silence critics ahead of elections due in July 2018.

Chief Judge Dith Muntty, who is a senior ruling party member, announced the nine-member court's unanimous ruling.

He said 118 opposition party members would also be banned from politics for the next five years, and the verdict could not be appealed.

The government accuses the Cambodia National Rescue Party of plotting a coup and has called for its dissolution for weeks. The opposition staunchly denies the allegations and says they are politically motivated — a position backed by international rights groups and independent analysts who say no credible evidence has emerged to back the claims.

The party had been expected to pose a serious challenge in next year's polls. During the last vote in 2013, it scored major gains in a tense race that saw Hun Sen narrowly retain office.

Since then, the opposition's fortunes have ebbed dramatically.

Sam Rainsy, who led the party during that vote, went into exile in 2016 and faces a jail term for a criminal defamation conviction if he returns. The party's current leader, Kem Sokha, has been imprisoned since September, charged with treason.

Amid deepening fears over the nation's fate, more than 20 opposition lawmakers — about half of those with seats in Parliament — have also fled the country.

Mu Sochua, an opposition party vice president who is among those who have left, said the struggle for democracy was not over in Cambodia.

Speaking in London just before the verdict, she said there were no plans to launch demonstrations immediately. "But in the heart, in our hearts, in our minds, in our spirits, in our souls, the fight for democracy will continue. It will not die."

Amnesty International blasted the decision, calling it "a blatant act of political repression."

"This is yet more evidence of how the judiciary in Cambodia is essentially used as an arm of the executive and as a political tool to silence dissent," said James Gomez, Amnesty International's director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

"Sadly, this is just the culmination of several months of threats, rhetoric and outright repression. The authorities have launched a widespread assault on dissent ... the international community cannot stand idly — it must send a strong signal that this crackdown is unacceptable."

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The government-led crackdown has targeted civil society groups and independent media outlets, too. In September, authorities shut down the English-language Cambodia Daily, and they have shuttered radio stations that aired programming from U.S.-funded Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, whose reports they allege are biased.

The government also expelled the U.S. National Democratic Institute, which helped train political parties and election monitors, accusing it of colluding with its opponents.

The crackdown reflects a major shift away from American influence, which has waned for years as Cambodia edges closer to China. Analysts say Hun Sen has also been emboldened by U.S. President Donald Trump, who has welcomed Thailand's coup leader to the Oval Office and praised the Philippine president despite a crackdown on drugs that has left thousands dead.

Hun Sen has been in office since 1985 and has held a tight grip on power since ousting a co-prime minister in a bloody 1997 coup.

Although Cambodia is a nominally a democratic state, its institutions remain fragile and the rule of law weak; the judiciary is not seen as independent.

Before Thursday's ruling, Hun Sen had encouraged opposition lawmakers to defect to his ruling party. In a speech last week to garment workers, he was so confident the court would rule against the opposition party that he offered anyone 100 to 1 odds if they were willing to bet it would not happen.

Charles Santiago, a Malaysian lawmaker who chairs the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, slammed the verdict, calling it "the final nail in the coffin for Cambodian democracy."

"Its decision not only leaves the country without its only viable opposition party less than a year before scheduled elections, but also completely undermines Cambodia's institutional framework and the rule of law," Santiago said. "The CNRP was dissolved not for breaking any laws, but simply for being too popular and a threat to the ruling party's dominance."

Associated Press writers Todd Pitman in Bangkok and Danica Kirka in London contributed to this report.

France says Hariri accepts invitation, will come within days

By ANGELA CHARLTON, Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri has accepted an invitation to come to France after his surprise resignation from Saudi Arabia nearly two weeks ago that stunned Lebanon and rattled the region, the French president's office announced Thursday.

An official in President Emmanuel Macron's office said Hariri is expected in France in the coming days. The official was not authorized to be publicly named.

Lebanon's President Michel Aoun welcomed Hariri's decision to accept the invite, saying he hoped it "opened the door for a resolution" of the crisis.

"I wait for the return of President (of the council of ministers) Hariri to decide the next move regarding the government," Aoun said in comments during a meeting with journalists. They were published on his official Twitter account.

Aoun had refused to accept Hariri's resignation and accused the Saudis of holding him against his will. In his strongest statements yet about the crisis, Aoun said Wednesday there was no reason for the prime minister not to return to Lebanon.

In Riyadh, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said the kingdom "rejected" allegations that it is holding Hariri against his will.

"The accusation that the kingdom would hold a prime minister or a former prime minister is not true, especially a political ally like President Saad Hariri," al-Jubeir said during a press conference with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian who is visiting Saudi Arabia.

Le Drian is expected to meet with Hariri later.

"I don't know the source of these accusations. But they are rejected and are baseless and untrue," al-Jubeir said.

Al-Jubeir said Hariri is in Saudi Arabia according to his own will. "He leaves when he wants to," he said.

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Hariri is a dual Saudi-Lebanese citizen.

Hariri announced his resignation from Saudi Arabia nearly two weeks ago, citing concerns over the meddling of Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah in regional affairs. He also said he fears for his life.

Saudi Arabia is locked in a feud with Iran over regional influence. Both countries support different groups in Lebanon.

The resignation of Saudi-aligned Hariri was seen as engineered by Saudi Arabia and raised concerns that it would drag Lebanon, with its delicate sectarian-based political system, into the battle for regional supremacy.

Hezbollah accused the kingdom of seeking to sow chaos in Lebanon.

Al-Jubeir railed against Hezbollah, calling it a "first-class terrorist organization" that should lay down its arms and respect Lebanon's sovereignty.

"Hezbollah has kidnapped the Lebanese system," al-Jubeir said.

France, Lebanon's onetime colonial ruler, has been trying to mediate the crisis. On Wednesday, Macron invited Hariri and his family to come to France, apparently as a way to put an end to allegations that the prime minister is being held against his will.

The announcement that Hariri will head to France came after Le Drian met with the Saudi crown prince and the Saudi king. He is expected to meet with Hariri on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the front page of the daily Lebanese Al-Akhbar boasted: "Saudi loses," hailing the French for their proposal to end the deadlock.

Associated Press writers Sarah El Deeb and Zeina Karam in Beirut and Aya Batrawy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 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. GOP MUSCLING TAX BILL THROUGH HOUSE; HITS SENATOR ROADBLOCK

House leaders are confident a massive tax overhaul bill will pass, but Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin became the first Republican senator to say he opposes his party's politically must-do legislation.

2. WHAT GOP IS BRACING FOR

Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore and his allies in Alabama are bracing for an extended conflict — not with Democrats, but with their own party in Washington.

3. MUGABE IN TALKS THAT COULD END DECADES-LONG RULE

The Zimbabwean president has been in military custody, reportedly with his wife, and there's no sign of the recently fired deputy Emmerson Mnangagwa, who fled the country last week.

4. FRANCE SAYS HARIRI ACCEPTS INVITATION

Macron's office says that the Lebanese prime minister will be in the country within days after his surprise resignation from Saudi Arabia that stunned Lebanon and rattled the region.

5. NEIGHBOR SLAIN BY NORTHERN CALIFORNIA GUNMAN HAD PROTECTIVE ORDER

Hailey Suzanne Poland told a judge earlier this year that she lived in fear of Kevin Janson Neal because he was violent and unpredictable, firing off guns at all hours and threatening her with "perverted things."

6. FERTILIZER RUNOFF POSES RISKS TO HEALTH, DAMAGES ECONOMY

An AP investigation finds that vast sums of taxpayer money spent to make farms more environmentally friendly are not stopping a toxic algae plague in the nation's waterways.

7. WHERE THEY'RE HAVING TROUBLE KEEPING TRACK OF PATIENTS

There have been 17 escapes in the past eight years at a Hawaii psychiatric hospital thrust into the spotlight after a dangerous patient got away and made it to California before he was captured.

8. \$500 MILLION MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE SET FOR WASHINGTON OPENING

Hobby Lobby's owner, who provided the artifacts, says the museum is a nonsectarian effort to educate

people about the Bible's broad influence, but critics say its ultimate goal is evangelizing.

9. WHAT \$450 MILLION CAN GET YOU

A painting of Christ by da Vinci sells for a record at a Christie's auction in New York, smashing previous marks for artworks sold at auction or privately.

10. WHO IS FEUDING OVER GOODELL

The NFL sends a letter to Jerry Jones' attorney accusing the Cowboys owner of "conduct detrimental to the league's best interests" over his objection to a contract extension for the commissioner.

Ohio calls off execution after failing to find inmate's vein

By **ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS, Associated Press**

LUCASVILLE, Ohio (AP) — Ohio called off the execution of an ailing 69-year-old killer Wednesday after the executioners couldn't find a vein to insert the IV that delivers the lethal drugs.

It was only the third time in modern U.S. history that an execution attempt was halted after the process had begun.

Alva Campbell, condemned to die for killing a teenager during a carjacking two decades ago, was promptly given a new execution date by Republican Gov. John Kasich that is a year and a half away.

The execution team worked for about 25 minutes to find a vein in Campbell's arms or his right lower leg as he lay on a gurney in the death chamber. Team members used a locating device with an ultraviolet light while comforting Campbell by patting him on the arm and shoulder.

Although it appeared the executioners had successfully inserted a needle in his shin, the warden instructed the team to pull it out, said David Stebbins, Campbell's public defender.

Informed the execution was being called off, the condemned man shook hands with two members of the team and wiped away tears.

"This is a day I'll never forget," Campbell said, according to Stebbins.

Certain conditions can make it difficult to find suitable veins, including damage from drug abuse, or dehydration. Stebbins said Campbell's poor veins and other health ills are problems that won't go away anytime soon.

Campbell's new execution date is June 5, 2019.

Death penalty opponents called for the state to put an end to the death penalty.

"This is not justice, and this is not humane," said Mike Brickner of the Ohio chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Campbell's attorneys had warned that his execution could become an unseemly spectacle because of his poor health. He suffers from breathing problems from a longtime smoking habit and requires a walker and a colostomy bag, his lawyers said.

On Wednesday, he was brought into the death chamber in a wheelchair, lifted onto the gurney by three men and given a wedge-shaped pillow to help him breathe. In the days before, he was kept hydrated and denied caffeinated coffee, Stebbins said.

A medical team had checked his veins and determined they were accessible an hour before Campbell was put on the gurney, according to a timeline provided by the prisons department.

Ohio Correction Director Gary Mohr said that the execution team humanely handled the attempt and that he made the decision to call it off after talking with the medical team.

The sister, brother and uncle of Campbell's 18-year-old victim witnessed the unsuccessful attempt to put him to death.

Earlier this month, Campbell lost a bid to be executed by firing squad, which would have required a change in Ohio law.

Franklin County prosecutor Ron O'Brien called Campbell "the poster child for the death penalty." Prosecutors also said Campbell's health claims were ironic given that he faked paralysis to escape the day of the carjacking.

Campbell was in a wheelchair in 1997 when he overpowered a sheriff's deputy on the way to a court

hearing on armed robbery charges. He took the deputy's gun, carjacked Charles Dials and drove around with him for several hours before shooting him twice in the head.

In 2009, the state called off the execution of killer Romell Broom after two hours of unsuccessful attempts to find a vein. Broom is back on death row with a new execution date in 2020. In 1946 in Louisiana, the electrocution of 16-year-old Willie Francis was halted because of improper set-up of the chair. He was executed the following year.

Andrew Welsh-Huggins can be reached on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/awhcolumbus>.

GOP muscling tax bill through House; hits senator roadblock

By ALAN FRAM and MARCY GORDON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans are muscling their massive tax bill through the House, with President Donald Trump urging them on to a critically needed legislative victory and GOP House leaders exuding confidence they have the votes.

But the tax overhaul hit a roadblock Wednesday as Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin became the first Republican senator to say he opposes his party's politically must-do tax legislation. That signaled potential problems for GOP leaders.

Passage of a similar package seemed assured Thursday in the House, where a handful of dissidents conceded they expected to be steamrolled by a GOP frantic to claim its first major legislative victory of the year.

"Big vote tomorrow in the House. Tax cuts are getting close!" Trump enthused in a tweet Wednesday night. "Why are Democrats fighting massive tax cuts for the middle class and business (jobs)? The reason: Obstruction and Delay!"

Trump planned to visit House GOP lawmakers Thursday at the Capitol in what seemed likely to be a pep rally, not a rescue mission. Eager to act before opposition groups could sow doubts among the rank-and-file, Republican leaders were anxious to hand Trump the first crowning achievement of his presidency by Christmas.

The two chambers' plans would slash the 35 percent corporate tax rate to 20 percent, trim personal income tax rates and diminish some deductions and credits — while adding nearly \$1.5 trillion to the coming decade's federal deficits. Republicans promised tax breaks for millions of families and companies that would have more money to produce more jobs.

"It represents a bold path forward that will allow us as a nation to break out of the slow-growth status quo once and for all," said House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady, R-Texas, as his chamber debated the bill Wednesday.

Democrats charged the measures would bestow the bulk of their benefits on higher earners and corporations. In the Senate Finance Committee, they focused their attacks on two provisions designed by Republicans to increase revenue.

One would repeal President Barack Obama's health law requirement that people buy coverage or pay a fine, a move the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects would result in 13 million more uninsured people by 2027. The other would end the personal income tax cuts in 2026 while keeping the corporate reductions permanent.

"We should be working together to find ways to cut taxes for hardworking middle-class families, not taking health care away from millions of people just to give huge tax cuts to the largest corporations," said Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla.

The Republican-led Finance panel was on track to approve its proposal by week's end. It shut down Democrats' initial efforts to modify the bill, voting along party lines against amendments aimed at protecting health care coverage for veterans or people with disabilities, mental illness or opioid addiction if the insurance mandate is ended.

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But with GOP leaders hoping for full Senate passage early next month, concerns harbored by Johnson and perhaps others would have to be addressed.

Republicans controlling the Senate 52-48 can approve the legislation with just 50 votes, plus tie-breaking support from Vice President Mike Pence. With solid Democratic opposition likely, they can lose just two GOP votes.

Besides Johnson, Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Jeff Flake of Arizona and Bob Corker of Tennessee have yet to commit to backing the tax measure.

Johnson complained the bills were more generous to publicly traded corporations than to so-called pass-through entities. Those are millions of partnerships and specially organized corporations whose owners pay levies using individual, not corporate, tax rates. While details of the House and Senate bills differ, many pass-through owners would owe more than 20 percent in taxes for much of their income.

"These businesses truly are the engines of innovation and job creation throughout our economy, and they should not be left behind," Johnson said. But he left the door open to changes that would allow him to support the final version.

A small group of House Republicans largely from New York and New Jersey rebelled because the House plan would erase tax deductions for state and local income and sales taxes and limit property tax deductions to \$10,000.

Their numbers seemed insufficient to derail the bill. Asked if they could stop it, Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., shook his head and said, "I don't think so."

Repealing the "Obamacare" individual mandate would save \$338 billion over the coming decade because fewer people would be pressured into getting government-paid coverage like Medicaid. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, used the savings to make his bill's personal tax reductions modestly more generous.

Ending the bill's personal income tax cuts in 2026, derided by Democrats as a gimmick, was designed to pare the bill's long-term costs. Legislation cannot boost budget deficits after 10 years if it is to qualify for Senate procedures barring bill-killing filibusters. Those delays take 60 votes to block, numbers Republicans lack.

The House measure would collapse today's seven personal income-tax rates into four: 12, 25, 35 and 39.6 percent. The Senate would have seven rates: 10, 12, 23, 24, 32, 35 and 38.5 percent.

Both bills would nearly double the standard deduction to around \$12,000 for individuals and about \$24,000 for married couples and dramatically boost the current \$1,000 per-child tax credit.

Each plan would erase the current \$4,050 personal exemption and annul or reduce other tax breaks. The House would limit interest deductions to \$500,000 in the value of future home mortgages, down from today's \$1 million, while the Senate would end deductions for moving expenses and tax preparation.

Each measure would repeal the alternative minimum tax paid by higher-earning people. The House measure would reduce and ultimately repeal the tax paid on the largest inheritances, while the Senate would limit that levy to fewer estates.

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Richard Lardner and Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

Neighbor shot by California gunman lived in fear of him

By DON THOMPSON and PAUL ELIAS, Associated Press

RANCHO TEHAMA RESERVE, Calif. (AP) — One of the first victims of a Northern California gunman told a judge earlier this year that she and her family lived in fear of him because he was violent and unpredictable, firing off guns at all hours and threatening her with "all kinds of perverted things."

A sheriff's deputy on April 1 handed Kevin Janson Neal a court order to stay away from his neighbor Hailey Suzanne Poland and her family, and barred him from possessing guns.

Records show Neal certified that he surrendered his weapons in February, but Tehama County Assistant Sheriff Phil Johnston said they had recovered two illegal homemade assault rifles and two handguns.

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registered to someone else.

On Tuesday, Neal shot and killed the 34-year-old woman before embarking on what authorities called a "murderous rampage" through a neighborhood in Tehama County about 130 miles (209 kilometers) north of Sacramento.

Neal killed five people and wounded at least eight others before sheriff's deputies fatally shot him during a gun battle, Johnston said.

Several other neighbors had repeatedly reported that Neal was firing hundreds of rounds at his property.

At Wednesday's news conference, Johnston initially said Neal "was not prohibited from owning firearms" but later acknowledged the protective order against him.

After being pressed by reporters on why police did not act when Neal was in clear violation of his court order, Johnston obliquely replied: "The law is only for people who obey it."

Poland's slaying underscored the difficulty of enforcing restraining orders when suspects ignore them, Loyola Law School professor Laurie Levenson said.

"Law enforcement often doesn't realize it has a problem until it's too late," Levenson said.

Neal was arrested and charged with stabbing Poland and attacking her mother-in-law during a Jan. 31 encounter in their rural neighborhood. Poland filed for a restraining order a week later, writing in a plea to a judge that Neal "is very unpredictable and unstable ... has anger issues."

Tehama County district attorney Gregg Cohen said he sought a protective order for Poland and her mother-in-law after Neal's release from jail on bail.

"Simply put, the victims were very scared of him," Cohen said.

Neal was also known to have violent squabbles with his wife.

The gunman's sister, Sheridan Orr, said her brother had struggled with mental illness throughout his life and at times had a violent temper.

She said Neal had "no business" owning firearms.

At a tense news conference Wednesday, Johnston conceded that neighbors had repeatedly complained about Kevin Janson Neal firing hundreds of rounds from his house.

Johnston said authorities responded to calls several times, but the 44-year-old Neal wouldn't open the door, so they left.

"He was not law enforcement friendly. He would not come to the door," Johnston said. "You have to understand we can't anticipate what people are going to do. We don't have a crystal ball."

The evidence that emerged Wednesday, however, along with residents' statements raised questions about whether lawlessness was occasionally tolerated.

The community is a sparsely populated area of rolling woodlands dotted with grazing cattle.

"There's hardly any police presence out here," said Dillon Elliot, who moved away in 2001, though his parents still live there. "Every so often you'll see them if it's super bad."

He said his father, who was on the homeowners' association board, was threatened in the late '80s and early '90s during a dispute with a neighbor and deputies never responded.

"It's almost like they think we're lawless out here and they just don't care," he said.

Police found the bullet-riddled body of Neal's wife stuffed under the floorboards of their home in the rural community of Rancho Tehama Reserve. They believe her slaying was the start of the rampage.

Neal then shot two neighbors in an apparent act of revenge before he went looking for random victims at the community's elementary school and several other locations.

During the rampage that lasted 25 minutes, Neal tried and failed to get into Rancho Tehama Elementary School, but fired into the school from the outside.

Six-year-old Alejandro Hernandez was in his classroom when one of Neal's bullets came through the window and hit him in the chest.

His aunt, Rosa A. Monroy, said he was at a Sacramento hospital awaiting surgery on his foot. It's not clear when they will operate on the more serious wound to his upper chest and right arm, she said.

"I just pray that we can all be strong together," she tearfully told a crowd of dozens of people that gathered for a vigil to honor the victims on Wednesday night.

— Elias reported from San Francisco. Associated Press writers Jocelyn Gecker, Janie Har and Olga Rodriguez also contributed from San Francisco.

Leonardo da Vinci's Christ painting sells for record \$450M

By KAREN MATTHEWS and TOM McELROY, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A painting of Christ by the Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci sold for a record \$450 million (380 million euros) at auction on Wednesday, smashing previous records for artworks sold at auction or privately.

The painting, "Salvator Mundi," Latin for "Savior of the World," is one of fewer than 20 paintings by Leonardo known to exist and the only one in private hands. It was sold by Christie's auction house, which didn't immediately identify the buyer.

"Salvator Mundi" is a painting of the most iconic figure in the world by the most important artist of all time," said Loic Gouzer, co-chairman of post-war and contemporary art at Christie's. "The opportunity to bring this masterpiece to the market is an honor that comes around once in a lifetime."

The highest price paid for a work of art at auction had been \$179 million (152 million euros), for Pablo Picasso's painting "Women of Algiers (Version O)" in May 2015, also at Christie's in New York. The highest known sale price for any artwork had been \$300 million (253 million euros), for Willem de Kooning's painting "Interchange," sold privately in September 2015 by the David Geffen Foundation to hedge fund manager Kenneth C. Griffin.

A backer of the "Salvator Mundi" auction had guaranteed a bid of at least \$100 million (85 million euros). The bidding opened at \$75 million and ran for 19 minutes. The price hit \$300 million about halfway through the bidding.

People in the auction house gallery applauded and cheered when the bidding reached \$300 million and when the hammer came down on the final bid, \$400 million. The record sale price of \$450 million includes the buyer's premium, a fee paid by the winner to the auction house.

The 26-inch-tall (66-centimeter-tall) Leonardo painting dates from around 1500 and shows Christ dressed in Renaissance-style robes, his right hand raised in blessing as his left hand holds a crystal sphere.

Its path from Leonardo's workshop to the auction block at Christie's was not smooth. Once owned by King Charles I of England, it disappeared from view until 1900, when it resurfaced and was acquired by a British collector. At that time it was attributed to a Leonardo disciple, rather than to the master himself.

The painting was sold again in 1958 and then was acquired in 2005, badly damaged and partly painted over, by a consortium of art dealers who paid less than \$10,000 (8,445 euros). The art dealers restored the painting and documented its authenticity as a work by Leonardo.

The painting was sold Wednesday by Russian billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev, who bought it in 2013 for \$127.5 million (108 million euros) in a private sale that became the subject of a continuing lawsuit.

Christie's said most scholars agree the painting is by Leonardo, though some critics have questioned the attribution and some say the extensive restoration muddies the work's authorship.

Christie's capitalized on the public's interest in Leonardo, considered one of the greatest artists of all time, with a media campaign that labeled the painting "The Last Da Vinci." The work was exhibited in Hong Kong, San Francisco, London and New York before the sale.

In New York, where no museum owns a Leonardo, art lovers lined up outside Christie's Rockefeller Center headquarters on Tuesday to view "Salvator Mundi."

Svetla Nikolova, who's from Bulgaria but lives in New York, called the painting "spectacular."

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience," she said. "It should be seen. It's wonderful it's in New York. I'm so lucky to be in New York at this time."

— This story has been corrected to show the name of the painting is Latin, not Italian.

Silence from Trump as Moore-Alabama storm grows louder

By ZEKE MILLER and STEVE PEOPLES, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump dodged questions about the turmoil in the Alabama Senate race on Wednesday, declining to join national Republicans who've called for Roy Moore to abandon the race amid allegations of sexual impropriety with teenage girls. Far from surrendering, Moore's camp challenged the credibility of one of the accusers.

Trump, who withstood allegations of sexual assault weeks before his own election, was uncharacteristically silent when faced with questions about the scandal, which has rattled the party and left Moore's would-be colleagues threatening to expel him should he win. Republicans had looked to Trump as one of the few remaining hopes for pushing a fellow political rebel from the race.

Moore, meanwhile, offered fighting words in a tweet addressed to the top Senate Republican: "Dear Mitch McConnell, Bring. It. On."

Chris Hansen, executive director of the national GOP's Senate campaign committee, fired back, "Bring It On is a movie about cheerleaders."

In Alabama, Moore's campaign chairman and personal attorney did address reporters, trying to undercut the story of one of the women who has accused Moore of sexually accosting her when she was in high school.

The attorney, Phillip Jauregui, demanded that Beverly Nelson "release the yearbook" she contends Moore signed. The lawyer questioned whether the signature was Moore's and said it should be submitted for handwriting analysis. Neither the attorney nor the campaign manager addressed the original allegations from Leigh Corfman who says that Moore initiated sexual contact with her when she was 14. They did not take questions.

Gloria Allred, Nelson's attorney, later said her client would allow the yearbook to be examined only if Moore is questioned under oath by a Senate committee.

The unusual news conference suggested Moore, a judge twice removed from his post as state Supreme Court chief justice, was digging in, leaving his party with two damaging potential election outcomes. His victory would saddle GOP senators with a colleague accused of abusing and harassing teenagers, a troubling liability heading into next year's congressional elections, while a loss to Democrat Doug Jones would slice the already narrow GOP Senate majority to an unwieldy 51-49.

It's too late to remove Moore's name from the ballot, so fielding a Republican write-in at this point would almost certainly hand the election to the Democrats unless he should withdraw and persuade his supporters to vote for that substitute.

According to internal polling conducted by the Senate GOP campaign arm and reviewed by The Associated Press, Moore trails Democrat Jones by 12 points — 39 percent to 51 percent — in the survey conducted on Sunday and Monday. Moore led by 9 points the week before in the National Republican Senatorial Committee's internal numbers.

Behind the scenes, aides described Trump as vexed by the Moore issue. Even if he should speak out, he might make an uncomfortable critic: The allegations against the bombastic former judge echo Trump's own political problems when he was accused weeks before the 2016 election of more than a dozen instances of sexual harassment. The Trump aides would not be named discussing the matter because they were not authorized to discuss private conversations.

To a great extent, the anti-establishment forces that propelled Trump to the White House are now strongly behind Moore, and Alabama Republican leaders are reluctant to enrage his loyal conservative supporters. State GOP leaders are highlighting party rules that could allow them to crack down on Alabama officials who support anyone else.

Alabama Republican officials convened in person and by phone late Wednesday to discuss the situation. The 21-member party steering committee did not take a final vote after an hours-long meeting, which took place before new allegations of misconduct surfaced. For now, the committee is expected to maintain support for Moore, according to three people familiar with the meeting who weren't authorized to speak

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publicly.

The state GOP has the power to revoke Moore's GOP nomination and ask election officials to ignore ballots cast for him, but that would risk a lawsuit and backlash from Moore supporters. The party has little interest in alienating Moore's followers a year before elections in which the governor's office and entire state Legislature will be in play.

A regional GOP committee representing the state's 5th congressional district approved a new resolution of support for Moore and asked the state GOP to do the same.

Trump backed Moore's unsuccessful rival, Sen. Luther Strange, in the Republican primary. Moore has the backing of Trump's former chief strategist, Steve Bannon. And Bannon's conservative news site, Breitbart, has led the charge in trying to discredit the allegations against the candidate.

GOP officials cautioned that the actions of Washington Republicans, including the president, were unlikely to affect Moore's decision-making — and that any moves against him could backfire. For example, calling for Moore to exit the race could risk embarrassment if, as expected, Moore defied the request. Officials said the White House did sign off on the Republican National Committee's decision to cut ties with Moore.

Republican leaders were openly discussing a write-in candidate, although they had not yet agreed on who it should be. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has encouraged Attorney General Jeff Sessions to step up. But Sessions, whose former Senate seat is at stake, has indicated he has no interest in that.

Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby said Wednesday that he'll write in another name on Election Day and Sessions would be an "ideal candidate." But he also said "I don't see any movement" toward an effective effort with the election less than a month away.

One prominent conservative voice — Fox News Channel host Sean Hannity — eased off on Moore Wednesday. On his Tuesday evening show, Hannity gave Moore 24 hours to explain "inconsistencies" in his response to allegations of child molestation or else exit the Alabama race.

Moore responded in a letter Wednesday: "I adamantly deny the allegations of Leigh Corfman and Beverly Nelson, did not date underage girls, and have taken steps to begin a civil action for defamation. Because of that, at the direction of counsel, I cannot comment further."

Hannity noted Wednesday night that things appeared to be worsening for Moore, but said only that Alabama voters would ultimately "make the best decision for their state."

Corfman and Nelson have said Moore molested them in the 1970s when one was 14, the other 16 and he was a local deputy district attorney in Gadsden in his 30s. Three other women have said he pursued romantic relationships with them around the same time.

Moore faced fresh allegations Wednesday.

Gena Richardson told The Washington Post she agreed to a date with Moore in 1977, around her 18th birthday, when Moore was 30. Richardson said the date ended with giving her an unwanted, "forceful" kiss. "I never wanted to see him again," Richardson told the Post.

Becky Grey, who worked in the same mall as Richardson in 1977, said Moore was so persistent about asking her out that she complained to her manager. Grey was 22 at the time.

Tina Johnson told AL.com that Moore flirted with her during a 1991 meeting in his law office and afterward grabbed her buttock. "He didn't pinch it; he grabbed it," she told the Alabama outlet.

Ivanka Trump weighed in, saying to the AP: "There's a special place in hell for people who prey on children. I've yet to see a valid explanation and I have no reason to doubt the victims' accounts." She did not call for Moore to exit the race.

Peoples reported from Birmingham, Alabama. AP reporters Alan Fram, Catherine Lucey, Andrew Taylor and Matthew Daly in Washington, Jay Reeves in Birmingham, Alabama, and Kimberly Chandler in Montgomery, Alabama contributed to this report.

Police knew 'madman' had guns before killing rampage

By **DON THOMPSON** and **JOCELYN GECKER**, Associated Press

RANCHO TEHAMA RESERVE, Calif. (AP) — Police on Wednesday called the deadly shooting rampage in California a clear case of "a madman on the loose" while defending their decision not to arrest the man for previously violating a court order prohibiting him from having guns.

At a tense news conference, police conceded that neighbors had repeatedly complained about Kevin Neal firing hundreds of rounds from his house among other erratic and violent behavior.

Tehama County Assistant Sheriff Phil Johnston said authorities responded to neighbors' calls several times, but the 44-year-old Neal wouldn't open the door, so they left.

"He was not law enforcement friendly. He would not come to the door," Johnston said. "You have to understand we can't anticipate what people are going to do. We don't have a crystal ball."

On Tuesday, Neal shot and killed five people and wounded at least eight others at different locations around the rural community of Rancho Tehama Reserve. Police later shot and killed him.

Asked about Neal's motive, Johnston responded: "Madman on the loose. The case is remarkably clear. We will move forward and we will start the healing process."

The evidence that emerged Wednesday, however, along with residents' statements raised questions about whether lawlessness was occasionally tolerated.

Neal was also known to have violent squabbles with his neighbors and his wife.

Police found the bullet-riddled body of Neal's wife stuffed under the floorboards of their home. They believe her slaying was the start of the rampage.

"We are confident that he murdered her," Johnson said.

Neal then shot two of his neighbors in an apparent act of revenge before he went looking for random victims at different locations that included the community's elementary school. All those killed were adults but authorities have said that children were among the wounded.

At the time of the attack, Neal was out of custody on bail after being charged in January with stabbing one of the neighbors he later killed in the rampage.

After the January assault, a judge barred Neal from having guns, according to court records.

The records also show that Neal was charged with illegally firing a weapon and possessing an illegal assault rifle on Jan. 31.

He was charged with five felonies and two misdemeanors. As part of a protective order that barred him from "owning, possessing, purchasing or attempting to purchase firearms," Neal was ordered to stay away from the two female neighbors he had threatened.

The neighbor he was accused of stabbing obtained a restraining order against him in February, writing to the court that Neal fired guns to scare people in her house and alleging that he was "very unpredictable and unstable" and that he had "anger issues," according to court documents.

The gunman's sister, Sheridan Orr, said her brother had struggled with mental illness throughout his life and at times had a violent temper.

She said Neal had "no business" owning firearms.

At Wednesday's news conference, Johnston initially said Neal "was not prohibited from owning firearms" but later acknowledged the protective order against him.

Records show Neal certified that he surrendered his weapons in February, but Johnston said Wednesday they had recovered two homemade assault rifles and two handguns registered to someone else.

Laurie Levenson, a Loyola Law School professor, said police officers don't need to be eyewitnesses to take action when a person is suspected of violating a restraining order.

"You can have probable cause even if officers don't see a gun or hear shots," she said. "They do not have to see the suspect with the weapon if all the circumstantial evidence indicates that he is violating the orders."

Levenson said officers don't even need a warrant to search a suspect's home if they believe the caller and the evidence they are hearing and collecting indicate the suspect is firing a gun.

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"If an officer believes there is someone with a weapon who is not entitled to have a weapon, the law permits the officer to go in," she said.

During the rampage that lasted 25 minutes, Johnston said the gunman spent about six minutes shooting into Rancho Tehama Elementary School before driving off to keep shooting elsewhere.

Police said surveillance video shows the shooter unsuccessfully trying to enter the school after quick-thinking staff members locked the outside doors and barricaded themselves inside when they heard gunshots.

Witnesses reported hearing gunshots and children screaming at the school, which has about 100 students from kindergarten through fifth grade.

A heroic school custodian rushed children inside, yelling "get into the classrooms" before Neal could reach them, said Corning Union Elementary School District maintenance department head Randy Morehouse.

"At that point he was able to get everyone inside so there was no one left on the blacktop," Morehouse said. "He's an absolute hero."

The shooter "tried and tried and tried and tried to get into the kindergarten door," he said.

Six-year-old Alejandro Hernandez was in his classroom when one of Neal's bullets came through the window and hit him in the chest.

His aunt, Rosa A. Monroy, said he was at University of California, Davis, Medical Center in Sacramento awaiting surgery on his foot. It's not clear when they will operate on the more serious wound to his upper chest and right arm, she said.

"We're just hoping to hear for the best," she tearfully told a crowd of dozens of people that gathered for a vigil to honor the victims on Wednesday night. "I just pray that we can all be strong together."

The rampage ended when a patrol car rammed the stolen vehicle Neal was driving and police killed him in a shootout.

Dillon Elliott said he witnessed the rolling gun battle from a coffee shop and parking lot as the gunman and deputies sped by.

"All hell broke loose. I mean I've never heard gunshots like that before," he said.

Elliott's parents have lived in the sparsely populated area of rolling woodlands dotted with grazing cattle about 130 miles (209 kilometers) north of Sacramento since 1986. He moved away in 2001.

"There's hardly any police presence out here," he said. "In all the time we've been out here there has been almost, I would say almost zero police presence. Every so often you'll see them if it's super bad."

He said his father, who was on the homeowners' association board, was threatened in the late '80s and early '90s during a dispute with a neighbor and deputies never responded.

"It's almost like they think we're lawless out here and they just don't care," he said.

Gecker reported from San Francisco. Associated Press writers Paul Elias, Janie Har and Olga Rodriguez also contributed from San Francisco.

Hawaii acknowledges failures after dangerous patient escapes

By **AUDREY McAVOY** and **JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER**, Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A dangerous Hawaii psychiatric patient who escaped a state hospital and flew to California before being captured Wednesday has prompted an investigation into why employees appeared to fail to do their jobs.

Dr. Virginia Pressler, director of the Hawaii Department of Health, said an internal inquiry indicated that workers inadvertently or intentionally neglected to supervise Randall Saito and notify their supervisors.

The apparent failures were spread through several shifts of workers, she said.

Seven hospital staff members were being placed on unpaid leave Wednesday for 30 days and more may be identified as the investigation continues, the department said in a statement.

Saito was gone at least eight hours before hospital staff alerted authorities.

Saito on Sunday left the 202-bed Hawaii State Hospital outside Honolulu, where he has been committed

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for 36 years since being acquitted of murder by reason of insanity. He took a taxi to a chartered plane bound for the island of Maui and then boarded another plane to San Jose, California, authorities said.

It wasn't immediately known how he was able to charter a plane, and police wouldn't provide details about his flight to California. Attorney General Doug Chin said the escape was planned and an investigation would include an examination of whether Saito had any accomplices.

"We were dismayed to learn that Hawaii State Hospital escapee Randall Saito used an alias to charter a flight on one of our planes from Honolulu to Maui on Sunday," said a statement Wednesday from luxury charter flight company Royal Pacific Air.

Video footage from inside the taxi that drove Saito to the chartered flight shows him using a cellphone after climbing in with a large backpack. He tells the driver he's in a rush to catch a flight.

During the ride, he made two calls. "I'm on my way," Saito said to someone he called Mickey. "We just made the freeway, so, um, we should be there very shortly."

A few minutes later he made another call: "Is this the captain that's going to fly to Maui today? Hi. Hi, it's me. I'm on my way."

Saito was captured in Stockton on Wednesday morning as the result of a tip from an alert taxi driver, the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department said. The agency posted a photo on social media showing Saito surrounded by three deputies at a gas station.

Saito has been charged with felony escape, and the attorney general said the breakout was not planned by someone suffering from a "mental defect."

Hospital workers had called 911 to report Saito's disappearance shortly after 7:30 p.m. Sunday — two hours after he landed in California, Honolulu police said. An all-points bulletin went out an hour later.

Gov. David Ige said authorities and the public should have been notified much sooner and directed Chin to investigate.

He said the state has started reviewing patient privileges and public visitation policies at the hospital to determine if they are appropriate. It's also boosting the frequency of unannounced patient searches and ordering more fencing.

Saito was sent to the hospital in 1981 after acknowledging he shot Sandra Yamashiro with a pellet gun and then repeatedly stabbed her in her car, which was parked at a shopping mall, according to court records.

"He is a very dangerous individual," said Wayne Tashima, a Honolulu prosecutor who argued in 2015 against Saito receiving passes to leave the hospital grounds without an escort.

Defense attorneys sought to have Saito released in 2000. But Jeff Albert, a deputy city prosecutor, objected, saying Saito "fills all the criteria of a classic serial killer."

In 1993, a court denied Saito's request for conditional release, saying he still suffered from sexual sadism and necrophilia.

Psychiatrists who evaluated him over the years also said he could be personable, charming and had good social skills.

Dr. Gene Altman, who evaluated Saito in 2010, said he had six significant relationships since being committed in 1981. Three of those were reportedly with hospital staff members and the others were with women in the community, including Saito's first and second wives, according to Altman's assessment, filed in court records.

Irving Tam, who has lived near the hospital for about 30 years, said he heard about the escape from a neighbor, not the police, hospital or media, and that patients have gotten out several times in the past.

"When they do escape, especially someone with this kind of a record, there is a high degree of concern, he could be violent and who knows," Tam said Tuesday.

Associated Press writer Caleb Jones in Honolulu contributed to this report.

Cowboys' Elliott drops appeal, will serve rest of 6-game ban

By SCHUYLER DIXON, AP Pro Football Writer

FRISCO, Texas (AP) — Dallas Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott is ending his legal fight with five games remaining on a six-game suspension over alleged domestic violence.

Elliott's agents said Wednesday the decision by last year's NFL rushing leader "is in no way an admission of wrongdoing." Elliott had a hearing set in a federal appeals court on Dec. 1, four games into the suspension.

Wednesday was the 96th day since Commissioner Roger Goodell announced the suspension. Elliott served the first game in Dallas' 27-7 loss to Atlanta last weekend. By accepting the six-game ban, Elliott is eligible to return for the final two games of the regular season: Dec. 24 at home against Seattle and Dec. 31 at Philadelphia.

The defending NFC East champion Cowboys (5-4) are three games behind the division-leading Eagles (8-1), who visit Sunday night. A year after being the top seed in the NFC at 13-3, Dallas faces a difficult task staying in playoff contention until Elliott returns.

The 22-year-old Elliott was suspended by Goodell in August after the league concluded following a yearlong investigation that he had several physical confrontations in the summer of 2016 with Tiffany Thompson, his girlfriend at the time.

Prosecutors in Ohio didn't pursue the case, citing conflicting evidence. Elliott denied the allegations under oath during his NFL appeal.

"Our vigilant fight on behalf of Ezekiel once again exposed the NFL's disciplinary process as a sham and a lie," the NFL Players Association said in a statement. "They hired several former federal prosecutors, brought in 'experts' and imposed a process with the stated goal of 'getting it right,' yet the management council refuses to step in and stop repeated manipulation of an already awful League-imposed system."

The suspension prompted weeks of court hearings in three states resulting in three legal reprieves that kept Elliott on the field.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed to an expedited hearing for Elliott's arguments that he wasn't treated fairly by the league, but last week turned down his request for an injunction while the case was being heard.

The same court ruled against New England quarterback Tom Brady last year over his four-game suspension in the "Deflategate" case. Unlike Elliott, Brady had won a lower-court ruling that delayed the suspension for a year.

"This decision arises from a practical assessment of the current legal landscape," agents Rocky Arce-neaux and Frank Salzano said.

"This decision is in no way an admission of any wrongdoing, and Mr. Elliott is pleased that the legal fight ... resulted in disclosing many hidden truths regarding this matter, as well as publicly exposing the NFL's mismanagement of its disciplinary process."

A Texas judge granted an injunction that kept Elliott eligible early in the season, agreeing with NFL Players Association lawyers who argued that investigators withheld key evidence from Goodell, and that the appeal hearing was unfair because arbitrator Harold Henderson refused to call Goodell and Thompson as witnesses.

The NFL contended all along that the league followed federal law as it relates to labor agreements and the commissioner's power to discipline players.

A federal appeals court in New Orleans tossed Elliott's lawsuit in Texas on the grounds that it was filed prematurely. The case moved to New York because the NFL had already filed there.

After a visiting federal judge granted a temporary restraining order that kept Elliott on the field two more weeks, the judge assigned to the case rejected all of Elliott's arguments in denying his request for an injunction.

An emergency stay made him eligible for one game against Kansas City before the latest ruling denying an injunction.

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"Mr. Elliott's desire for closure is in his best interest, as well as the best interests of his teammates, family and friends," Elliott's attorneys said. "Mr. Elliott will maximize his time away from the game and come back even stronger both on and off the field."

The Dallas offense struggled without Elliott against the Falcons, finishing with a season low in points. Alfred Morris, who started in Elliott's place, had 53 yards on 11 carries. Elliott is third in the NFL with 783 yards rushing.

"Like I said and continue to say, we trust those running backs that we have and what they'll do this Sunday," quarterback Dak Prescott said Wednesday before Elliott's decision was announced.

More AP NFL: <http://www.pro32.ap.org> and http://www.twitter.com/AP_NFL

1st GOP senator opposes tax bill in early sign of problems

By ALAN FRAM and MARCY GORDON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wisconsin's Ron Johnson on Wednesday became the first Republican senator to say he opposes his party's tax bill, signaling potential problems for GOP leaders. Passage of a similar package seemed certain Thursday in the House, where a handful of dissidents conceded they expected to be steamrolled by a GOP frantic to claim its first major legislative victory of the year.

Eager to act before opposition groups could sow doubts among the rank-and-file, Republican leaders were anxious to hand Donald Trump the first crowning bill of his presidency by Christmas. Trump planned to visit House GOP lawmakers Thursday at the Capitol in what seemed likely to be a pep rally, not a rescue mission.

"Big vote tomorrow in the House. Tax cuts are getting close!" Trump enthused in a tweet Wednesday. "Why are Democrats fighting massive tax cuts for the middle class and business (jobs)? The reason: Obstruction and Delay!"

The two chambers' plans would slash the 35 percent corporate tax rate to 20 percent, trim personal income tax rates and diminish some deductions and credits — while adding nearly \$1.5 trillion to the coming decade's federal deficits. Republicans promised tax breaks for millions of families and companies left with more money to produce more jobs.

"It represents a bold path forward that will allow us as a nation to break out of the slow-growth status quo once and for all," said House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady, R-Texas, as his chamber debated the bill.

Democrats said the measures would bestow the bulk of their benefits on higher earners and corporations. In the Senate Finance Committee, they focused their attacks on two provisions designed by Republicans to save money.

One would repeal President Barack Obama's health law requirement that people buy coverage or pay a fine, a move the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects would result in 13 million more uninsured people by 2027. The other would end the personal income tax cuts in 2026 while keeping the corporate reductions permanent.

"We should be working together to find ways to cut taxes for hardworking middle-class families, not taking health care away from millions of people just to give huge tax cuts to the largest corporations," said Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla.

The Republican-led Finance panel was on track to approve its proposal by week's end. It shut down Democrats' initial efforts Wednesday to modify the Senate bill, voting along party lines against amendments aimed at protecting health care coverage for veterans or people with disabilities, mental illness or opioid addiction if the insurance mandate is ended.

But with GOP leaders hoping for full Senate passage early next month, concerns by Johnson and perhaps others would have to be addressed.

Republicans controlling the Senate 52-48 can approve the legislation with just 50 votes, plus tie-breaking support from Vice President Mike Pence. With solid Democratic opposition likely, they can lose just two

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GOP votes.

Besides Johnson, Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Jeff Flake of Arizona and Bob Corker of Tennessee have yet to commit to backing the tax measure.

Johnson complained the bills were more generous to publicly traded corporations than to so-called pass-through entities. Those are millions of partnerships and specially organized corporations whose owners pay levies using individual, not corporate, tax rates. While details of the House and Senate bills differ, many pass-through owners would owe more than 20 percent in taxes for much of their income.

"These businesses truly are the engines of innovation and job creation throughout our economy, and they should not be left behind," Johnson said. But he left the door open to changes "so I can support the final version."

A small group of House Republicans largely from New York and New Jersey was rebelling because the House plan would erase tax deductions for state and local income and sales taxes and limit property tax deductions to \$10,000.

Their numbers seemed insufficient to derail the bill. Asked if they could stop it, Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., shook his head and said, "I don't think so."

Repealing the "Obamacare" individual mandate would save \$338 billion over the coming decade because fewer people would be pressured into getting government-paid coverage like Medicaid. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, used the savings to make his bill's personal tax reductions modestly more generous.

Ending the bill's personal income tax cuts in 2026, derided by Democrats as a gimmick, was designed to pare the bill's long-term costs. Legislation cannot boost budget deficits after 10 years if it is to qualify for Senate procedures barring bill-killing filibusters. Those delays take 60 votes to block, numbers Republicans lack.

"To pay for these handouts to multinational corporations, millions of Americans are going to lose their health care," said Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, top Democrat on the Finance panel.

Hatch said voiding the individual mandate "means we have a chance to provide greater tax relief to middle-class families, through both reduced penalties and lower overall rates."

The House measure would collapse today's seven personal income tax rates into four: 12, 25, 35 and 39.6 percent. The Senate would have seven rates: 10, 12, 23, 24, 32, 35 and 38.5 percent.

Both bills would nearly double the standard deduction to around \$12,000 for individuals and about \$24,000 for married couples and dramatically boost the current \$1,000 per child tax credit.

Each plan would erase the current \$4,050 personal exemption and annul or reduce other tax breaks. The House would limit interest deductions to \$500,000 in the value of future home mortgages, down from today's \$1 million, while the Senate would end deductions for moving expenses and tax preparation expenses.

Each measure would repeal the alternative minimum tax paid by higher-earning people. The House measure would reduce and ultimately repeal the tax paid on the largest inheritances, while the Senate would limit that levy to fewer estates.

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Richard Lardner and Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that the House bill would limit mortgage interest deductions to \$500,000 in the value of future home loans, not \$500,000 in interest.

Australian Senate debates gays rights in marriage bill

By ROD MCGUIRK, Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — A gay lawmaker on Thursday started the Australian Parliament's debate on legal recognition for same-sex marriage with an emotion speech in which he warned against winding back LGBT rights.

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Dean Smith, a senator with the ruling conservative Liberal Party, has introduced a bill that would limit who could legally refuse to take part in same-sex marriage to churches, religious ministers and a new class of religious celebrants.

But many same-sex marriage opponents want amendments to broaden the range of businesses and individuals who can legally refuse to provide services such as cakes, flowers or a venue to same-sex couples and new free-speech protections for those who denounce gay marriage. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is illegal in Australia outside religious institutions.

"Let me be clear: Amendments that seek to address other issues, or which seek to deny gay and lesbian Australians the full rights, responsibilities and privileges that they already have will be strenuously opposed," Smith told the Senate.

"Australians did not vote for equality before the law so that equality before the law that is already gained be stripped away," he added.

Another Liberal Party senator, James Paterson, had won the support of lawmakers who oppose marriage reform with a proposed bill that offered "a limited right of conscientious objection to ensure no one is forced to participate in a same-sex wedding against their sincerely held beliefs." It also would safeguard speaking out against gay marriage and would bar government agencies from acting against people who hold such views.

The Law Council Of Australia, the nation's peak lawyers group, said Paterson's bill "would encroach on Australia's long-established anti-discrimination protections in a dangerous and unprecedented way."

Paterson decided to not introduce his bill because senators favored Smith's bill as the starting point for the debate, but many lawmakers will argue for contentious features of Paterson's bill to be incorporated in Smith's bill as amendments.

The Senate debate began a day after the release of a nonbinding postal survey found that 62 percent of Australian respondents wanted reform. Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull wants gay marriage legislation rushed through by Dec. 7, the last day Parliament is to sit for the year.

The postal survey result sparked street parties across Australia overnight and most marriage equality opponents have accepted that the Parliament now has a clear mandate for change.

Cabinet Minister Christopher Pyne on Thursday suggested his Twitter account had been hacked overnight as a consequence of his vocal support for marriage equality.

Pyne said the hack explained his Twitter account liking a pornographic gay video.

"I was hacked overnight!" Pyne tweeted, adding that he was asleep at 2 a.m. local time when the "like" was posted.

"Someone tried to hack my social media yesterday. Maybe they are making mischief" over the postal survey, he said.

Smith came close to tears during his speech as he said he once thought Australia would never embrace marriage equality.

"I never believed the day would come when my relationship would be judged by my country to be as meaningful and valued as any other," Smith said. "The Australian people have proven me wrong."

"To those who want and believe in change and to those who seek to frustrate it, I simply say: Don't underestimate Australia, don't underestimate the Australian people, don't underestimate our country's sense of fairness, its sense of decency and its willingness to be a country for all of us," he added.

Smith's speech was followed a successions of eight senators who all spoke in favor of gay marriage and supported the bill before the debate was adjourned until later Thursday .

Smith had supported his party's opposition to gay marriage when he joined the Senate five years ago. He has said he changed his mind after a siege in a Sydney cafe in 2014 in which a gunman killed cafe manager Tori Johnson. Police then killed the gunman and another hostage died in the crossfire. Smith said he was moved by Johnson's loving same-sex relationship.

MLB hopes for new Japan posting deal by early December

By RONALD BLUM, AP Baseball Writer

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Major League Baseball hopes to put in place a new posting system agreement with Japan by early December, a deal that would allow star pitcher-outfielder Shohei Otani to start negotiations with big league teams.

MLB Chief Legal Officer Dan Halem said a new framework has been agreed to with Nippon Professional Baseball and has been given to the Major League Baseball Players Association for its approval.

"I'm hopeful that we can wrap up our discussions with the union soon, maybe within a week," he said Wednesday at the general managers' meetings.

After that, MLB owners would hold a conference call for an approval vote.

"I'm hopeful that we'll have a new system in place in which players can be posted by the NPB in early December," he said.

Otani, a 23-year-old with the Pacific League's Nippon Ham Fighters, would be restricted to a minor league contract with a maximum signing bonus of \$3,535,000, with each team having different amounts to spend.

Halem also hopes to have a separate deal with the players' association by mid-January on pace-of-play changes such as a pitch clock, limits on mound visits. Baseball also is considering split screens to allow commercials on broadcasts as half-innings start.

"Proposals have been exchanged and in-person meetings have taken place," he said. "I would characterize those discussions as being in the beginning. We have a ways to go. In terms of the calendar, I think we would need to complete those discussions by mid-January in order to effectively roll them out and explain them to umpires and our clubs."

Nine-inning games averaged a record 3 hours, 5 minutes during the regular season and 3:29 in the postseason.

Owners have the right for next season to unilaterally institute a 20-second pitch clock and limit a catcher to one mound visit per pitcher each inning, but baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred prefers to reach an agreement with the union in time for next season.

"Both discussions are 'ongoing' and we remain 'optimistic,'" union head Tony Clark wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

Halem said baseball officials and general managers discussed sign stealing this week and teams were reminded that watches with internet capability are prohibited from dugouts. Boston was fined in September for improper use of an Apple watch.

After a season in which a record 6,105 home runs were hit, topping the 5,963 in 2000 at the height of the Steroids Era, MLB is examining baseballs and quality control.

"We have consultants that are on retainer that look at all of our equipment, including the baseball," Halem said. "The test results for the baseballs this year, including the postseason, were no different than the test results in prior seasons. That being said, it is an issue that has generated a lot of discussion, so we are thoroughly reviewing the entire testing process and the way baseballs are handled to determine whether changes should be made."

More MLB baseball: <https://apnews.com/tag/MLBbaseball>

Thousands mourn 8 family members killed in Texas church

By EMILY SCHMALL and ERIC GAY, Associated Press

SUTHERLAND SPRINGS, Texas (AP) — Three thousand people mourned eight members of a family who were among the more than two dozen killed in a shooting at a small Texas church Wednesday before the funeral procession headed to a cemetery near the site of the massacre.

Surrounding the multicolored caskets, mourners released light pink and blue balloons at a graveside service for the Holcombe family in rural Wilson County.

Church member and survivor John Holcombe had invited the public to attend the funeral of his pregnant

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wife, Crystal, 36, and three of her children from a previous marriage, Greg Hill, 13, Emily Hill, 11, and Megan Hill, 9; his parents, 60-year-old Bryan and Karla Holcombe, 58; a brother, 36-year-old Marc Holcombe, and Marc's 18-month-old daughter, Noah.

Fire marshals had to turn hundreds more people away from the services at an events center in Floresville, Texas, about 12 miles (19 kilometers) from the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, where the Nov. 5 shooting occurred.

News reporters were barred from entering the event center and were being held in a pen with two trucks obscuring the view inside.

In an earlier Facebook post, John Holcombe thanked friends and well-wishers for their support, adding: "Please continue to pray for us."

The gunman, Devin Patrick Kelley, began firing into First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs as Bryan Holcombe, an assistant pastor, ascended to the pulpit. Walking up and down the center aisle, Kelley killed 25 people at the church, including crying babies at point-blank range, according to witness accounts. Authorities have put the official toll at 26, because Crystal Holcombe was pregnant.

John Holcombe was managing the church's audio-visual operations at the back of the building when gunfire erupted. He and Crystal's 7-year-old daughter Evelyn escaped the barrage. Crystal's eldest child, 14-year-old Philip, had stayed home from church services that day.

After his rampage, Kelley fled in a vehicle parked near the church, pursued by a barefoot observer with an AR assault rifle and another man in a pick-up truck. The man with the rifle shot and struck Kelley but authorities say the gunman died of what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Investigators have said the attack appeared to stem from a domestic dispute Kelley was having with his mother-in-law, a member of the church who wasn't present that day. However, among the victims was Lula White, the gunman's wife's 71-year-old grandmother.

Kelley had a history of domestic violence: He was given a bad conduct discharge from the Air Force after pleading guilty to assaulting his first wife and stepson.

Under federal law, anyone convicted of domestic violence cannot purchase a firearm. But the Air Force failed to inform federal law enforcement authorities that Kelley had been court-martialed. When he tried to buy guns after his release from a military prison, his conviction was not in the database used to conduct background checks, and the purchases went through.

In addition to those killed, another 20 people were injured in the shooting. Eight survivors remained hospitalized Wednesday at two San Antonio-area hospitals, their conditions ranging from good to critical.

Trump: China agrees NKorea nuclear weapon freeze not enough

By MATTHEW PENNINGTON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Wednesday that the U.S. and China agree that North Korea cannot just freeze its nuclear weapons program in exchange for concessions and that it must eliminate its arsenal.

Trump was restating a long-standing U.S. position but suggested that China now concurred with Washington that a "freeze-for-freeze" agreement was unacceptable.

China and Russia have proposed that as a way to restart long-stalled negotiations: that the North could freeze its nuclear and missile programs in exchange for the U.S. and its close ally South Korea stopping regular military drills that Pyongyang considers as preparation for invasion.

China has not made a public disavowal of the proposal. China said Wednesday that it would send a high-level special envoy to North Korea amid an extended chill in relations between the neighbors.

Trump was speaking a day after he returned from a 12-day trip through Asia that included a state visit to China, where he was hosted by President Xi Jinping.

"President Xi recognizes that a nuclear North Korea is a grave threat to China, and we agreed that we would not accept a so-called freeze for freeze agreement, like those that have consistently failed in the past," Trump said.

He said that Xi pledged to implement U.N. sanctions that aim to deprive North Korea of revenues for its weapons programs "and to use his great economic influence over the regime to achieve our common goal of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula."

China is North Korea's traditional ally and accounts for about 90 percent of the isolated nation's external trade — including virtually all its oil supplies.

Speaking at the White House, Trump cast his Asian sojourn as a "tremendous success," saying the United States was feted by foreign leaders and asserted its strength in the world.

"America's renewed confidence and standing in the world has never been stronger than it is right now," Trump said, detailing his stops in Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Trump said he had three goals on the trip: to unite the world against North Korea's nuclear ambitions, to strengthen alliances in the region and to insist on "fair and reciprocal trade."

Trump pledged to work "as fast as possible" to eliminate sizable trade deficits with U.S. trading partners. He said it was "unacceptable" that the U.S. trade deficit with other nations stands at about \$800 billion a year and promised to "start whittling that down as fast as possible." He did not say how he planned to achieve that goal.

Earlier, Trump used social media to spar with media coverage of his trip.

He tweeted criticism at The New York Times. He said the paper "hates" that he has good relationships with world leaders and "they should realize that these relationships are a good thing, not a bad thing." He called the paper "naive (or dumb)" on foreign policy.

The president also tweeted Wednesday that he was "forced" to watch CNN during the trip and "again realized how bad, and FAKE, it is."

Associated Press writer Catherine Lucey contributed to this report.

Official: US would consider individual sanctions for Myanmar

By ESTHER HTUSAN, Associated Press

NAYPYITAW, Myanmar (AP) — Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Wednesday that the U.S. is deeply concerned by "credible reports" of atrocities committed by Myanmar's security forces and called for an independent investigation into a humanitarian crisis in which hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh.

Speaking at a joint news conference with leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar's capital, Tillerson said the U.S. would consider individual sanctions against people found responsible for the violence, but he would not advise "broad-based economic sanctions" against the entire country.

"All of that has to be evidence-based," Tillerson said. "If we have credible information that we believe to be very reliable that certain individuals were responsible for certain acts that we find unacceptable, then targeted sanctions on individuals very well may be appropriate," he said.

Tillerson's one-day visit comes as a new report said there is "mounting evidence" of genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine state, where a government security operation has caused nearly 620,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh.

Tillerson also met with Myanmar's powerful military chief, Min Aung Hlaing, who is in charge of operations in Rakhine.

A senior U.S. State Department official said Tuesday that Tillerson would use the visit to "express concerns over the displacement and violence and insecurity affecting Rohingya populations and other local populations and discuss ways to help Burma stakeholders implement commitments aimed at ending the crisis and charting productive ways forward."

Myanmar was formerly known as Burma.

Though Suu Kyi has been the de facto head of Myanmar's civilian government since her party swept elections in 2015, she is limited in her control of the country by a constitution written under the military junta that ruled Myanmar for decades. The military is in charge of the operations in northern Rakhine,

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and ending them is not up to Suu Kyi.

Still, Suu Kyi has faced widespread criticism for not speaking out in defense of the Rohingya. At Wednesday's news conference Suu Kyi denied she had been silent on the issue, saying she had personally commented on the situation as well as issued statements through her office.

"I haven't been silent," she said. "What people mean is what I say is not interesting enough. But what I say is not meant to be exciting. It's meant to be accurate. And it's aimed at creating more harmony and a better future for everybody. Not setting people against each other."

But U.N. human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein said he was "hugely disappointed" in Suu Kyi, noting that he appealed to her after a smaller scale flight of Rohingya last October "to use all her emotional standing and moral standing inside the country to confront the military and put an end to this."

"Evidently, she was unable to do that and now she speaks in compassionate terms," he said in response to a question after a lecture at Columbia University on Tuesday.

But Zeid said he fears the Rohingya who have fled to Bangladesh since Aug. 25 won't be able to return "because the operations were so systematic, so organized, so well-planned, that there was intent involved."

"I believe it rises to the threshold of very serious violations . international crimes," he said.

U.S. congressional pressure is mounting on the Trump administration to take punitive steps against Myanmar. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a non-binding resolution Wednesday condemning "murderous ethnic cleansing and atrocities against civilians." It called on President Donald Trump to impose sanctions on those responsible for human rights abuses, including members of Myanmar's military and security services.

The report by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the advocacy group Fortify Rights found there is "mounting evidence" of genocide against the Rohingya. It accused security forces and civilians of mass killings — including burning victims alive including infants — rape and other abuses, and called on the international community to take action.

"These crimes thrive on impunity and inaction," said Matthew Smith, the head of Fortify Rights. "Condemnations aren't enough. Without urgent international action towards accountability, more mass killings are likely."

Myanmar's military has denied the accusations, most recently with a statement Monday. The military said it had interviewed thousands of people during a monthlong investigation into the conduct of troops in Rakhine after Rohingya insurgents launched a series of deadly attacks there on Aug. 25.

While the report acknowledged that battles against militants from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army had left 376 "terrorists" dead, it also claimed security forces had "never shot at the innocent Bengalis" and "there was no death of innocent people."

Myanmar's government and most of the Buddhist majority say the members of the Muslim minority are "Bengalis" who migrated illegally from Bangladesh, and do not acknowledge the Rohingya as a local ethnic group even though they have lived in Myanmar for generations.

Zeid, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, said he was also "very unhappy" that the communique from the summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in the Philippines didn't even use the word Rohingya.

"How much more do they need to suffer before they are recognized by some of these leaders?," he asked.

"If we allow this to happen at zero cost ... how many other countries with minorities would be only too willing, if they want to remove a so-called "problem" from their society, to follow suit in similar ways?," Zeid asked.

Associated Press writers Matthew Pennington in Washington and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

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Asian stocks, oil prices steady

By YOUKYUNG LEE, AP Business Writer

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Asian stock markets were mostly firm on Thursday and oil prices were steady, despite a second straight day of losses on Wall Street overnight. But analysts said it was too early to say risk sentiment was back after a day of heavy losses in Asia. Other than on-going worries about the prospect of the U.S. tax reform plan and the pace of the Federal Reserve's rate hike, there were little market-moving headlines.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's Nikkei 225 rose 0.8 percent to 22,210.45 and South Korea's Kospi advanced 0.5 percent to 2,531.74. Hong Kong's Hang Seng index gained 0.4 percent to 28,979.81. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 added 0.2 percent to 5,943.50. But China's Shanghai Composite Index fell 0.2 percent to 3,395.46. Stocks in Southeast Asia were mostly higher.

ANALYST'S VIEW: While the Federal Reserve's rate hike in December is "a done deal," Rob Carnell, head of research, Asia, at ING, said in a daily commentary that the latest share price declines and lower commodity prices "raise worries about growth and the pace of tightening in 2018."

FED WATCH: Analysts said the U.S. retail sales data and consumer prices figures gave a green light to the Fed to raise rates next month. U.S. retail sales rose 0.2 percent in October, a healthy rate, and consumer prices rose 0.1 percent last month.

WALL STREET: U.S. stock markets finished lower on Wednesday, led by a decline in tech stocks. The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 0.6 percent to 2,564.62. The Dow Jones industrial average lost 0.6 percent to 23,271.28 and the Nasdaq composite slid 0.5 percent to 6,706.21. The Russell 2000 index of smaller-company stocks gave up 0.5 percent to 1,464.09.

OIL: Crude oil prices eked out a tiny gain. Benchmark U.S. crude added 1 cent to \$55.34 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It fell 37 cents, or 0.7 percent, to settle at \$55.33 per barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, gained 10 cents to \$61.97 per barrel in London. It lost 34 cents, or 0.5 percent, to close at \$61.87 a barrel on Wednesday.

CURRENCIES: The dollar rose to 112.96 yen from 112.84 yen while the euro weakened to \$1.1781 from \$1.1790.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Nov. 16, the 320th day of 2017. There are 45 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 16, 1907, Oklahoma became the 46th state of the union.

On this date:

In 1776, British troops captured Fort Washington in New York during the American Revolution.

In 1885, Canadian rebel leader Louis Riel was executed for high treason.

In 1917, Georges Clemenceau again became prime minister of France.

In 1933, the United States and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations.

In 1939, mob boss Al Capone, ill with syphilis, was released from prison after serving 7 1/2 years for tax evasion and failure to file tax returns.

In 1945, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded at the conclusion of a conference in London.

In 1959, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "The Sound of Music" opened on Broadway.

In 1960, Academy Award-winning actor Clark Gable died in Los Angeles at age 59.

In 1966, Dr. Samuel H. Sheppard was acquitted in Cleveland at his second trial of murdering his pregnant wife, Marilyn, in 1954.

In 1973, Skylab 4, carrying a crew of three astronauts, was launched from Cape Canaveral on an 84-day mission.

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In 1982, an agreement was announced in the 57th day of a strike by National Football League players. In 1997, China's most prominent pro-democracy campaigner, Wei Jingsheng (way jeeng-shuhng), arrived in the United States after being released following nearly 18 years of imprisonment in his country.

Ten years ago: Senate Republicans blocked a \$50 billion bill by Democrats that would have paid for several months of combat but also would have ordered troop withdrawals from Iraq to begin within 30 days. Poland's new prime minister, Donald Tusk, formally took office along with a team of former anti-communist dissidents.

Five years ago: Former CIA Director David Petraeus told Congress that classified intelligence showed the Sept. 11, 2012 attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans was a terrorist attack, but that the Obama administration withheld the suspected role of al-Qaida affiliates to avoid tipping them off. Financially struggling Hostess Brands Inc. announced it was shutting down its operations following a strike by the union.

One year ago: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, addressing a U.N. conference in Morocco, made a stirring appeal to all countries — including his own — to press ahead with the fight against climate change, saying a failure to do so would be a "betrayal of devastating consequences." Rick Porcello of the Boston Red Sox won the AL Cy Young Award by a narrow margin while Max Scherzer of the Washington Nationals took the NL prize. Former congressman and defense secretary Melvin Laird, 94, died in Fort Myers, Florida.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Clu Gulager is 89. Journalist Elizabeth Drew is 82. Blues musician W.C. Clark is 78. Actress Joanna Pettet is 75. Actor Steve Railsback is 72. Actor David Leisure is 67. Actor Miguel Sandoval is 66. Actress Marg Helgenberger is 59. Rock musician Mani is 55. Country singer-musician Keith Burns (Trick Pony) is 54. Tennis player Zina Garrison is 54. Former MLB All-Star pitcher Dwight Gooden is 53. Jazz singer Diana Krall is 53. Actor Harry Lennix is 53. Rock musician Dave Kushner (Velvet Revolver) is 51. Actress Lisa Bonet (boh-NAY') is 50. Actress Tammy Lauren is 49. Rhythm-and-blues singer Bryan Abrams (Color Me Badd) is 48. Actress Martha Plimpton is 47. Actor Michael Irby is 45. Actress Missi Pyle is 45. Rock musician Corey McCormick (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 41. Olympic gold medal figure skater Oksana Baiul (ahk-SAH'-nah by-OOL') is 40. Actress Maggie Gyllenhaal (JIHL'-ehn-hahl) is 40. Pop singer Trevor Penick is 38. NBA player Amare Stoudemire is 35. Actress Kimberly J. Brown is 33. Rock singer Siva Kaneswaran (The Wanted) is 29. Actor-comedian Peter Davidson (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 24. Actor Casey Moss is 24. Actor Noah Gray-Cabey is 22.

Thought for Today: "No matter how dull, or how mean, or how wise a man is, he feels that happiness is his indisputable right." — Helen Keller, American author and lecturer (1880-1968).