

Groton Daily Independent

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Kristi Peterson Bookkeeping
Simple Solutions for YOU
605/216-4474 ~ peterson4@nvc.net

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**

Today

Boys' basketball hosts Redfield-Doland C game at 5:15 p.m. followed by junior varsity and then the varsity game. (JV and Varsity games to be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM)

Tomorrow

Girls' basketball at Redfield-Doland 7th grade game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game. (Varsity game to be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.)
Debate at Brookings Bell

Saturday

Wrestling at Madison
Debate at Brookings Bell

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Boys win both games over Leola-Frederick

The Groton Area boys' basketball team posted a 67-41 non-conference win over Leola-Frederick in action played Saturday in Groton.

Seric Shabazz led all scorers with 28 points while Brodyn DeHoet had 15, Jonathan Doeden had nine, Marshall Lane eight, Anthony Sippel five and Brandon Keith had two points.

Alex Sumption led Leola/Frederick with 14 points followed by Trevor Sumption with eight, Lance Feickert and Tanner Geffre each had six, Haydn Podoll had four and Isaac Sumption had three.

Groton Area made 42 percent of its field goals while the Titans made 35 percent.

The Tigers made eight of 14 free throws off of the Titans' 12 team fouls and Leola-Frederick made 10 of 23 free throws off of Groton Area's 18 team fouls. The Titans had 27 turnovers, 16 of which were steals with Seric Shabazz having five. Groton Area had 16 turnovers, eight of which were steals with Haydn Podoll and Trevor Sumption each having two. Groton Area had the edge on rebounds, 39-35, with DeHoet having nine rebounds for Groton Area and Alex Sumption and Trevor Sumption each having seven for the Titans.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 41-28.

Scoring for Groton Area were Peyton Johnson 13, Cade Guthmiller 11, Darien Shabazz 8, Austin Jones 6, Kaden Kurtz 2 and Cole Larson 1. Scoring for Leola-Frederick were Jake Kenser 12, Isaac Sumption 6, Spencer Hoffman 5, Zach Mueller 3 and Josh Hoffman 2.

NEW SIGN-ON BONUSES!

☆☆☆ \$1,500 for CNAs ☆☆☆

☆☆☆ \$3,000 for LPNs ☆☆☆

☆☆☆ \$4,500 for RNs ☆☆☆

Alzheimer's Care Unit Director Medication Aid

Contact Brynn Pickrel or Nellie Hatfield at 605-397-2365
or apply in person.



GROTON
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER

1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton

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

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

Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Jackelopes 16, Cheetahs 16, Chipmunks 15, Shih Tzus 14, Coyotes 13, Foxes 10

Men's High Games: Roger Spanier 207, Mike Siegler 190, Brad Waage 189

Women's High Games: Nancy Radke 198, Nicole Kassube 185, Sue Stanley 168

Men's High Series: Brad Waage 538, Charlie Dirks 516, Roger Spanier 510

Women's High Series: Nicole Kassube 507, Nancy Radke 503, Sue Stanley 464

FEMA AUTHORIZES FUNDS TO HELP FIGHT THE LEGION LAKE FIRE IN CUSTER COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA

DENVER - The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has authorized the use of federal funds to help with firefighting costs for the Legion Lake Fire in Custer County, South Dakota.

FEMA Regional Administrator Lee K. dePalo approved the state's request for a federal Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) after receiving the state's request Wednesday afternoon.

At the time of the request, 175 homes were under mandatory evacuation orders, 15 roads were threatened, and 25 bridges were either lost or threatened. The fire has also caused substantial damage to three watersheds and other infrastructure in Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park. The fire started on Monday, December 11, 2017, and has burned in excess of 35,000 acres of state, federal and private land. The fire is 7 percent contained. The Red Cross has opened a shelter at the Hermosa School in Hermosa, South Dakota.

The authorization makes FEMA funding available to pay 75 percent of the state's eligible firefighting costs under an approved grant for managing, mitigating and controlling designated fires. These grants do not provide assistance to individual home or business owners and do not cover other infrastructure damage caused by the fire.

Fire Management Assistance Grants are provided through the President's Disaster Relief Fund and made available by FEMA to assist in fighting fires that threaten to cause a major disaster. Eligible items can include expenses for field camps; equipment use, repair and replacement; mobilization and demobilization activities; and tools, materials and supplies.

South Dakota Snowmobile Trails Open Dec. 15

PIERRE, S.D. – Snowmobile trails across South Dakota open Friday, Dec. 15.

Officials in the Black Hills say the majority of trails are in poor condition. The Black Hills have not yet received much for snow accumulation but they are hopeful that it will snow in the next coming weeks.

“It’s important that snowmobilers pick up a 2018 trail map this season,” reminds Black Hills trails manager Shannon Percy. “The trail system incurs a number of re-routes each year and having a current map will help avoid trespassing.”

Snowmobile trail maps can be picked up at various businesses along the trails. Riders can request a copy by calling 605.584.3896 or 605.773.7885.

East River trails will see minimal grooming by opening day. Snowmobilers are encouraged to check local conditions before riding.

Trail condition updates are posted to Twitter accounts dedicated to both the Black Hills and the East River trails (twitter.com/SDsnowBHills and twitter.com/SDsnowEast).

A \$20 snowmobile motorcycle trail pass is available for residents who use a motorcycle conversion kit. Those permits can be picked up at the Black Hills Trails office in Lead, 605.584.3896, or at Farm Island Recreation Area in Pierre, 605.773.7885.

The snowmobile season runs until March 31.

South Dakota’s Snowmobile Trails Program is entirely self-sufficient. The program receives no general tax fund dollars. The program relies on snowmobile registration fees, fuel tax reimbursement and a 4 percent initial registration tax on the purchase price of snowmobiles.

Health Department Urges Vaccination As Flu Activity Increases

PIERRE, S.D. – People should not delay getting a flu shot now that flu activity is increasing in South Dakota. So far this season, South Dakota has reported 146 laboratory-confirmed cases and 26 flu-related hospitalizations. The best way to prevent getting sick with influenza is to receive a dose of influenza vaccine.

“It’s not too late to get vaccinated,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist for the Department of Health. “It takes about two weeks after getting a flu shot for your body to build protection against the flu, so get vaccinated now to protect you and your loved ones.”

Annual flu vaccination is recommended for everyone age 6 months and older. Groups like pregnant women, children younger than 5 years, people over 65 years and people with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk for flu-related complications, such as pneumonia, hospitalization, and death. Healthcare workers and household contacts of high-risk populations, such as those with young infants, should also be vaccinated.

Influenza is a viral infection spread by respiratory droplets released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Common signs and symptoms of the flu include fever of 100 degrees or greater, cough, sore throat, headache, fatigue, body or muscle aches, and runny or stuffy nose.

In addition to vaccination, to prevent the spread of the flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand gel;
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth; and,
- Stay home if you are sick.

Learn more at <http://flu.sd.gov>

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2017-2018 La Niña and Winter Outlook

BROOKINGS, S.D. - The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center has officially declared a La Niña Advisory, as of November 9, 2017.

"This means that La Niña conditions are observed and expected to continue," said Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension State Climatologist.

NOAA observes La Niña conditions using sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean, Edwards explained. "For La Niña, ocean temperatures are cooler than average near the equator in the Pacific Ocean, which can alter jet streams and storm tracks," she said.

What to Expect

Historically, La Niña has brought colder than average temperatures in winter for South Dakota. "There are varying strengths of La Niña, from weak to strong. Overall the colder temperatures are fairly consistent in any La Niña winter," Edwards said. "What is more variable is snowfall."

In weak La Niña events, there has historically been above average snowfall in the Northern Plains states. In strong La Niña events, this is not usually the case.

For our winter season ahead, Edwards said a weak La Niña is expected. "Thus the climate outlook shows an increased chance of above average precipitation," she explained.

This potential increase in snowfall is more likely to occur in mid- to late winter, or around January and February of 2018.

December Outlook

Despite the very dry November, there was recently a large pattern shift in early December, which is now starting to look more like a typical La Niña pattern.

"This will put South Dakota near the jet stream path, bringing colder air down from Canada and possibly some more chances of precipitation in the next couple of weeks," Edwards said.

La Niña's impact on agriculture

This cold, and possibly wet, climate outlook may create challenges for South Dakota's livestock producers who have already struggled with drought losses in pastures and forage.

"One way that animals adapt to severe cold is to increase their feed intake, which is already a challenge in some areas," Edwards said.

Shelter and protection from severe cold and some increased snowpack amounts may need to be considered as well.

Winter wheat growers may take some solace in the potential for increased snowfall, as this can insulate the crop in harsh cold temperatures. Also, increased snowfall can provide some soil moisture in the spring when it comes out of dormancy.



Please join us for a
RETIREMENT PARTY honoring
JIM GERDES
for his 10 years of service with the
City of Groton!!

When: December 21, 2017 from 2-4 pm

Where: City Hall,
209 N Main, Groton

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New Features Being Added To SD Driver's Licenses/ID Cards

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota's driver license and ID cards are getting a new look.

Starting in January 2018, several minor changes are being made to the license and card. The header on driver's licenses, which currently says "Operator License," will read "Driver License" on the new card. The organ donor indicator, which is in the bottom right-hand corner, will have a heart next to the word "donor."

Also changed is the current solid gold star on federally compliant licenses and IDs. The star will now be white in a gold-colored circle. The new style meets the new federal REAL ID guidelines in using the license or card for such activities as commercial air travel.

"The changes will increase the readability of the license and the card," says Jane Schrank, director of the state Driver Licensing program. "It has been several years since we changed the style or lettering so we thought it was a good time to make the upgrades."

The changes are being made as new driver's license issuance equipment is being installed in exam stations statewide. Schrank says changes will be made first at the Pierre exam station in early January and then implemented statewide through early February.

Schrank reminds people that they have 180 days prior to the expiration date to renew their license. For information about online renewal or what documents are needed for a license renewal and a list of exam stations, go to: <https://dps.sd.gov/driver-licensing>.

An estimated 225,000 driver licenses and ID cards are either applied for or renewed each year.

The Driver Licensing program is part of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



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Today in Weather History

December 14, 1994: Snow accumulated over all of South Dakota on the 14th but was heavy in the central part of the state and at a few places in the northwest. The greatest accumulations were 11 inches at Murdo and 10 inches at the Lake Sharpe project and near Stephan. The storm caused numerous accidents, but no fatalities or injuries were reported. Eight inches of snow fell at McLaughlin and Miller, with 7 inches at Faulkton and McIntosh, 6 inches at Eagle Butte and Timber Lake, and 5 inches at Mobridge, Kennebec, and near Highmore.

December 14, 1996: Heavy snow of 6 to 20 inches fell across most of central, north central, and part of northeast South Dakota during the late evening of the 14th. Strong north winds of 20 to 35 mph created near-blizzard conditions and heavy drifting across the area. Travel was tough if not impossible, with several cars going into the ditch. A two-car accident between Blunt and Pierre left several people injured. Many activities were postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Fort Pierre, Ipswich, Kennebec, Aberdeen, and Pollock; 7 inches at Mobridge; 8 inches at Lake Sharpe, Clark, and Mellette; 9 inches at Roscoe, Gettysburg, and McIntosh; 10 inches at Highmore, Eagle Butte, 22 miles SSW of Keldron, and at West Whitlock; 11 inches at Blunt and Miller; 12 inches at Ree Heights, McLaughlin, and Onida; 13 inches at Highmore; 14 inches at Redfield; 15 inches at Timber Lake; 18 inches at Faulkton; and 20 inches at Hoven.

December 14, 1287: A powerful storm affected the Netherlands and Northern Germany on this day. Called the St. Lucia's flood, which was the day before, this storm broke a dike, flooding much of the land in what is now the Waddenzee and IJsselmeer. A significant percentage of the country's population perished in this disaster and had been rated as one of the most destructive floods in recorded history. The death toll from this storm was between 50,000 to 80,000 people. Also, 180 residents of Hickling village, which is 137 miles north-east of London was impacted by this storm. The storm surge rose a foot above the high altar in the church. From British-History.ac.uk, "Hickling was one of the townships that suffered most severely from the tremendous storm of December, 1287, no fewer than nine score persons being drowned there. In the priory the water rose more than a foot above the high altar, and all the canons fled away except two, who stayed behind and managed to save the horses and other property by bringing them up into the dormitory over the vaulted undercroft."

1924 - The temperature at Helena, MT, plunged 79 degrees in 24 hours, and 88 degrees in 34 hours. The mercury plummeted from 63 above to 25 below zero. At Fairfield MT the temperature plunged 84 degrees in just 12 hours, from 63 at Noon to 21 below zero at midnight. (David Ludlum)








December 14, 1952: Trace of snow or sleet at or near Pensacola, Crestview, DeFuniak Springs, Quincy, Carrabelle, Tallahassee, St. Marks, Monticello, Madison, Mayo, Live Oak, Lake City, Glen St. Mary, and Hilliard in Florida. Frozen precipitation occurred before noon at most points, but happened in the afternoon at Mayo and Lake City and near Hilliard. Temperatures were above freezing and snow or sleet melted as it fell.

December 14, 1997: Central Mississippi and western Alabama saw significant snowfall of 4 to 8 inches on this day. In Mississippi, this was one of the heavier snowfalls to occur since 1929. The weight of the snow caused limbs of trees to break, which knocked down power lines.


2010 - A rare tornado struck the small town of Aumsville, Oregon, tearing roofs off buildings, hurling objects into vehicles and homes and uprooting trees. No one was injured but the destruction left behind was severe. The National Weather Service classified the tornado as an EF2 with wind speeds of 110-120 mph and they said the tornado's damage trail was five miles long and 150 yards wide. 50 houses in Aumsville and the surrounding county area were affected, with 10 of them being unsuitable for occupancy. (KATU)


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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Chance Snow	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 34 °F	Low: 22 °F	High: 39 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 38 °F	Low: 22 °F	High: 37 °F


**Northeastern South Dakota
Icy Morning Commute**


Slow Down 

Light Snow and Rain Today 

Snowfall around 1" or less
● Rain also possible west of the James River Valley

Breezy winds west of the Missouri River 

allow extra time to get to your destination 

 National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

www.weather.gov/abr

Graphic Created
12/14/2017 5:56 AM

Published on: 12/14/2017 at 5:57AM

Untreated roadways will remain icy over portions of northeastern South Dakota this morning. Slow down, and allow extra time to get to your destination. Light snow will push across the region today, with snowfall accumulations expected to be around an inch or less. Warmer air west of the James River Valley will also result in rain. Breezy winds are also anticipated west of the Missouri River today.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 45.2

Low Outside Temp: 26.5

High Gust: 37

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 55° in 1988

Record Low: -30° in 1917

Average High: 26°F

Average Low: 6°F

Average Precip in Dec: 0.24

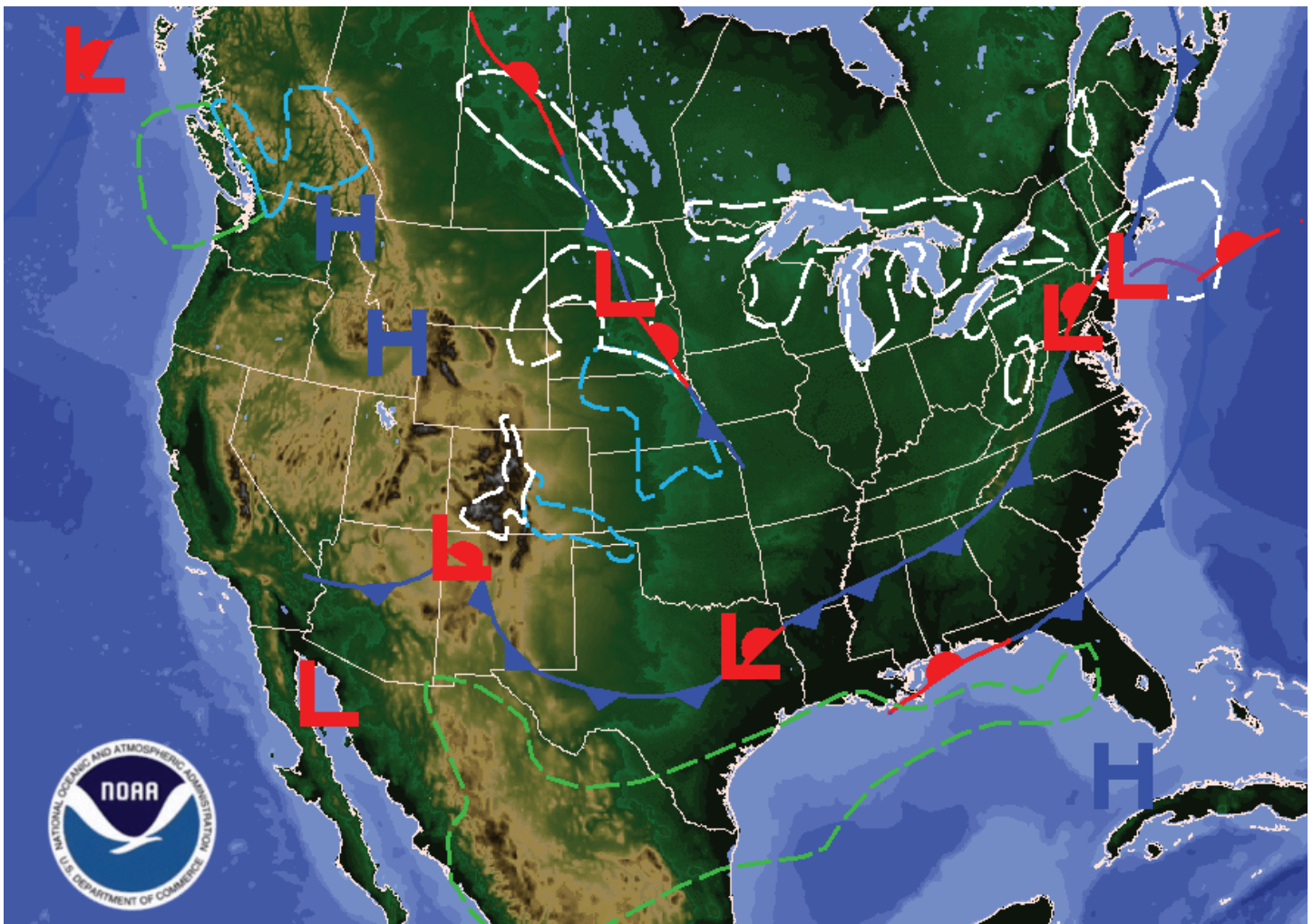
Precip to date in Dec: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.44

Precip Year to Date: 13.47

Sunset Tonight: 4:50 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:06 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Dec 14, 2017, issued 4:04 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Reinhart 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)



FACING FEAR WITH FACTS

A bright light on a dark night would frighten most individuals if it was unexpected. How much more frightening would it be if an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and God's glory lit up the area where sheep were quietly sleeping and shepherds were watching to make certain that they were safe.

Sensing the fear of the shepherds the angel said confidently, "Don't be afraid of this Light!" The angel wanted to calm their pounding hearts. "I came with Good News. News that will bring great joy to everyone, everywhere who is willing to accept the Good News!"

How gracious is our God. The shepherds did what any of us would do: react with apprehension and fear. Yet, God, in His love and mercy first gave them His assurance that they were safe and then explained to them what had happened. "A Savior, Christ, who is the Anointed One, the One that you have been waiting for, even the LORD, has been born!"

There is a wonderful lesson here for each of us. Rarely do we get through any day without something unusual – sometimes a tragedy, perhaps a life threatening or grief producing event – invading our lives. It is normal and natural to react with fear and wonder.

But as God said to the shepherds then and as He says to us every day, "Don't be afraid. Good News awaits you. Your Savior is here. Turn to Him in faith and He will save you!"

Prayer: How thankful we are, Father, to know that Your Son, our Savior, is with us every moment of every day. Calm our fears, encourage our hearts through Him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Luke 2:8-12 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
05-09-14-30-32
(five, nine, fourteen, thirty, thirty-two)
Estimated jackpot: \$34,000

Lotto America
09-18-23-46-50, Star Ball: 3, ASB: 3
(nine, eighteen, twenty-three, forty-six, fifty; Star Ball: three; ASB: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$16.36 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$208 million

Powerball
02-24-28-51-58, Powerball: 7, Power Play: 3
(two, twenty-four, twenty-eight, fifty-one, fifty-eight; Powerball: seven; Power Play: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$229 million

Wednesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Lakota Nation Tournament
First Round

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 48, Custer 38

Crow Creek 74, Crazy Horse 39

Lower Brule 68, Todd County 57

McLaughlin 57, St. Francis Indian 42

Pine Ridge 76, Omaha Nation, Neb. 58

Red Cloud 79, Marty Indian 47

Tiospa Zina Tribal 55, Little Wound 52

White River 74, Standing Rock, N.D. 48

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GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Lakota Nation Tournament
First Round

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 55, Tiospa Zina Tribal 31

Custer 62, Standing Rock, N.D. 54

Little Wound 75, Crazy Horse 34

Lower Brule 54, McLaughlin 47

Pine Ridge 59, St. Francis Indian 32

Red Cloud 68, White River 48

Todd County 68, Marty Indian 24

Evacuation lifted for South Dakota towns near wildfire

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Lucia Roda stood in her backyard early Wednesday morning, watching flames shoot up in the dark for each tree a spreading western South Dakota wildfire engulfed on the hills not far from the Spanish mustang preserve she manages.

Roda's family got an early morning pre-evacuation notice suggesting they leave their home and the conservancy in Buffalo Gap, South Dakota, but they decided to remain rather than chance moving 34 horses in the dark. The family took the "calculated risk" to wait until light so it would be safer if the horses had to be transported, Roda said.

"Last night at about three in the morning, it was a little hairy and a little scary," said Roda. "I don't think I've ever done something quite that scary, and I've done some dumb things in my life."

The wildfire in South Dakota's popular Custer State Park grew rapidly into Wednesday, pushing beyond the park's borders and threatening nearby communities of Fairburn and Buffalo Gap, but evacuation orders for those cities were eventually lifted later in the day.

The fire in the Black Hills park, which is just south of Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the state's southwest, grew from about 6 square miles (16 square kilometers) on Tuesday to about 55 square miles (142 square kilometers) on Wednesday, spreading to about 73 square miles (190 square kilometers) that night, according to park officials.

The fire is 10 percent contained, up from 7 percent. Lydia Austin, a park spokeswoman, said officials don't anticipate another night of rapid fire growth.

The Rapid City Journal reported it's among the largest wildfires in modern Black Hills history. No one has been injured by the blaze, which started on Monday.

"From hearing the briefing this morning, a lot of these firefighters say they haven't seen anything like this fire in 10 to 20 years," said Kobee Stalder, the park's visitor services program manager. "A lot of people are comparing this to a mid-summer fire."

Some fences and outbuildings have burned, but none of the park's main buildings have been destroyed and crews have succeeded in protecting the popular State Game Lodge and Blue Bell Lodge.

The park is home to a herd of about 1,300 buffalo, and park officials tweeted Wednesday that they'd be checking on the wellbeing of the herd and other animals along its popular wildlife loop road. The fire's spread through the southeastern end of the park put wildlife in danger, but the officials said they don't know of any animal deaths. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks tweeted a message seeking hay for the

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herd throughout the winter because of the fire.

The park is a top South Dakota tourist destination, featuring hills with ponderosa pine and prairie. Visitors often drive to see roaming buffalo, elk and bighorn sheep, and the park hosts a popular annual buffalo roundup.

The fire also spread into the northern part of Wind Cave National Park, said Chief of Interpretation Tom Farrell. He said the park's back country trails are closed, but the park did host a Christmas open house.

Kara Jo Webster, whose family has a ranch in Fairburn, said she and her siblings had to search for about 100 missing cattle into morning. The fire burned up a lot of their pastureland and destroyed fencing, she said.

"It's a mess — financially, mentally, physically. It's going to be hard for a little while," said Webster, who praised community members for their response.

A fire evacuation Facebook group had grown by Wednesday afternoon to more than 1,400 members. They offered shelter for displaced people, help hauling and housing animals and even assistance if indoor birds such as parrots needed to be evacuated.

Roda, 53, said a local rancher had a spot for the horses of Windcross Conservancy, but that the town's mayor, a member of the fire response, told her earlier Wednesday that he didn't think the family had to leave.

"I almost cried," Roda said. "I hugged him, and I thought the poor guy was going to fall over."

Death in swimming pool at Hartford home appears accidental

HARTFORD, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say the death of a woman in a backyard swimming pool in the town of Hartford west of Sioux Falls appears to be accidental.

Officers with the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office responded to the home Tuesday afternoon, after someone checking on the woman reported finding her body.

Authorities identify the victim as 54-year-old Laura Lee Keller. While her death appears accidental, authorities say the investigation continues.

Judge blocks proposed health care merger in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A judge has blocked a proposed merger between Sanford Health and Mid Dakota Clinic until a Federal Trade Commission hearing next month.

North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem says a U.S. District Court judge issued a preliminary injunction Wednesday blocking the proposed merger.

Stenehjem and the FTC allege the deal would violate antitrust law by significantly lessening competition for health care services in the Bismarck-Mandan area.

In a statement, Stenehjem says competition in the marketplace "benefits consumers, including when that competition is for medical care."

Sanford and Mid Dakota called the decision disappointing, and said the government's case "rests on theories that are at odds with reality here in North Dakota."

The two providers agreed to merge earlier this year. Dakotas-based Sanford has 45 hospitals and nearly 300 clinics in nine states and three countries.

Board reconsiders horse races at South Dakota track

FORT PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — There may be horse racing at a central South Dakota track next year, after all.

The Verendrye Benevolent Association announced Tuesday that its board unanimously voted to reconsider an earlier decision not to host races at the Fort Pierre track in 2018, the Pierre Capital Journal reported.

The vote comes after the South Dakota Horsemen's Association offered \$15,000 in support and community members pledged \$5,500.

The association's November decision not to host races at the Fort Pierre track was made in response

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to a funding decline provided by the South Dakota Commission on Gaming. The commission's funding is generated from taxes on pari-mutuel betting, which has seen a nationwide decline. The association said it would face a \$40,000 to \$50,000 shortfall if it hosted the 2018 races.

Skip Moody, the association's president, said that a bankruptcy filing of an advanced deposit wagering operation in Sioux Falls in October also exacerbated the decline in pari-mutuel betting revenue. Moody said revenue from taxes paid by the operation to the commission amounted to \$18,000 for each of South Dakota's two horse racing tracks.

Board members said the association will hold another vote and reach a decision by March 1. If the board reverses its decision, the Fort Pierre track would host the 2018 horse races during the end of April and beginning of May.

Information from: Pierre Capital Journal, <http://www.capjournal.com>

Ex-polygamous sect leader gets nearly 5 years in fraud case

By BRADY McCOMBS, Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A former polygamous sect leader was sentenced Wednesday to nearly five years in prison for his role in carrying out an elaborate food stamp fraud scheme and for escaping home confinement while awaiting trial.

The sentencing of Lyle Jeffs closes the book on a major government bust that took several years to investigate, culminating in February 2016 with fraud and money laundering charges against him and 10 other group members.

Lyle Jeffs was accused of being the ring-leader of a scheme that diverted some \$11 million in food-stamp benefits to a communal storehouse and front companies over several years.

U.S. District Judge Ted Stewart said during a hearing in Salt Lake City that Lyle Jeffs deserved the 57-month prison sentence because his behavior showed he doesn't respect U.S. laws and puts his allegiance to his brother and the sect's imprisoned prophet, Warren Jeffs, above everything else.

Stewart said Lyle Jeffs' religious beliefs provide context for his decision to "blindly" follow his brother's orders, but don't justify the fact that he "cheated" taxpayers out of government funds.

"Mr. Jeffs is an adult. He knows right from wrong," Stewart said.

Lyle Jeffs is a lifelong member of the Mormon offshoot group based on the Utah-Arizona border known as the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or FLDS.

Lyle Jeffs 57, spoke briefly and said he accepted responsibility for his mistakes and that he erred in not properly researching food stamp fraud laws. He was ordered to pay \$1 million in restitution. He had previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit benefits fraud and failure to appear.

"I do your honor humbly and respectfully say that I acknowledge my mistakes and decision-making," said Lyle Jeffs, his hands and ankles shackled. "I do humbly accept my responsibly for my actions. I don't blame anyone."

The cases against the 10 other defendants ended in plea deals without prison time or with dismissed charges, but prosecutors made Lyle Jeffs their top priority from the outset.

They dug in even more against him after he became a fugitive in June 2016 after he slipped off an ankle monitoring device while out on supervised release. The FBI put up a \$50,000 reward. He was caught in South Dakota a year later after pawn shop workers spotted him and called police.

Prosecutor Robert Lund said he hopes the sentence sends a strong message to Lyle Jeffs and other sect leaders that a "culture of corruption" in recent years won't be tolerated. He said Lyle Jeffs and other leaders lived and ate well while lower-level group members suffered, using businesses and special instructions to members to try and conceal the scheme.

"This case cries out for a message to that community," Lund said. "They must obey the law."

Lund added about Lyle Jeffs: "There is no training, no treatment for what ails the defendant."

The food stamp investigation was one of several government crackdowns on the group in recent years

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that has weakened the sect and created a leadership void in its home base in the sister cities of Hildale, Utah and Colorado City, Arizona.

The town governments and the police are being watched closely by court-appointed monitors after a jury found them guilty of civil rights violations. Government-ordered evictions of sect families from nearly 150 homes has forced many to seek refuge in trailers around the communities or in different cities across the West. Last month, the mayor's office and three council seats in Hildale that had always been controlled by FLDS members were taken over by former sect members.

Warren Jeffs is serving a life sentence in Texas for sexually assaulting girls he considered wives.

Lyle Jeffs' attorney Kathryn Nester said the scheme wasn't malicious but meant to ensure everyone in the group had food to eat as part of the group's religious beliefs in communal living. She said her client was serving his faith just as he's done his entire life.

"His salvation was on the line like everybody else's," Nester said.

She said Lyle Jeffs has already suffered tremendously because he's been banned from the sect by Warren Jeffs. That means he's lost his family, his job and his faith.

"If you're looking to humble him, I think we're there," Nester said.

Nester tried to get a more lenient sentence by telling Judge Stewart that a "perfect storm" of factors led her client and the group to share the food stamps and that it won't ever happen again.

Stewart said he's not so sure based on letters sent in by Jeffs' friends who were trying to vouch for his character. He said several of them referred to the charges as religious persecution, leading him to believe they still don't understand the seriousness of the crime.

"That troubles me because it suggests it could happen again," Stewart said. "The deterrent effect has not been felt by some members of the community."

South Dakota processing plant receives forbearance on rent

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's only facility that processes pulse crops won't be required to pay rent for an undetermined amount of time as it faces financial challenges.

The South Dakota Pulse Processors plant, which began operating about a year ago in Harrold, has received forbearance from the Pierre Economic Development Corporation on its \$14,000 monthly lease payment, the Pierre Capital Journal reported. The plant also laid off one of its seven workers.

"We have agreed to defer (their monthly lease payments) until they can kind of get their ducks in a row," said Jim Protexter, chief operating officer of PEDCO. "They are asking for some forbearance to get things figured out."

Investors supported the plant as a way to offer South Dakota farmers a local processing facility for high-protein field peas, lentils and other pulse crops. Before the plant began operations in January, local farmers had to haul such crops to processing plants in North Dakota and Nebraska.

Protexter noted the facility is new to a market with established companies.

"There's been a learning curve," he said. "They are up against some veterans (in the processing business) in North Dakota and Canada that have been around for a long time and that can probably better weather different trade and policy (issues) they have come across."

Protexter said once the plant has been in operation for a full year, it'll be in better shape.

High-protein pulse crops are often used in soups and foods popular in the Middle East. They're also heavily used in the U.S. dog food market.

Information from: Pierre Capital Journal, <http://www.capjournal.com>

Mitchell man accused of killing wife denies violating order

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — A Mitchell man accused of suffocating his wife has denied violating a protection order.

Thirty-nine-year-old James Brinker has pleaded not guilty to charges of murder and manslaughter in the

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death of 36-year-old Marie Brinker last October. Brinker allegedly was staying at the couple's residence despite a protection order filed against him. The Mitchell Daily Republic says Brinker denied violating the order during an appearance in Davison County Tuesday. A trial to address the protection order and probation violation is set for May 1.

Court documents allege Brinker wrapped his wife in a blanket, placed her on a mattress, then put a sock in her mouth and tied a belt around her head to hold the sock in place.

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

Officials investigate deaths of over 40 South Dakota cattle

FEDORA, S.D. (AP) — Officials are investigating the deaths of more than 40 cattle on a farm south of Fedora.

The Daily Republic reports that the Miner County Sheriff's Office says 42 heifers and 1 bull died between Nov. 1 and Nov. 7 on the farm.

Authorities say the deaths are suspicious, but a cause isn't clear. Tissue samples from dead cows have been sent to Iowa, and water samples from the farm have been dispatched to North Dakota.

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

Sioux Falls, Rapid City to kill dozens of problem deer

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The two largest cities in South Dakota are planning to get rid of dozens of problem deer.

Deer in urban areas can cause property damage and lead to vehicle crashes. Drivers in Sioux Falls alone have hit and killed 121 deer this year.

The Argus Leader reports that Sioux Falls police have received a state permit to kill 50 deer in city limits this winter.

The Rapid City Journal reports that sharpshooters will target 150 deer in that city.

Meat from the deer is donated to charities that help feed the hungry.

Belle Fourche woman pleads guilty to robbing Spearfish bank

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — A Belle Fourche woman accused of robbing a bank in Spearfish last spring has pleaded guilty in federal court.

The Black Hills Pioneer reports that 22-year-old Kaycee Teppo reached a plea agreement with prosecutors under which she would make restitution to Pioneer Bank and Trust.

Authorities say Teppo entered the bank on May 18 and gave a teller a note saying she had a gun and demanding money. She made off with \$1,500 but turned herself in to authorities about 4 1/2 hours after the robbery.

Bank robbery carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Information from: Black Hills Pioneer, <http://www.bhpioneer.com>

2-vehicle crash in Charles Mix County kills 54-year-old man

WAGNER, S.D. (AP) — A two-vehicle crash in Charles Mix County killed a 54-year-old man.

The Highway Patrol says the man was driving a car that failed to stop at a rural intersection north of Wagner and collided with a pickup truck about 6 a.m. Tuesday.

The driver of the car was pronounced dead at the scene. He wasn't immediately identified.

The pickup driver wasn't hurt.

South Korean President Moon in China on visit to repair ties

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping told his South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in on Thursday that Beijing wants to improve ties that have nosedived over China's objections to the deployment of an American anti-missile system.

Welcoming Moon at the Great Hall of the People in the heart of Beijing, Xi said relations had suffered setbacks "for reasons known to all."

"I hope and believe that your visit will be an important opportunity to improve relations as we seek to find ways to carve a better path based on mutual respect and trust," Xi said.

Moon responded that there have been "temporary difficulties" between the sides, but they "provided an opportunity to think from the other's perspective."

He called the meeting a "first step to develop the mutual relations to the next level."

The two leaders later presided over the signing of seven agreements covering cooperation in areas from food safety to the Winter Olympics.

In their remarks before reporters, neither leader explicitly mentioned the U.S. Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense anti-missile system, known as THAAD, that China has demanded South Korea remove.

However, state broadcaster CCTV said Xi reiterated China's opposition to the deployment to Moon and said he hoped South Korea would "continue to appropriately handle this matter."

China says the system allows South Korea and its U.S. ally to spy on military activity in northeastern China. South Korea says it is necessary to counter North Korea's missile threats.

The more than one-year-old dispute has taken a heavy toll on economic ties, with South Korean businesses in China suffering massive drops in sales and China suspending group tours to South Korea that are a mainstay of the local tourism industry.

South Korean soap operas have been pulled off Chinese television and the country's popular K-Pop stars banned from visiting. South Korea's Lotte business group, which provided the land for the missile defense system, was forced to suspend business in China because of the anti-South Korea sentiment.

Moon, a left-leaning lawyer, has strived to balance South Korea's close political and military ties with the U.S. with its economic dependency on the Chinese market.

While the THAAD issue appears no closer to resolution, Beijing has said it approves of a pledge from Seoul not to expand it.

That set the stage for a visit by South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha to Beijing last month at which she and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi affirmed their commitment to repair relations.

But Thursday's visit was marred before the leaders met by reports that South Korean reporters following the president had been beaten by Chinese security agents in a scuffle that required intervention from South Korean presidential staff and emergency treatment for two journalists.

Seoul "regretted" that South Korean reporters were injured, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Noh Kyu-duk, who issued a strong request to Beijing to investigate the case and respond with "needed measures."

North Korea was also a focus of the talks. China is North Korea's most important political and economic partner, but has enforced increasingly strict United Nations sanctions against its neighbor while seeking to persuade all parties to return to denuclearization talks.

Xi told Moon that both China-South Korea relations and the situation on the peninsula as a whole are at a key stage.

"As friendly neighbors and strategic partners, China and South Korea have broad common interests in keeping the region peaceful and promoting mutual developments," Xi said.

Moon said he expected to reaffirm cooperation with China over the North Korean nuclear issue, which he said is "threatening the peace and security of not only the Northeast Asia region but the entire world."

Despite their traditional friendship, relations between North Korea and China have hit a low point in recent years.

A visit to Pyongyang, North Korea's capital, by Chinese special envoy Song Tao last month appears to

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have created no breakthroughs. Song visited as part of a tradition of exchanges between the ruling parties of the two countries, but left apparently without meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Associated Press writer Kim Tong-hyung in Seoul, South Korea, 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. WHO REPUBLICANS ARE BLAMING FOR ALABAMA SENATE LOSS

Former White House strategist Steve Bannon is being singled out, but he shows no signs of abandoning his guerrilla war against the GOP establishment.

2. COMCAST, VERIZON, AT&T ABOUT TO GET MORE FREE REIN

The FCC is voting to undo Obama-era rules that kept broadband providers from exercising more control over what people watch and see on the internet.

3. HOW PALESTINIANS VIEW TRUMP'S DECLARATION

Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem are at turns cynical, defiant and fearful after Trump's recognition of the contested city as Israel's capital.

4. FEDERAL JUDGES TO EXAMINE DRUG STASH-HOUSE STINGS

A potentially landmark hearing will consider evidence on whether the phony operations that overwhelmingly target suspects in black neighborhoods are racially biased.

5. DISPARITY SEEN IN GOP TAX ACCORD

Generous tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest Americans would be delivered in the sweeping overhaul while middle- and low-income families would receive smaller tax cuts.

6. CORONER: ACCUSED KENTUCKY LAWMAKER'S DEATH APPARENTLY SUICIDE

Dan Johnson, a Republican state legislator accused of sexually assaulting a teenage girl in the basement of his home, also compared the Obamas to monkeys in Facebook posts.

7. DECADE SINCE GREAT RECESSION: THRIVING CITIES LEAVE OTHERS BEHIND

Many Southern and Midwestern cities have yet to recover from the loss of manufacturing jobs that have been automated out of existence or lost to competition from China, data analyzed for AP finds.

8. WHAT GAY ADVOCATES ARE WATCHING FOR

How a child support fight between a divorced lesbian couple plays out in Hawaii, something experts say is likely the first such case before a state Supreme Court.

9. WHAT SALMA HAYEK SAYS ABOUT WEINSTEIN

The "Frida" actress says rebuffing the disgraced Hollywood mogul led to a nightmare on the set of the 2002 Oscar-winning movie.

10. AS OLYMPICS NEAR, SOUTH KOREA AGONIZES OVER COSTS

If history is any indicator, post-games expenses and huge financial strain would be placed on Pyeongchang — one of its poorest regions.

Aid group: At least 6,700 Rohingya killed in Myanmar

BANGKOK (AP) — International aid group Doctors Without Borders said its field survey has found at least 6,700 Rohingya Muslims were killed between August and September in a crackdown by Myanmar's security forces.

The group, known by its French acronym MSF, said in a statement made available Thursday that it conducted the survey in refugee camps in Bangladesh. It estimated that at least 9,000 Rohingya had died of various causes in Myanmar's Rakhine state between Aug. 25 and Sept. 24, and that more than 70 percent of the deaths were the result of violence.

According to MSF, the dead included at least 730 children younger than 5.

More than 630,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled Buddhist-majority Myanmar into Bangladesh to escape

what the United Nations has called "ethnic cleansing."

"The peak in deaths coincides with the launch of the latest 'clearance operations' by Myanmar security forces in the last week of August," MSF medical director Sidney Wong said in a statement.

She said the findings were staggering, both in terms of the numbers of people who reported a family member dead as a result of violence and the horrific ways in which they said they were killed or severely injured.

MSF said that among children below the age of 5, more than 59 percent who were killed during that period were reportedly shot, 15 percent burnt to death in their homes, 7 percent beaten to death and 2 percent died due to land mine blasts.

Myanmar's Information Ministry has said that 400 people died following attacks by a militant Rohingya group on police posts on Aug. 25. It said most of the 400 were "extremist terrorists" who died during military "clearance operations."

International aid and rights groups have accused the military of arson, killings and rapes of Rohingya villagers. Myanmar authorities have blamed Rohingya militants for the violence.

More than 1 million ethnic Rohingya Muslims have lived in Myanmar for generations. They have been stripped of their citizenship, denied almost all rights and labeled stateless.

Since the Myanmar's military conducted operations against the Rohingya in Rakhine state, the civilian government has barred most journalists, international observers and humanitarian aid workers from independently traveling to the region.

MSF said the number of deaths is likely to be an underestimation "as we have not surveyed all refugee resettlements in Bangladesh and because the surveys don't account for the families who never made it out of Myanmar."

Bannon, undeterred, under siege from GOP after Alabama loss

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former White House strategist Steve Bannon is catching blame from fellow Republicans for coughing up a safe Senate seat in deep-red Alabama and foisting damaging political advice on President Donald Trump. But in the aftermath of this week's stinging Alabama defeat, Bannon is showing no signs of abandoning his guerrilla war against the GOP establishment.

Bannon wholeheartedly backed Roy Moore, the insurgent conservative who faltered in Tuesday's special election amid allegations that he had preyed on underage girls decades ago. The accusations prompted the national party to withdraw support for its nominee for a while, but Bannon stuck with Moore, headlining rallies for the candidate and convincing Trump to extend a full-throated endorsement.

But when Moore lost on Tuesday, handing the Democrats control of their first Senate seat in Alabama in a generation, Republicans turned on Bannon. The Breitbart News head already had made scores of enemies for declaring a siege on his own party.

"This is a brutal reminder that candidate quality matters regardless of where you are running," said Steven Law, head of the Senate Leadership Fund, a super PAC for Republicans aligned with GOP leadership. "Not only did Steve Bannon cost us a critical Senate seat in one of the most Republican states in the country, but he also dragged the president of the United States into his fiasco."

Bannon's team vowed that its revolution would continue, insisting that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell should be the one to take the blame.

Bannon's allies dismissed the Alabama loss as little more than a temporary setback that would soon be forgotten. They expect that the Republicans cheering Moore's loss will simply enrage Trump's most loyal supporters nationwide, who already suspected some Republican leaders were trying to undermine the president's agenda.

"They're stomping on the very base they need to turn out for their candidates in the general election in 2018," said Andy Surabian, a senior adviser to the Bannon-backed Great America PAC. He contended

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that "the average Republican voter across the country is pointing their finger at Mitch McConnell and the Republican establishment."

Bannon's team blamed McConnell for abandoning Moore, though it was a somewhat incongruous argument after Bannon warned McConnell to stay out of Alabama when Moore won the GOP primary. On his Sirius XM radio show Wednesday, Bannon credited Democrats with "out-hustling" the GOP on the ground in Alabama — praise that doubled as a swipe at the lack of Senate Republican campaign committee field staff on the ground in the state.

The fate of Bannon's insurgency may depend on whether he can keep Trump's ear.

In the hours after Moore's loss, Trump was restrained, according to a White House official and an outside adviser not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations. Some in the West Wing had hoped the loss would prompt Trump to sever ties with Bannon but the president did not seem inclined to take that step, according to the two people.

Since Bannon's exit from the White House in August, he has remained close to the president, speaking to him frequently by phone, offering political advice and reminding Trump of his populist campaign promises. Though he had grown weary of the infighting Bannon initiated in the West Wing, Trump still valued his former strategist, telling allies that he felt that Bannon had a better feel for the president's base than most of his advisers. He also praised Bannon's pugnacious spirit, seeing in his former aide a brawler similar to himself.

Bannon tried to steer Trump toward Moore in the primary but the president, confronted with conflicting advice from his staff, supported incumbent Sen. Luther Strange, who had been appointed to the seat vacated by Jeff Sessions when he became attorney general. But the president was never truly sold on Strange, and publicly worried he had backed the wrong candidate.

After Moore's primary win, an exultant Bannon believed it was the first victory of a GOP civil war and, later, urged the president to endorse Moore even after the sexual harassment allegations surfaced. Trump initially hesitated but then fully embraced Moore over objections from aides and Republican leadership.

Publicly, Trump on Wednesday addressed Moore's loss by acknowledging he "would have liked to have had the seat" in the Senate as he and GOP lawmakers scratch for legislative victories. But Trump also said, in what could be interpreted as a dig at those in the GOP who did not back Moore, that "a lot of Republicans feel differently. They feel very happy about the way it turned out."

Bannon's group indicated they would forge forward with plans to challenge the GOP establishment in Senate races in as many as 10 states, including Arizona, Nevada and Tennessee, though one adviser suggested that a greater effort may be made on recruiting and screening candidates.

But in the hours after the stunning defeat, many Republicans reveled in Bannon's failure.

Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina argued that Bannon should have called off his guns and simply backed Trump's first choice.

"When it comes to Alabama politics Steve Bannon should have followed President @realDonaldTrump lead in supporting Luther Strange," Graham tweeted. "Trump's instincts on the Alabama race proved to be correct."

And Rep. Peter King, R-NY, declared that Bannon looked "like some disheveled drunk who wandered onto the political stage."

"This is not the type of person we need in politics," said King said. "(Bannon) sort of parades himself out there with his weird alt-right views that he has, and to me it's demeaning the whole government and political process. And last night's election was a manifestation of the revulsion by the American people."

Associated Press writer Steve Peoples contributed reporting from Washington.

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Ample tax cuts for business, wealthy in new GOP tax accord

By **STEPHEN OHLEMACHER, ANDREW TAYLOR and MARCY GORDON, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Generous tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest Americans would be delivered in a sweeping overhaul of the tax laws, under a new agreement crafted by Republicans in Congress.

Middle- and low-income families would receive smaller tax cuts, though President Donald Trump and Republican leaders have billed the package as a huge benefit for the middle class. The agreement reached Wednesday by House and Senate GOP leaders also calls for scrapping a major tax requirement of the “Obamacare” health law, a step toward the ultimate GOP goal of unraveling the law.

The agreement combines key elements of separate tax bills recently passed by the House and Senate, striking compromises on some of them. The Republicans are pushing to deliver final legislation to Trump before Christmas as the first major legislative accomplishment of his presidency.

At the White House, Trump was eager to receive it. “The cynical voices that opposed tax cuts grow smaller and weaker, and the American people grow stronger, he said. “This is for people of middle income, this is for companies that are going to create jobs. This is for very, very special people, the great people of America.”

The business tax cuts would be permanent, but reductions for individuals would expire after a decade — saving money to comply with Senate budget rules. In all, the bill would cut taxes by about \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years, adding billions to the nation’s mounting debt.

The legislation, still being finalized, would cut the top tax rate for the wealthiest earners — Trump among them — from 39.6 percent to 37 percent, slash the corporate income tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent and allow homeowners to deduct interest only on the first \$750,000 of a new mortgage.

The top tax rate currently applies to income above \$470,000 for married couples, though lawmakers are reworking the tax brackets.

The standard deduction would be nearly doubled, to \$24,000 for married couples.

Details of the agreement were described by Republican senators and congressional aides. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorized to publicly discuss private negotiations.

“It’s not my vision of the perfect, but again, this is definitely going to be a strong pro-growth tax package,” said Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis.

Republicans view passage of the legislation as a political imperative, proving to voters they can govern as the GOP fights to hold onto its majorities in the House and Senate in next year’s elections. Republicans say they expect the package to increase economic growth, generating additional tax revenue and lessening the hit to the \$20 trillion budget deficit. Independent economists aren’t as optimistic.

Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen said Wednesday that she and her Fed colleagues, who set interest rate policy, expect a “modest lift” to economic growth from the tax package.

Negotiators have removed several controversial provisions from the tax bill, including one that would have eliminated the deduction for interest on student loans and another deduction for medical expenses, said two congressional aides. Also, the bill would no longer start taxing graduate-school tuition waivers, the aides said.

The tax bill would scale back the deduction for state and local taxes, allowing families to deduct only up to a total of \$10,000 in property and income taxes. The deduction is especially important to residents of high-tax states like New York, New Jersey and California.

Business owners who report business income on their personal tax returns would be able to deduct 20 percent of that income.

The bill would repeal the mandate that most Americans get health insurance, a provision of the 2010 health care law. Republicans suffered a humiliating defeat this past summer when they were unable to dismantle the health care law after seven years of promises. Scrapping the individual mandate would provide them with more than \$300 billion for deeper tax cuts while also undermining the Obama law.

Senate leaders plan to vote on the package next Tuesday. If it passes, the House would vote next.

“Let’s not waver now — let’s not give in to the Washington status quo — not when tax reform is so

close,” Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas, chairman of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, said at the start of the joint House-Senate conference committee’s first public meeting. The committee is charged with blending the tax bills passed by the House and Senate, though Republicans have done all their negotiations behind closed doors.

Full details will be unveiled by the end of the week, Brady said.

Democrats, who haven’t been included in any substantive talks on the bill, have assailed it as unfairly tilted in favor of business and the wealthy.

“This is the ultimate betrayal of the middle class,” Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, one of the Democratic conferees, charged at the meeting.

Once the plan is signed into law, workers could start seeing changes in the amount of taxes withheld from their paychecks early next year, lawmakers said — though taxpayers won’t file their 2018 returns until the following year.

The IRS said in a statement Wednesday that taxpayers could begin seeing less money withheld from their paychecks “as early as February.” The agency said it was taking initial steps to prepare withholding guidance for employers, which it expects to issue in January.

Corporate tax cuts would take effect in January, allowing businesses to immediately write off the full cost of capital investments.

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking and Ken Thomas contributed to this report.

Follow Stephen Ohlemacher on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/stephenatap>

Hawaii case draws attention to same-sex child support issues

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER, Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — National gay rights advocates are watching how a child support fight between a divorced lesbian couple plays out in Hawaii, likely the first such case before a state Supreme Court, experts say.

A woman wants to sever her parental rights to a child her ex-wife gave birth to and is appealing a family court ruling denying that request to the Hawaii Supreme Court, which is set to hear arguments Thursday.

The couple, who are not identified in the confidential family court case, married in Washington, D.C., in 2013 and moved to Hawaii because of military orders for the woman seeking to end her parental rights.

Throughout the marriage, the couple talked about the possibility of having a child together, the court said. While the woman was deployed between January and September 2015, her wife got pregnant through a sperm donor. The woman filed for divorce in October 2015, and the child was born while it was pending.

The family court denied her petition because it found that Hawaii’s Uniform Parentage Act and Marriage Equality Act presumes that a legal spouse of a woman who gives birth to a baby is the parent of that child, regardless of the spouse’s gender.

“This is a very important and of-the-moment question in the LGBT community right now, which is how are states going to treat parents of children where there are a same-sex marriage couple,” said Cathy Sakimura, family law director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, which is not involved in the case.

“Are they going to give them the same kind of recognition that any other couple would get or are they going to have a different rule applied to them?” Sakimura said.

There are a handful of similar cases nationwide, but the Hawaii dispute is likely the first involving a same-sex married couple with a child support case before a state’s highest court, she said.

Most same-sex parental rights cases involve a spouse who didn’t give birth to a child and wants custody, Sakimura said.

“It doesn’t happen that often in the same-sex parenting world, but there are few cases where they are trying to avoid child support,” she said.

In such cases, conception is a key question, Sakimura said.

"Did the spouse consent to the procedure and know about it? And that is what triggers them being a parent," she said.

The case will test marriage equality, said Lambda Legal, a prominent LGBT-rights group that is representing the woman who gave birth.

"This is unusual in that biology is being used as a shield to evade parental obligation," Lambda Legal attorney Peter Renn said. "Equal rights come with equal responsibility."

Arguments are being held in a high school auditorium because the case is being used to teach students about courts.

Ky. lawmaker accused of assault dies in apparent suicide

By ADAM BEAM, Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Dan Johnson, a Republican state lawmaker in Kentucky who defiantly denied allegations that he sexually assaulted a teenage girl in the basement of his home, died in an apparent suicide Wednesday night, the county coroner said. He was 57.

Bullitt County Coroner Dave Billings said Johnson died of a single gunshot wound on Greenwell Ford Road in Mount Washington, Kentucky. Billings said Johnson stopped his car at the end of a bridge in a secluded area, then got out and walked to the front of the car. He said an autopsy is scheduled for Thursday morning.

"I would say it is probably suicide," he said.

Johnson was elected to the state legislature in 2016, part of a wave of Republican victories that gave the GOP control of the Kentucky House of Representatives for the first time in nearly 100 years. He won his election despite Republican leaders urging him to drop out of the race after local media reported on some of his Facebook posts comparing Barack and Michelle Obama to monkeys.

The pastor of Heart of Fire church in Louisville, Johnson sponsored a number of bills having to do with religious liberty and teaching the Bible in public schools. But he was mostly out of the spotlight until Monday, when the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting published an account from a woman saying Johnson sexually assaulted her in the basement of his home in 2013.

At the time, the woman told police, who investigated the incident but closed the case and did not file charges.

On Tuesday, Johnson held a news conference in the pulpit of his church, which he began by leading friends and family in singing a portion of the Christmas carol "O Come All Ye Faithful." He said the allegations against him were "totally false" and said they were part of a nationwide strategy of defeating conservative Republicans. He referenced Republican Alabama U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore, who faces accusations of sexual misconduct from multiple women.

Shortly before 5 p.m. Wednesday, Johnson posted a message on his Facebook page that asked people to care for his wife. He wrote that PTSD "is a sickness that will take my life, I cannot handle it any longer. It has won this life, BUT HEAVEN IS MY HOME." The post appears to have been removed.

Michael Skoler, president of Louisville Public Media, which owns the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting, said everyone at the organization is "deeply sad."

"Our aim, as always, is to provide the public with fact-based, unbiased reporting and hold public officials accountable for their actions," Skoler said. "As part of our process, we reached out to Representative Johnson numerous times over the course of a seven-month investigation. He declined requests to talk about our findings."

The sexual assault accusations against Johnson were revealed as a sexual harassment scandal involving four other Republican lawmakers was unfolding at the state Capitol. Former Republican House Speaker Jeff Hoover resigned his leadership position after acknowledging he secretly settled a sexual harassment claim with a member of his staff. Three other lawmakers were involved in the settlement, and all lost their committee chairmanships.

"I am very sad over the passing of Rep. Dan Johnson. Over the past few weeks in some of the darkest days of my life, he reached out to me, encouraged me, and prayed for me," Hoover posted on his Twitter

account Wednesday night.

Republican Gov. Matt Bevin posted on his Twitter account that "my heart breaks for his family tonight." "These are heavy days in Frankfort and in America," Bevin posted. "May God indeed shed His grace on us all. ... We sure need it."

GOP's not all that sad; party grapples with Alabama fallout

By STEVE PEOPLES and ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Weary national Republicans breathed a collective sigh of relief on Wednesday, a day after voters knocked out their own party's scandal-plagued candidate in deep-red Alabama. Yet all is not well in a party confronted with new rounds of infighting and a suddenly shrinking Senate majority heading into next year's midterm elections.

A semi-humbled President Donald Trump conceded that Roy Moore's loss was not his preferred outcome. He said he "would have liked to have had the seat" and an important Senate vote as he and GOP lawmakers scratch for legislative victories.

But he also acknowledged, "A lot of Republicans feel differently. They feel very happy about the way it turned out."

Indeed, it was easy to find establishment-minded Republicans — in and out of Washington — who cheered Moore's loss as the impact of the Alabama stunner echoed throughout the political world. The prospect of a high-profile Republican senator dogged by sexual misconduct accusations — and an all-but-certain ethics investigation — unnerved a GOP that's fearful of an albatross on its candidates in next year's campaigns.

Republican Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby said that Moore, a fiery conservative, would have brought a "radioactive" element to the Senate GOP.

"I'm relieved and I believe a lot of Republicans are relieved that Roy Moore and some of his people aren't the face of the Republican Party that I know," said Shelby, who cast a write-in vote for another Republican and never backed down in his opposition to Moore.

More than 22,000 write-in votes were cast Tuesday, more than the margin of difference between the winner and loser, suggesting many other voters refused to vote for a Democrat but couldn't accept Moore.

Meanwhile, the former state Supreme Court chief justice said he is waiting for the "final count" in the race. In a video released by his campaign Wednesday, Moore said that it had been a close race and that some military and provisional ballots had yet to be counted.

Moore said he was waiting for certification of the final vote by the Alabama secretary of state, which is expected to occur sometime between Dec. 26 and Jan. 3.

Unofficial returns show that Democrat Doug Jones defeated Moore by about 20,000 votes or 1.5 percent.

Moore released the message several hours after Jones urged him to "do the right thing" and concede. Moore, who is known for his evangelical politics, called the election a battle for the "heart and soul" of the country.

Sen.-elect Doug Jones' stunning Democratic victory marked a major setback for Trump and top political ally Steve Bannon. They had devoted time, resources and political capital to Moore in recent days, even as he faced the allegations of sexual misconduct and espoused views that alienated women, racial minorities, gays and Muslims.

Despite the outcome's relief for the GOP's pragmatic wing, the fight for the party's soul was hardly decided with one Alabama special election.

Allies of Bannon, who declared war on the party's establishment after leaving the White House earlier in the year, dismissed the loss as little more than a temporary setback that would soon be forgotten. Republicans cheering Moore's loss, they said, would simply enrage Trump's most loyal supporters nationwide, who already suspected some Republican leaders were trying to undermine the president's agenda.

"They're stomping on the very base they need to turn out for their candidates in the general election in 2018," said Andy Surabian, a senior adviser to the Bannon-backed Great America PAC. He contended that "the average Republican voter across the country is pointing their finger at Mitch McConnell and the

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Republican establishment.”

Conservative activist Mark Meckler did just that.

“One hundred percent of this I hang around Mitch McConnell’s neck,” said Meckler, an early tea party leader, referring to the mainstream Republican who is Senate majority leader.

At the same time, the Alabama contest sounded an undeniable alarm for Republican officials charged with defending the party’s majorities in the House and Senate next year. Under the weight of Trump’s historically low approval ratings, Alabama put their concerns on steroids.

“This was a wake-up-and-smell-the-coffee moment,” said Steven Law, who leads the Senate Leadership Fund, which is aligned with Senate GOP leaders. He said Alabama’s election, like recent contests in Virginia and New Jersey, demonstrated “sky-high Democratic enthusiasm.”

“Republicans are going to have to put forward top-quality candidates and run flawless campaigns to win next year even in states that trend Republican,” Law said.

In the shorter term, it’s unclear how the loss will affect the Republicans’ governing agenda.

When Jones is sworn into office — likely in early January — the GOP’s Senate majority will shrink to pinhole-sized 51-49. That increases pressure on Republicans to push their prized \$1.5 trillion tax bill through Congress before lawmakers leave town late this month, a goal they seem likely to achieve.

The narrowing majority gives extra leverage to Republicans like moderate Maine Sen. Susan Collins, who’s extracted leadership promises for accompanying legislation shoring up parts of the “Obamacare” health care law. Collins told reporters Wednesday she was confident those promises would be kept.

“All you cynics in the press will have to be eating crow come Dec. 31,” she said.

Yet Republicans cannot abandon their policy priorities after taxes if they hope to generate momentum heading into the midterms, said Tim Phillips, president of the Koch Brothers-backed Americans for Prosperity.

“Taxes are a crucial start, but they’re going to need to do more,” he said. Jones’ victory could complicate the GOP’s goals, Phillips said, particularly “if he goes the partisan resistance route.”

“If he does, then clearly it’s one less vote and it will make things more difficult,” he added.

The GOP already faced an uphill battle for any major legislative achievements in the near term.

Some Republicans, particularly House leaders, have talked about a drive to overhaul Medicare, Medicaid and welfare programs next year. Even if the GOP succeeds in approving special rules that would require just 50 votes, some Republicans are leery of cutting popular programs in an election year and the chances of success seem low. Democrats would oppose any such effort.

Other initiatives, like a huge program to upgrade the nation’s infrastructure, would need 60 Senate votes to succeed. Barring a GOP effort to craft bipartisan bills from the start, it seems unlikely nine Democrats would defect to back a Republican-written version with elections on the horizon.

Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez hailed the Alabama result as a harbinger of what’s to come.

“Last night was not a fluke, it was a message,” he told reporters on a conference call. “The days of Donald Trump are numbered.”

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Matthew Daly and Zeke Miller in Washington, and Bill Barrow in Montgomery, Alabama contributed to this report.

As Olympics near, South Korea agonizes over post-Games costs

By KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

GANGNEUNG, South Korea (AP) — South Korean officials have ruled out turning a state-of-the-art Olympic skating arena into a giant seafood freezer. Other than that, not much is certain about the country’s post-Winter Games plans for a host of expensive venues.

As officials prepare for the games in and around the small mountain town of Pyeongchang, there are lingering worries over the huge financial burden facing one of the nation’s poorest regions. Local officials hope that the Games will provide a badly needed economic boost by marking the area as a world-class

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tourist destination.

But past experience shows that hosts who justified their Olympics with expectations of financial windfalls were often left deeply disappointed when the fanfare ended.

This isn't lost on Gangwon province, which governs Pyeongchang and nearby Gangneung, a seaside city that will host Olympic skating and hockey events. Officials there are trying hard to persuade the national government to pay to maintain new stadiums that will have little use once the athletes leave. Seoul, however, is so far balking at the idea.

The Olympics, which begin Feb. 9, will cost South Korea about 14 trillion won (\$12.9 billion), much more than the 8 to 9 trillion won (\$7 to 8 billion) the country projected as the overall cost when Pyeongchang won the bid in 2011.

Worries over costs have cast a shadow over the games among residents long frustrated with what they say were decades of neglect in a region that doesn't have much going on other than domestic tourism and fisheries.

"What good will a nicely managed global event really do for residents when we are struggling so much to make ends meet?" said Lee Do-sung, a Gangneung restaurant owner. "What will the games even leave? Maybe only debt."

TEARING THINGS DOWN

The atmosphere was starkly different three decades ago when grand preparations for the 1988 Seoul Summer Games essentially shaped the capital into the modern metropolis it is today.

A massive sports complex and huge public parks emerged alongside the city's Han River. Next came new highways, bridges and subway lines. Forests of high-rise buildings rose above the bulldozed ruins of old commercial districts and slums.

The legacy of the country's second Olympics will be less clear. In a country that cares much less now about the recognition that large sporting events bring, it will potentially be remembered more for things dismantled than built.

Pyeongchang's picturesque Olympic Stadium — a pentagonal 35,000-seat arena that sits in a county of 40,000 people — will only be used for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics and Paralympics before workers tear it down.

A scenic downhill course in nearby Jeongseon will also be demolished after the games to restore the area to its natural state. Fierce criticism by environmentalists over the venue being built on a pristine forest sacred to locals caused construction delays that nearly forced pre-Olympic test events to be postponed.

Gangwon officials want the national government to share costs for rebuilding the forest, which could be as much as 102 billion won (\$95 million).

NO FISH

Despite more than a decade of planning, Gangwon remains unsure what to do with the Olympic facilities it will keep.

Winter sports facilities are often harder to maintain than summer ones because of the higher costs for maintaining ice and snow and the usually smaller number of people they attract. That's especially true in South Korea, which doesn't have a strong winter sports culture.

Not all ideas are welcome.

Gangwon officials say they never seriously considered a proposal to convert the 8,000-seat Gangneung Oval, the Olympic speed skating venue, into a refrigerated warehouse for seafood. Officials were unwilling to have frozen fish as part of their Olympic legacy.

Gangwon officials also dismissed a theme park developer's suggestion to make the stadium a gambling venue where people place bets on skating races, citing the country's strict laws and largely negative view of gambling.

A plan to have the 10,000-capacity Gangneung Hockey Center host a corporate league hockey team fell apart.

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Even worse off are Pyeongchang's bobsleigh track, ski jump hill and the biathlon and cross-country skiing venues, which were built for sports South Koreans are largely uninterested in.

After its final inspection visit in August, the International Olympic Committee warned Pyeongchang's organizers that they risked creating white elephants from Olympic venues, though it didn't offer specific suggestions for what to do differently.

Cautionary tales come from Athens, which was left with a slew of abandoned stadiums after the 2004 Summer Games that some say contributed to Greece's financial meltdown and Nagano, the Japanese town that never got the tourism bump it expected after spending an estimated \$10.5 billion for the 1998 Winter Games.

Some Olympic venues have proved to be too costly to maintain. The \$100 million luge and bobsled track built in Turin for the 2006 games was later dismantled because of high operating costs. Pyeongchang will be only the second Olympic host to dismantle its ceremonial Olympic Stadium immediately after the games — the 1992 Winter Olympics host Albertville did so as well.

'MONEY-DRINKING HIPPOS'

Gangwon has demanded that the national government in Seoul pay for maintaining at least four Olympic facilities after the Games — the speed skating arena, hockey center, bobsleigh track and ski jump hill. This would save the province about 6 billion won (\$5.5 million) a year, according to Park Cheol-sin, a Gangwon official.

But the national government says doing so would be unfair to other South Korean cities that struggled financially after hosting large sports events. Incheon, the indebted 2014 Asian Games host, has a slew of unused stadiums now mocked as "money-drinking hippos." It would also be a hard sell to taxpayers outside of Gangwon, said Lee Jae-soon, an official from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Unlike the 1988 Olympics and the 2002 World Cup, which were brought to South Korea after bids driven by the national government, the provincial government led the bid for the Pyeongchang games and it did so without any commitment from Seoul over footing the bill.

Under current plans, Gangwon will be managing at least six Olympic facilities after the games.

These facilities will create a 9.2 billion won (\$8.5 million) deficit for the province every year, a sizable burden for a quickly-aging region that had the lowest income level among South Korean provinces in 2013, according to the Korea Industrial Strategy Institute, which was commissioned by Gangwon to analyze costs.

Hong Jin-won, a Gangneung resident and activist who has been monitoring Olympic preparations for years, said the real deficit could be even bigger. The institute's calculation is based on assumptions that each facility would generate at least moderate levels of income, which Hong says is no sure thing.

He said that could mean welfare spending gets slashed to help make up the lack of money.

South Korea, a rapidly-aging country with a worsening job market and widening rich-poor gap, has by far the highest elderly poverty rate among rich nations, according to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development figures.

If Seoul doesn't pay for the Olympic facilities, and Gangwon can't turn them into cultural or leisure facilities, it might make more sense for Gangwon to just tear them down.

Park said the national government must step up because the "Olympics are a national event, not a Gangwon event."

AP Explains: What is net neutrality and why does it matter?

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — "Net neutrality" regulations, designed to prevent internet service providers like Verizon, AT&T, Comcast and Charter from favoring some sites and apps over others, are on the chopping block. On Thursday, the Federal Communications Commission plans to vote on a proposal that would not only undo the Obama-era rules that have been in place since 2015, but will forbid states to put anything similar in place.

Here's a look at what the developments mean for consumers and companies.

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WHAT IS NET NEUTRALITY?

Net neutrality is the principle that internet providers treat all web traffic equally, and it's pretty much how the internet has worked since its creation. But regulators, consumer advocates and internet companies were concerned about what broadband companies could do with their power as the pathway to the internet — blocking or slowing down apps that rival their own services, for example.

WHAT DID THE GOVERNMENT DO ABOUT IT?

The FCC in 2015 approved rules, on a party-line vote, that made sure cable and phone companies don't manipulate traffic. With them in place, a provider such as Comcast can't charge Netflix for a faster path to its customers, or block it or slow it down.

The net neutrality rules gave the FCC power to go after companies for business practices that weren't explicitly banned as well. For example, the Obama FCC said that "zero rating" practices by AT&T violated net neutrality. The telecom giant exempted its own video app from cellphone data caps, which would save some consumers money, and said video rivals could pay for the same treatment. Pai's FCC spiked the effort to go after AT&T, even before it began rolling out a plan to undo the net neutrality rules entirely.

A federal appeals court upheld the rules in 2016 after broadband providers sued.

WHAT TELCOS WANT

Big telecom companies hate the stricter regulation that comes with the net neutrality rules and have fought them fiercely in court. They say the regulations can undermine investment in broadband and introduced uncertainty about what were acceptable business practices. There were concerns about potential price regulation, even though the FCC had said it won't set prices for consumer internet service.

WHAT SILICON VALLEY WANTS

Internet companies such as Google have strongly backed net neutrality, but many tech firms have been more muted in their activism this year. Netflix, which had been vocal in support of the rules in 2015, said in January that weaker net neutrality wouldn't hurt it because it's now too popular with users for broadband providers to interfere.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Although the FCC's two Democrats said they will oppose the proposal, the repeal is likely to prevail as Republicans dominate 3-2. The vote for net neutrality in 2015 was also along party lines, but Democrats dominated then.

In the long run, net-neutrality advocates say undoing these rules makes it harder for the government to crack down on internet providers who act against consumer interests and will harm innovation. Those who criticize the rules say undoing them is good for investment in broadband networks.

But advocates aren't sitting still. Some groups plan lawsuits to challenge the FCC's move, and Democrats — energized by public protests in support of net neutrality — think it might be a winning political issue for them in 2018 congressional elections.

Firefighters wary despite gains against California fire

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Southern California firefighters contained part of the fifth-largest fire in the state's history but warned coastal communities Wednesday that they're still at risk if unpredictable winds whip up again and fan the flames.

The National Weather Service extended warnings through Friday of extreme fire danger conditions throughout much of Southern California due to lack of moisture along with a possible increase in wind gust speeds at the end of the week.

Firefighters made some progress Wednesday on corralling the so-called Thomas Fire, which has spread

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into national forest land northwest of Los Angeles. However, they warned that the fire would continue to spread west as it eats up parched brush.

By Wednesday evening, state fire officials said the blaze was 30 percent contained but it continued to threaten Santa Barbara, Carpinteria, Summerland and Montecito — a wealthy area home to celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey.

Since the blaze broke out on Dec. 4, it has burned more than 372 square miles (965 square kilometers) and destroyed 921 buildings — including at least 700 homes. It threatens 18,000 buildings and has prompted evacuations of about 100,000 people.

Elsewhere, fire officials announced that a cooking fire at a homeless encampment sparked a blaze last week that destroyed six homes in the exclusive Bel Air neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Arson investigators determined that the so-called Skirball Fire near the world-famous Getty museum was started by an illegal fire at a camp near a freeway underpass, city fire Capt. Erik Scott said.

The camp was empty when firefighters found it, but people apparently had been sleeping and cooking there for at least several days, he said.

The Fire Department was working on a plan to locate such encampments at the start of fire season next year to avoid danger, Scott said.

At the largest of the fires northwest of Los Angeles, firefighters protected foothill homes while the flames churned mostly into unoccupied forest land, Santa Barbara County Fire Department spokesman Mike Eliason said.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member Eric Burdon and his wife, Marianna were among the people who fled the smoke in the small city of Ojai Tuesday.

Burdon, a member of the 1960s British Invasion band The Animals, wrote on Facebook last week about having to flee and returning temporarily to find his home still standing with ashes all around it.

"A week like this gives you the perspective that life is what truly matters," he wrote.

A photo accompanying the post showed his handprint and signature written in ashes.

For complete coverage of the California wildfires, click here: <https://apnews.com/tag/Wildfires>.

Former 'Apprentice' contestant Omarosa leaving White House

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — True to form, former "Apprentice" star Omarosa is ending her time at the White House with a dose of drama.

Omarosa Manigault Newman, one of President Donald Trump's most prominent African-American supporters, was escorted off the White House grounds after resigning her post as a presidential adviser, according to two White House officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Wednesday that Manigault Newman's resignation is effective Jan. 20, one year after Trump's inauguration. "We wish her the best in future endeavors and are grateful for her service," Sanders said.

The president also bid her farewell, tweeting: "Thank you Omarosa for your service! I wish you continued success."

Manigault Newman was an assistant to the president and director of communications for the White House Office of Public Liaison, working on outreach to various constituency groups. But the office languished under her watch and White House chief of staff John Kelly had indicated that changes were forthcoming — including her dismissal, according to the two officials, who insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about personnel matters.

Better known by just her first name, Manigault Newman was escorted from the White House complex Tuesday night but was allowed to offer her resignation. The U.S. Secret Service, which provides security for the president, tweeted Wednesday that it was not involved in her termination or her escort from the grounds. Some published reports said Secret Service officers had physically removed Manigault Newman

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from the complex.

The agency confirmed that a pass granting her access to the complex had been deactivated.

"Our only involvement in this matter was to deactivate the individual's pass which grants access to the complex," the agency tweeted.

Manigault Newman's exit comes at the front end of what's expected to be a wave of departures. Deputy national security adviser Dina Powell is also departing early next year.

Manigault Newman, who drew a top salary of \$179,700, was one of Trump's highest-profile supporters during the campaign. She also worked with Trump's transition team.

A former contestant on the first season of "The Apprentice," Trump's former reality TV show, Manigault Newman had long been unpopular with several senior West Wing officials, including senior adviser and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner and Kelly.

Kelly, the retired Marine general who had made it his mission to tighten White House operations and streamline how Trump gets information, has told aides that he wanted to curtail the number of White House officials with ill-defined positions and responsibilities.

Kelly took away Manigault Newman's ability to come and go from the Oval Office as she pleased. During the first months of Trump's administration, aides were known to wander in and out of meetings, a practice Kelly ended across the board. She also drew Kelly's ire by occasionally going around him to slip news articles to the president.

Manigault Newman enjoyed a close relationship with the president despite the fact that he once uttered the famous "You're fired!" line to her before dispatching her from the TV show. She held her April wedding at Trump's hotel blocks from the White House.

She had a knack for generating controversy.

An African-American White House reporter earlier this year accused Manigault Newman of physical and verbal intimidation, including issuing a warning that the White House kept "dossiers" on black journalists. The White House denied compiling such information.

Her appearance at the National Association of Black Journalists' convention in New Orleans in August devolved into a testy clash with a veteran news anchor during a panel discussion on policing in black communities.

Manigault Newman did not return voice mail and text messages Wednesday seeking comment.

Associated Press writers Zeke Miller and Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this report.

Follow Darlene Superville on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/dsupervilleap>

GOP says it's got a deal on taxes; cuts coming for next year

By STEPHEN OHLEMACHER, ANDREW TAYLOR and MARCY GORDON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Confident congressional Republicans forged an agreement Wednesday on a major overhaul of the nation's tax laws that would provide generous tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest Americans — Donald Trump among them — and deliver the first major legislative accomplishment to the GOP president.

Middle- and low-income families would get smaller tax cuts, though Trump and GOP leaders have billed the package as a huge benefit for the middle class. The measure would scrap a major tax requirement of Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, a step toward the ultimate GOP goal of unraveling the law.

"The cynical voices that opposed tax cuts grow smaller and weaker, and the American people grow stronger," Trump said at the White House. "This is for people of middle income, this is for companies that are going to create jobs. This is for very, very special people, the great people of America."

The business tax cuts would be permanent, but reductions for individuals would expire after a decade — saving money to comply with Senate budget rules. In all, the bill would cut taxes by about \$1.5 trillion

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over the next 10 years, adding billions to the nation's mounting debt.

The legislation, which is still being finalized, would cut the top tax rate for the wealthy from 39.6 percent to 37 percent, slash the corporate income tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent and allow homeowners to deduct interest only on the first \$750,000 of a new mortgage.

The top tax rate currently applies to income above \$470,000 for married couples, though lawmakers are reworking the tax brackets.

The standard deduction would be nearly doubled, to \$24,000 for married couples.

Details of the agreement were described by Republican senators and congressional aides.

"It's not my vision of the perfect, but again, this is definitely going to be a strong pro-growth tax package," said Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis.

Republicans see passage of the legislation as a political imperative, proving to voters they can govern as the GOP fights to hold onto its majorities in the House and Senate. Republicans said they expect the package to increase economic growth, generating additional tax revenue and lessening the hit to the budget deficit. Independent economists aren't as optimistic.

Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen said she and her colleagues expect a "modest lift" to economic growth from the tax package.

Yellen said at a news conference the likelihood of lower taxes is why Fed officials expect the economy to grow at 2.5 percent in 2018. But growth would then slip back closer to its recent 2 percent average.

She said that any wage growth would likely stem from the low unemployment rate rather than the tax cuts.

Negotiators have removed several controversial provisions from the tax bill, including one that would have eliminated the deduction for interest on student loans and another deduction for medical expenses, said two congressional aides.

Also, the bill would no longer start taxing graduate-school tuition waivers, said the aides, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss private negotiations.

The tax bill would scale back the deduction for state and local taxes, allowing families to deduct only up to a total of \$10,000 in property and income taxes. The deduction is especially important to residents of high-tax states like New York, New Jersey and California.

Business owners who report business income on their personal tax returns would be able to deduct 20 percent of that income.

The bill would repeal the mandate that most Americans get health insurance, a provision of the 2010 health care law. Republicans suffered a humiliating defeat this past summer when they were unable to dismantle the health care law after seven years of promises. Scrapping the individual mandate would provide them with more than \$300 billion for deeper tax cuts while undermining the law.

Senate leaders plan to vote on the package Tuesday. If it passes, the House would vote next. GOP leaders hope to send the bill to Trump before Christmas.

"Let's not waver now — let's not give in to the Washington status quo — not when tax reform is so close," said Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas, chairman of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee.

The measure has come under assault by Democrats who say it is unfairly tilted in favor of business and the wealthy.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said the public doesn't know all the details of the bill, "but they smell what's going on and that is tax cuts for the wealthiest and no help for so many in the middle class."

Schumer predicted that the politically unpopular bill would drag down Republicans in next year's congressional elections. "I believe they'll pay a very steep price for this bill in 2018," he said.

The agreement was reached hours before a joint House-Senate conference committee met in public for the first time. The committee is charged with blending the tax bills passed by the House and Senate, though Republicans have done all of their negotiations behind closed doors.

Democrats have not been included in any substantive talks on the bill.

The full details will be unveiled by the end of the week, Brady said.

Once the plan is signed into law, workers could start seeing changes in the amount of taxes withheld

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from their paychecks early next year, lawmakers said — though taxpayers won't file their 2018 returns until the following year.

The IRS said in a statement Wednesday that taxpayers could begin seeing less money withheld from their paychecks "as early as February." The agency said it was taking initial steps to prepare withholding guidance for employers, which it expects to issue in January.

Corporate tax cuts would take effect in January, allowing businesses to immediately write off the full cost of capital investments.

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking and Ken Thomas contributed to this report.

Follow Stephen Ohlemacher on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/stephenatap>

Republicans criticize Mueller's probe, but want him to stay

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, TOM LOBIANCO and SADIE GURMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans ratcheted up criticism of special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russian meddling Wednesday, questioning whether there was bias on his team of lawyers but stopping short of calling for his firing or resignation.

The criticism directed toward Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein at a House Judiciary Committee hearing comes after the release of anti-Donald Trump text messages exchanged between two FBI officials later assigned to the Russia probe. While Republicans on Capitol Hill are unlikely to support Mueller's removal, some appear to be laying the groundwork for suggesting the results of the investigation will be unfairly partisan.

House members focused on the hundreds of text messages between an FBI counterintelligence agent and an FBI lawyer. Those messages, which occurred before Mueller was appointed in May to investigate potential coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign, show the officials using words like "idiot" and "loathsome human" to characterize Trump as he was running for president in 2016. One of the officials said in an election night text that the prospect of a Trump victory was "terrifying."

Republicans also focused on past donations to Democrats made by some members of Mueller's team. "How, with a straight face, can you say that this group of Democrat partisans are unbiased and will give President Trump a fair shake?" asked Republican Rep. Steve Chabot of Ohio.

Rosenstein defended Mueller. When asked by lawmakers if he had seen good cause to fire Mueller, whom he appointed and whose work he oversees, Rosenstein replied that he had not.

"The special counsel's investigation is not a witch hunt," Rosenstein said in response to questions about whether he agreed with Trump's characterization of the probe. "The independence and integrity of the investigation are not going to be affected by anything that anyone says."

Critics of the probe may win praise from Trump, who has been pressured by some allies to push back. But there is still little appetite on Capitol Hill to have Mueller removed.

South Carolina Republican Trey Gowdy, who is leading investigations into Democrat Hillary Clinton and leaks from the Russia probe, ticked through the text messages in prosecutorial style at Wednesday's hearing. But he also said he doesn't want Mueller removed.

"I think there are prosecutors he could have found that had not donated to major political candidates — I wish he had found them," Gowdy said. "But ultimately this comes down to facts, and I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt until otherwise necessary."

The sentiment is similar across the Capitol, where both Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley and Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr said in interviews Wednesday they continue to have confidence in Mueller. The two committees are leading their own investigations into Russian interference in the election.

Grassley has criticized the texts, called for another special counsel to investigate an Obama-era uranium deal and repeatedly expressed concerns about political interference at the FBI. Still, he said, "I have con-

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confidence in Mueller as far as what he is doing in the Trump-Russia investigation.”

Burr said the revelation of the texts is a good “inflection point” for Mueller to examine his team, but said he still has confidence in the former FBI director’s ability to do the job.

“I know what the standard is that Bob Mueller has to meet and that’s criminality,” Burr said. “It would concern me if that wasn’t the threshold for his investigation, but that’s what it is.”

Mueller’s team has already brought federal charges against four people, including former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and former national security adviser Michael Flynn. Flynn has pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI.

Peter Strzok, a veteran FBI counterintelligence agent, was removed from Mueller’s team over the summer following the discovery of the text messages exchanged with Lisa Page, an FBI lawyer who was also detailed to the group of agents and prosecutors investigating potential coordination between Russia and Trump’s Republican campaign.

“When we have evidence of any inappropriate conduct, we’re going to take action on it. That’s what Mr. Mueller did here. As soon as he learned about this issue, he took action,” Rosenstein said.

Hundreds of the messages, which surfaced in a Justice Department inspector general investigation of the FBI’s inquiry into Clinton’s use of a private email server, were being provided to congressional committees and were reviewed by The Associated Press on Tuesday night.

Republican Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, a member of the intelligence panel, said he believes the problems on Mueller’s team — such as the text messages — are an “anomaly” and said the “mass majority” of Republicans want to see him stay in place.

Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, said he doesn’t believe there is increased opposition to Mueller in Congress.

“I think there’s a campaign to try and undermine him, but I don’t see opposition,” he said.

Associated Press writer Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Bombing underscores New York subway system’s vulnerability

By COLLEEN LONG and LARRY NEUMEISTER, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The crude pipe bomb that exploded beneath the streets of New York this week served as a chilling reminder of the vulnerability of the city’s subway system, a 24-hour-a-day operation with 472 stations and more than 5 million daily riders.

While police say the nation’s largest subway system has some of the tightest security possible that still allows busy New Yorkers to get where they’re going, they acknowledge they can’t be everywhere or anticipate every kind of attack, particularly in this era of lone-wolf terrorism.

“It’s very difficult, and it’s getting harder,” John Miller, the New York Police Department’s deputy commissioner of intelligence and counterterrorism, said on CBS’s “This Morning.” “This is not the al-Qaida model, where a cell of people who are communicating with a base are an intelligence problem.”

Instead, he said, the threat is coming from people “where the conspiracy is within the confines of their own mind.”

Investigators say that appears to be what happened Monday, when a Bangladeshi immigrant indoctrinated into terrorism through internet videos strapped a bomb to his body and set it off in a busy passageway. He was the only one seriously hurt, suffering burns on his hands and torso.

Akayed Ullah, who’s 27, was charged with federal terrorism-related offenses punishable by up to life in prison and was informed of the charges via video Wednesday as he lay in his hospital bed. He did not enter a plea and said little during the hearing, which lasted a little over 10 minutes.

It was the second lone-wolf terror attack on the city in six weeks. On Oct. 31, a man in a rented truck mowed down cyclists and pedestrians on a crowded bike path near the World Trade Center, killing eight people.

But the blast this week was the first bombing on the subway in 23 years, a streak police attribute in

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part to a multilayered security approach that begins with 3,000 officers underground every day, patrolling trains and platforms.

That's bolstered by hundreds of security cameras, including one that captured detailed pictures of Monday's explosion, and roving teams of officers with heavy weapons and dogs to sweep subway stations and trains. Officers are outfitted with pager-size radiation detectors to guard against a radioactive dirty bomb. Police also conduct tens of thousands of random bag searches in the system each year.

Yet those officers are confronted daily with thousands of people of every background, from every corner of the globe, carrying big backpacks, suitcases and large boxes, with no easy way of knowing whether any of those items contain a bomb.

Police have to rely on riders as their eyes and ears, constantly reminding them, "If you see something, say something."

"Look up from your phones. Look up from your books now and then. Take your earphones out. You can't say something when you see something if you don't look at it," Joseph Fox, chief of the NYPD's transit bureau, urged New Yorkers after the attack.

But the see-something, say-something system didn't work Monday. Authorities said Ullah boarded a subway train deep in Brooklyn with a bomb strapped to his torso, spent nearly an hour riding into Manhattan, changing trains along the way, and walked through one of the most heavily patrolled subway stations before triggering the device in front of a security camera.

"We're considering spending millions (of dollars) to erect a border wall, maybe we should be thinking about using the money to better secure rail and transit lines," said James Norton, a former homeland security official and professor at Johns Hopkins University.

He suggested more screening of bags and passengers before people get on a train.

Police and politicians have repeatedly said that measures such as adding metal detectors and bag checks to all stations could bring the system to a crawl.

"You can't have a police person on every block at every moment — that would be impractical," Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, said in a TV interview this week. "But in terms of the sophistication of our security system, it's second to none on the planet."

Only about six crimes are reported per day in the sprawling subway system.

Associated Press writer Tom Hays contributed to this report.

Fed rate increase is 3rd this year; foresees 3 more in 2018

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve is raising its key interest rate for the third time this year and foresees three additional hikes in 2018, a vote of confidence that the U.S. economy remains on solid footing 8½ years after the end of the Great Recession.

The Fed said Wednesday that it's lifting its short-term rate by a modest quarter-point to a still-low range of 1.25 percent to 1.5 percent. It is also continuing to slowly shrink its bond portfolio. Together, the two steps could lead over time to higher loan rates for consumers and businesses and slightly better returns for savers.

The central bank said in a statement after its latest policy meeting that it expects the job market and the economy to strengthen further. Partly as a result, it expects to keep raising rates at the same incremental pace next year under the leadership of Jerome Powell, who will succeed Janet Yellen as Fed chair in February.

Chris Probyn, chief economist at State Street Global Advisors, said he was surprised that Fed officials upgraded their forecast for economic growth next year and lowered their forecast for unemployment yet signaled no additional rate hikes.

"They're saying, 'We're going to get more growth, we're going to get lower unemployment, but we're not going to respond to it with any more tightening,'" he said. "They are prepared to let the economy run

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a little hotter.”

Investors took Wednesday’s widely anticipated rate hike in stride, with the Dow Jones industrial average setting another record-high close.

Asked whether she was concerned that the Fed’s prolonged low rates might be fueling a stock bubble, Yellen said she thought the market’s gains had been supported by a sturdy U.S. and global economy. She said that if stock prices were to suddenly “adjust” downward, the economy and the financial system should be able to withstand it.

“When we look at other indicators of financial stability risks, there’s nothing flashing red there or possibly even orange,” Yellen said.

The Fed’s rate decision Wednesday was approved 7-2, with Charles Evans, president of the Fed’s Chicago regional bank, and Neel Kashkari, head of the Minneapolis Fed, voting no. Both preferred to keep the benchmark rate unchanged.

The central bank’s message Wednesday departed little from its recent statements. It still stresses that it expects to keep raising rates gradually. Its projections for future hikes, based on estimates of 16 officials, showed that the median expectation remains three rate hikes in 2018, at least two in 2019 and two more in 2020.

By then, the Fed’s target for short-term rates would have reached 3.1 percent — slightly above its estimate of a long-term neutral rate of 2.8 percent. That would mean the Fed would still be seeking to tighten credit three years from now.

At a news conference after the Fed’s meeting, Yellen said she would work to provide a smooth transition for Powell. Powell has been a Yellen ally who backed her cautious stance toward rate hikes in his five years on the Fed’s board. Yet no one knows for sure how his style of chairmanship or rate policy might depart from hers.

What’s more, Powell will be joined by several new Fed board members who, like him, are being chosen by President Donald Trump. Some analysts say they think that while Powell might not deviate much from Yellen’s rate policy, he and the new board members will adopt a looser approach to their regulation of the banking system.

On Wednesday, the Fed boosted its forecast for growth to 2.5 percent next year, up from a previous forecast of 2.1 percent. But it then foresees growth slowing to 2.1 percent in 2019 and 2 percent in 2020. Those rates are far below the 3 percent to 4 percent growth that the Trump administration insists would result from its economic policies of tax cuts, deregulation and stricter enforcement of trade laws against unfair foreign imports.

The Fed modified its forecast to take into account that unemployment has fallen lower this year than it had expected. For the next two years, the Fed projects that unemployment will decline from the current 4.1 percent to 3.9 percent in 2018 and 2019 and then tick up to 4 percent in 2020.

It also expects inflation to rise from 1.7 percent this year to 1.9 percent in 2018 and 2 percent in 2019. The Fed’s inflation target is 2 percent, But the rate has puzzlingly remained below that level for more than five years.

Even before Wednesday, most analysts had said they thought the still-strengthening U.S. economy would lead the Fed to raise rates three more times next year. A few, though, have held out the possibility that a Powell-led Fed will feel compelled to step up the pace of rate hikes as inflation finally picks up and the economy, perhaps sped by the proposed Republican tax cuts, begins accelerating.

At his Senate confirmation hearing last month, Powell impressed his listeners as an evenhanded moderate who favored the kind of incremental stance toward rate hikes that both Yellen and her predecessor, Ben Bernanke, embraced. A Senate committee approved Powell’s nomination and sent it to the full Senate, where his confirmation is considered certain.

Besides Powell, Trump has so far chosen two new members for the seven-member board. And he has the opening to nominate three more, including a Fed vice chair.

Trump has made clear that he favors low rates. But he has also expressed a desire to pull back on many of the regulations that were imposed on banks after the 2008 financial crisis. Trump and many Republicans

argue that those regulations are too burdensome, especially for smaller banks. Powell himself has sent some signals that he agrees.

AP Economics Writer Christopher Rugaber contributed to this report.

Elections chief: Automatic recount unlikely in Alabama race

By KIM CHANDLER, Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Still-uncounted ballots are unlikely to change the outcome of the U.S. Senate race in Alabama enough to spur an automatic recount, the state's election chief said Wednesday as Democratic victor Doug Jones urged Republican Roy Moore to concede.

Speaking during an afternoon news conference in Birmingham, Jones said a concession from Moore is the "right thing" to do, and that "it's time to heal."

But Moore hasn't budged after a stunning loss in a reliably GOP state.

"Realize, when the vote is this close, it is not over," he told supporters at his election-night party in Montgomery late Tuesday. Moore did not make any public statements or appearances Wednesday.

Jones is leading Moore by about 20,000 votes, or about 1.5 percent, with all precincts counted.

A 2003 Alabama law triggers an automatic recount when the winner's margin of victory is less than half of 1 percent. Jones' margin is currently about three times that threshold. To obtain an automatic recount, lingering ballots — such as those mailed in by military personnel — would first have to significantly reduce Jones' margin of victory, Secretary of State John Merrill said.

"It would be very unlikely for that to occur," Merrill said.

There are three types of votes yet to be counted that could somewhat alter the margin between Jones and Moore: the ballots from military personnel and other overseas voters; provisional ballots that have to be reviewed to ensure they are valid; and write-in votes. Write-in votes are counted only if they exceed the difference between the first- and second-place candidates, which in this case they do. There are approximately 22,000 write-in ballots.

The secretary of state will tell counties Monday whether write-in votes must be tabulated. On Tuesday, counties will count those, if necessary, along with the provisional ballots and overseas ballots.

The state canvassing board will declare whether an automatic recount is needed, when it meets sometime between Dec. 26 and Jan. 3. The recount would begin within 72 hours of that decision.

According to the nonpartisan elections group FairVote, statewide recounts are rare, and reversals even rarer. Statewide recounts between 2000 and 2015 resulted in an average margin swing of 282 votes between the front-runners, according to a report from the group.

At least one fellow Republican who knows what it's like to lose an election urged Moore to accept Jones' win.

"Roy Moore won't concede; says will wait on God to speak," former Arkansas Gov. and unsuccessful Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee tweeted. "God wasn't registered to vote in AL but the ppl who voted did speak and it wasn't close enough for recount. In elections everyone does NOT get a trophy. I know first hand but it's best to exit with class."

Alabama lawmakers passed the seldom-used recount law in 2003, following an election dispute between then-Gov. Don Siegelman and Republican challenger Bob Riley. The law also was invoked in 2004 when a proposal to delete unenforceable segregationist language from the state constitution narrowly failed.

Rock Hall 2018 class: Nina Simone, Bon Jovi, the Moody Blues

By MESFIN FEKADU, AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Iconic singer Nina Simone and New Jersey rockers Bon Jovi lead the 2018 class of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees, which includes four first-time nominees.

The Cars, as well as first-time contenders Dire Straits, The Moody Blues and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, also

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are part of the 2018 class announced Wednesday. They will be inducted on April 14, in Cleveland, Ohio. The six inductees were chosen from a group of 19 nominees, including Radiohead, who were expected to enter in the Rock Hall in their first year of eligibility, but didn't make it.

Tharpe, a pioneering guitarist who performed gospel music and was known to some as "the godmother of rock 'n' roll," will be inducted with the "Award for Early Influence." She died in 1973. The other five acts will be inducted as performers.

The jazzy and soulful Simone, also a first-time nominee, was a leader in pushing for civil rights and influenced the likes of Alicia Keys and Aretha Franklin before her death in 2003.

Bon Jovi, first nominated in 2011 and again this year, have sold more than 120 million albums and launched No. 1 hits with "Livin' on a Prayer," "You Give Love a Bad Name," "Bad Medicine" and "I'll Be There for You."

In an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday, Jon Bon Jovi said the news was "wonderful. It's rewarding. It's humbling."

"I didn't know how long things would last because I never envisioned 35 years later. I could have never dreamt of that," he added. "I'm happy for the whole band, my family and for me."

He will be inducted alongside current bandmates David Bryan and Tico Torres, as well as former members Richie Sambora and Alec John Such. Sambora left in 2013; Such left in 1994.

The frontman said he and the other current members haven't spoken to Sambora since he left the group four years ago, but said he invites the performer, along with Such, to be part of the Rock Hall festivities.

"(Sambora) had things he had to deal with and (he) didn't show up anymore. I respect that," Bon Jovi said. "He's absolutely invited and will be asked to participate in every aspect, including the performance, as will Alex Such ... and they'll be able to join the band, the current band, onstage. They'll be most welcomed."

In another interview Wednesday with the AP, Sambora said he accepts Bon Jovi's offer: "Sure, of course. There's a lot to have gratitude for. There's no malice. I have no malice toward anybody. There's none of that — that's for sure."

"I don't take one minute for granted. I wake up and I'm a happy dude," added Sambora, who will release a new EP on Friday under his duo with guitarist Orianthi called RSO. "This is one of those days where you go, 'Thank you.' It's nice to be recognized."

Rock Hall voters have recently opened their hearts to progressive rockers, which benefited "Nights in White Satin" singers The Moody Blues. English rockers Dire Straits, which includes brothers Mark and David Knopfler, blended blues into their music. And The Cars, founded in Boston in 1976, combined New Wave and classic rock sounds. This year marked the band's third nomination.

Each year, between five and seven acts usually make it into the Rock Hall following a vote by 1,000 people, including performers, music historians and industry experts. Fans also were able to vote on the Rock Hall's website. All of the inductees had to have released their first recording no later than 1992 to be eligible.

The 33rd annual Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony will be held at Public Auditorium. Tickets will go on sale in January and the event will later air on HBO and be heard on SiriusXM Radio.

Online:

<https://www.rockhall.com/>

Abbas says UN should replace US as Mideast mediator

By KARIN LAUB and ZEYNEP BILGINSOY, Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Breaking with years of courting the U.S., Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called Wednesday for the United Nations to replace Washington as a Mideast mediator and suggested he might not cooperate with the Trump administration's much-anticipated effort to hammer out an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

At a summit in Turkey, Arab and Muslim leaders "rejected and condemned" President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital — the trigger for Abbas' sharp policy pivot — but stopped short of backing his more combative approach toward Washington.

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A possible Palestinian refusal to engage with the U.S. and growing backlash against Trump's shift on Jerusalem, including from Arab allies, cast new doubt over the administration's already seemingly remote chances of brokering a deal and succeeding where its predecessors have failed.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said Wednesday the administration would continue to work on a Mideast plan that it believes will benefit Israelis and Palestinians. Referring to Abbas, she said that the "type of rhetoric that we heard has prevented peace in the past, and it's not necessarily surprising that those types of things would be said."

In shunning the U.S., Abbas would find himself in uncharted territory.

He does not have an immediate practical alternative to more than two decades of U.S.-led negotiations on the terms of Palestinian statehood. The Palestinians seek such a state on lands captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war — the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.

On the other hand, Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital was decried by Palestinians and others in the region as a provocative show of pro-Israel bias, making it difficult for Abbas to justify dealing with Washington as a mediator.

Trump's argument that his announcement does not mean an endorsement of specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem has not gained traction in the ensuing uproar.

The fate of Jerusalem is a hot-button issue in the region, and even the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Egypt — reportedly eager to help advance Trump's Mideast efforts — cannot afford to be seen as soft on the religious claims of Muslims and political claims of Palestinians to the contested city. Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem is home to Islam's third-holiest shrine, along with the most revered site in Judaism and a major Christian church.

Wednesday's extraordinary summit of the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation ended with a call on Trump to rescind an "unlawful decision that might trigger chaos in the region" and on the world to recognize east Jerusalem as the capital of a state of Palestine.

A concluding statement lacked tougher criticism of U.S. policy contained in an earlier draft, which questioned Washington's continued role as a Mideast mediator and warned that Trump's shift on Jerusalem threatened global security.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who hosted the summit, stuck to the harder line, saying at a news conference that it is "out of the question" for Washington to continue mediating between Israel and the Palestinians.

"That process is now over," he said.

Abbas' speech marked a high-profile break with what had been his unwavering policy in more than a decade as Palestinian leader.

Despite setbacks, he had considered a close relationship with the U.S. the centerpiece of his efforts to win Palestinian statehood through negotiations.

When Trump was elected a year ago, Abbas went out of his way not to criticize the new president, for fear of harming the relationship.

On Wednesday, he expressed a sense of betrayal.

"We were shocked by the U.S. administration," Abbas said. "While we engaged with them in the peace process for the sake of a deal for the ages, (Trump) delivered a slap for the ages."

Abbas said the United States has disqualified itself as a mediator. "We will no longer accept that it has a role in the political process," Abbas said.

The Palestinian leader said he remains committed to a two-state solution but that he would push for the U.N. to assume responsibility and "find a new mechanism" for resolving the conflict.

In another sign of a harder Palestinian stance, Abbas aides said earlier this week that he would not meet with Mike Pence when the U.S. vice president visits the region, starting this weekend.

Abbas was initially to have hosted Pence, a devout Christian, in the biblical West Bank town of Bethlehem, following the vice president's visit to Israel.

Trump's nod to Israel on Jerusalem came at a time of mounting speculation about the terms of an

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Israeli-Palestinian deal the U.S. might propose.

Palestinian officials have said they have not heard anything official from the U.S. team led by Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner or from the powerful Saudi crown prince who met Abbas last month.

Saudi Arabia did not participate in a high-level capacity in Wednesday's summit.

But in Riyadh, King Salman and his heir met Wednesday with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who also leads the United Arab Emirates' armed forces. A statement said they discussed "the serious repercussions of the negative decision of the U.S. to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel."

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to criticize Abbas' comments, though he did not directly refer to the Palestinian leader.

Netanyahu said in a speech Wednesday that Palestinians should "work for peace and not for extremism."

"All of these declarations do not impress us," Netanyahu said.

He said Israel is committed to protecting the freedom of worship for all religions in Jerusalem, but reaffirmed Israel's claims to the entire city.

Israel has considered Jerusalem its capital since the state's establishment in 1948 and sees the city as the ancient capital of the Jewish people

Israel captured east Jerusalem in 1967 and annexed it to its capital, a move not recognized by most of the international community. Over the past 50 years, Israel has cemented its control over the eastern sector, building large settlements there that are now home to more than 200,000 Israelis.

Despite efforts to ensure a large Jewish majority, the share of the Palestinian population in Jerusalem has grown — from 26 percent in 1967 to 37 percent today.

Laub reported from Jericho, West Bank. Associated Press writers Sarah El Deeb in Beirut, Josef Federman in Jerusalem, Aya Batrawy in Dubai, Ken Thomas and Josh Lederman in Washington and Mohammed Daraghmeh in Ramallah, West Bank, contributed to this report.

After big Senate loss, what's next for firebrand Roy Moore?

By JAY REEVES, Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Roy Moore has now lost more statewide races than he's won in Alabama, including a Senate contest that seemed within reach. So will the Republican former judge now abandon politics and ride off into the sunset?

Probably not. Instead, he's discussing a possible recount — a longshot at best — and depicting himself as a victim of false child molestation allegations.

A Christian conservative known for never giving an inch in politics, Moore has not conceded the tight race to Democratic opponent Doug Jones.

"Part of the problem with this campaign is we've been painted in an unfavorable and unfaithful light," Moore told supporters Tuesday night. "We've been put in a hole, if you will."

Assuming the results of the special election stand, Moore could run for governor in 2018. It would be his third gubernatorial bid, after failed runs in 2006 and 2010. He could also oppose Jones in 2020, when his shortened term ends. At 70, Moore is too old under state law to run for judicial office.

One other door is wide open. He could return to the Foundation for Moral Law, a private group that he founded and ran from 2003 until 2012. There, Moore traveled the nation speaking to supportive groups and submitted court briefs stating his conservative Christian beliefs in federal court cases.

No matter how he proceeds, battling beyond a bitter end would fit a pattern for Moore, who has a history of claiming any detractor is wrong.

During the campaign, he argued that the women who came forward to accuse him of sexual misconduct decades ago were lying.

Likewise, when a state judicial ethics court suspended him last year from his elected position as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, he said the court was incorrect to punish him for issuing a court

order against same-sex marriage.

So was the same court in 2003, when it removed him as chief justice for defying a federal court order to remove a Ten Commandments monument from the state judicial building, Moore said.

The Alabama GOP has effectively drawn a curtain on the Senate race, issuing a statement that said it would hold Jones accountable for his votes in Washington.

"Now that this race has ended, may this holiday season of peace, love and hope resonate with everyone, regardless of one's political affiliation," it said.

Moore, a Vietnam veteran and one-time kickboxer, wasn't ready to move on.

"It's not over, and it's going to take some time," he told supporters.

It's uncertain whether Moore has a realistic future in elective politics beyond 2017.

Many people couldn't bring themselves to vote for Moore following allegations he forced himself upon two young women and tried to date other teenage girls decades ago when he was in his 30s. Others were put off by the fact that Moore seems to have a hard time keeping a job.

"As a small business owner, I think it's important to show up for work and do your job and not get fired twice," said Curt Peinhardt, 34, who runs a tutoring business in Tuscaloosa.

Although Moore's evangelical base could not propel him to victory in the Senate race, his most fervent supporters are not abandoning him.

Before Moore brought up the idea of fighting on, a backer at his election party held aloft framed artwork of the Ten Commandments and waved it at reporters. Another walked about with the image of an American flag held high.

Supporters sang hymns before cheering Moore once again and going off into the night.

Associated Press photographer Mike Stewart and AP writer Kim Chandler contributed from Montgomery, Alabama.

Minnesota Lt. Gov. Tina Smith named to fill Franken seat

By KYLE POTTER, Associated Press.

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton appointed Lt. Gov. Tina Smith on Wednesday to fill fellow Democrat Al Franken's Senate seat until a special election in November, setting up his longtime and trusted adviser for a potentially bruising 2018 special election.

Smith was widely seen as Dayton's top choice from the moment Franken announced his resignation last week. But her previous decision not to run for governor had raised questions about her appetite for a closely watched and expensive Senate campaign.

Smith said she is in and fully committed.

"I can tell you I shouldn't be underestimated and if I weren't confident I wouldn't be doing this," she said.

It's not clear when Smith will head to Washington. Franken, who resigned under pressure from his own party after he was accused of improper behavior by at least eight women, announced last Thursday that he would resign "in the coming weeks." His office hasn't set a final departure date yet; Smith indicated it would likely be in early January.

In a statement, Franken called his successor the perfect choice but didn't shed light on his formal resignation plans, saying only that he would work with Smith to ensure "a speedy and seamless transition."

Smith will be the second Democrat on a path to the Senate in as many days, after Doug Jones' victory in Alabama in Tuesday's special election.

Smith, 59, served as Dayton's chief of staff for four years before ascending to become his No. 2 when his previous lieutenant chose not to join him in seeking a second term in 2014. Dayton has long treated Smith as an equal in the office, and it was that deference that fueled speculation she was being groomed to succeed him.

Her path to politics was unconventional. A native of New Mexico, she graduated from Stanford and earned an MBA from Dartmouth. A marketing job with General Mills brought her to Minnesota, where she

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eventually started her own marketing and political consulting firm.

She managed Ted Mondale's unsuccessful campaign for governor in 1998, then ran the short-lived 2002 Senate campaign for his dad, former Vice President Walter Mondale. Smith served as chief of staff to Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak before eventually taking the same job with Dayton in 2011.

Smith, a soft-spoken, smiling presence at the Capitol, is credited with quiet but key roles in the response to the 2007 bridge collapse in Minneapolis and in the building of a new Vikings stadium. Dayton made her his point person on a massive public-private partnership to work with Mayo Clinic on an ambitious expansion in Rochester.

Next year's race to fill the final two years of Franken's term is certain to be one of the nation's most closely watched and expensive, and Dayton was under pressure from fellow Democrats in Washington to ensure his pick would use the appointment as a springboard for that election.

Meanwhile, Republicans immediately floated former two-term Gov. Tim Pawlenty as a possible candidate, but many others were said to be weighing a race.

Republicans said Dayton's selection of Smith for the seat could upset voters.

"Minnesota voters deserve a senator who will look out for their best interests, not another DFL (Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party) insider handpicked by Mark Dayton," National Republican Senatorial Committee spokesman Michael McAdams said in a written statement.

And Smith's past work with Planned Parenthood in Minnesota and other Midwestern states, which provides abortions along with other health services, was sure to become a flash point with Republicans on the campaign trail.

Smith, who served as vice president of external affairs, said Planned Parenthood provides critical health care and sexual transmitted disease treatment to "thousands and thousands and thousands of women."

"I'm proud of that work," Smith said.

The Associated Press names SZA's 'Ctrl' album of the year

By MESFIN FEKADU, AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The top 10 albums of the year by Associated Press Music Editor Mesfin Fekadu.

1. SZA, "Ctrl": As the beat of the opening track of SZA's debut album played at a concert this week in New York City, the entire venue passionately sang the first two minutes of the song "Supermodel," and the singer hadn't even showed her face onstage. And that's just it — SZA is the voice of this generation. The 28-year-old's "Ctrl" is a masterpiece about a girl navigating in life — dating, falling in love, dealing with dusty boys, self-doubt, acceptance and more. Her voice glides over each song nicely as she spits matter-of-fact lyrics and even finds ways to reference the TV shows "Martin" and "Narcos," as well as "Forrest Gump," in the songs. "The Weekend" is her at the top of the game; "Broken Clocks" is just as addictive; and "Normal Girl" and "20 Something" prove that SZA is not one of those alternative R&B artists with one or two tricks up her sleeve.

2. Kendrick Lamar, "DAMN.": To put out one epic album is impressive. Two? It's remarkable. BUT THREE? It's astonishing. There has not been a more consistent act in music in the last few years like Kendrick Lamar. Icon status is "DAMN." closer than we might think.

3. Daniel Caesar, "Freudian": Listening to Daniel Caesar's debut album will make you want to fall in love. The Canadian newcomer brilliantly sings R&B songs that echo D'Angelo and hit straight to the heart. "Freudian" is a beautiful work of art.

4. Jay-Z, "4:44": So, this SUPERSTAR with a super private wife and uber private life uncovered his most intimate thoughts and life moments — and people were moved by what he revealed. It wasn't just for the stuff that went on to dominate blogs and entertainment headlines. No, it was Jay's vulnerability, proving that honesty is what keeps artists relevant, long after they've transitioned from being the new hot thing.

5. Taylor Swift, "reputation": Don't be a hater — you know Taylor Swift knows how to craft perfect pop music. "Reputation" is exceptional, especially the songs "End Game," "Delicate" and "Dress," perfectly showing how Tay Tay continues to grow as an artist.

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6. Sam Smith, "The Thrill of It All": Sam Smith's "Thrill" is a ride you don't want to get off.
7. St. Vincent, "MASSEDUCTIO": St. Vincent's fifth album, full of electro pop, glam rock and techno sounds, is an adventurous album that deserves to be heard by the masses. Even when she slows things down — like on "New York" and the excellent "Happy Birthday, Johnny" — she's just as alluring.
8. Miguel, "War & Leisure": "I'm Luke Skywalker on these haters," a confident Miguel sings on "Sky Walker," the first single from his fourth album. And he's right — he's barely got competition when it comes to music. "War & Leisure" is just another grand album in his catalog.
9. H.E.R., "H.E.R.": Gabi Wilson, under her stage name H.E.R., shines brightly on her full-length debut album, with songs like "Focus," "U" and "Losing" showing that, like SZA, H.E.R. is also a groundbreaker in the alternative R&B movement.
10. Haim, "Something to Tell You": Who doesn't want to be part of the sister trio Haim? The rockers, who proved how outstanding they were on their 2013 debut album and at live concerts, keeps up the momentum on their sophomore release, "Something to Tell You," highlighted by Haim's harmonies.

Gillibrand got a fight she wants after Trump's fiery tweet

By RICHARD LARDNER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand got a fight she wants after President Donald Trump lashed out at the New York Democrat in a provocative tweet that claimed she'd begged him for campaign contributions and would "do anything" for them.

Gillibrand, who's up for re-election next year and is considered a possible presidential contender in 2020, has been an outspoken voice in the national debate over how to confront sexual assault and harassment. She's argued that the rules in institutions from Congress to Hollywood to the U.S. military are set to benefit the powerful and the favored at the expense of the vulnerable.

Gillibrand and a chorus of Democrats declared Trump's tweet to be sexually suggestive, an assertion the White House flatly rejected. Appearing Wednesday on NBC's "Today" show, Gillibrand was asked whether she'd misread the meaning of Trump's tweet. "No," she responded.

She said the tweet was "a sexual smear intended to silence me."

The fiery exchange with Trump could brighten the spotlight on Gillibrand's campaign to upend the dynamics and put power in the hands of the victims while simultaneously pushing the 51-year-old mother of two boys to the forefront of an unformed Democratic presidential field.

She's scathed icons in her own party along the way. Gillibrand was appointed to Hillary Clinton's Senate seat, but she recently said Bill Clinton should have resigned the presidency for his improprieties. That led Clinton loyalists to criticize her as an ungrateful opportunist.

The back-and-forth between Trump and Gillibrand on Tuesday came as a wave of sexual misconduct allegations roils Capitol Hill, forcing several lawmakers out of office in just the last week alone. Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., said he would resign amid an ethics probe into accusations that he sexually harassed several women. Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Trent Franks, R-Ariz., also quit after misconduct accusations surfaced.

"I do think this is a reckoning. This is a watershed moment," Gillibrand said of the resignations in speaking to The Associated Press late last week. "Politicians should be held to the highest standards, not the lowest standards."

And she rejected the notion that she and other Democrats, by demanding Franken and Conyers step aside, are making a calculation they hope will pay off politically as Trump continues to fend off allegations of sexual misconduct lodged over the last year by more than a dozen women.

"That couldn't be more cynical and backward," said Gillibrand, who was one of the first Democrats to call for Franken to step down. "It has nothing to do with politics. This whole debate is, 'Do we care about women.'"

Gillibrand served notice several years ago that combating sexual assault would be her issue. A member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, she and other female lawmakers dressed down senior military

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leaders at a headline-making hearing, insisting sexual assault in the ranks has cost the services the trust and respect of the American people as well as the nation's men and women in uniform.

"Not every single commander necessarily wants women in the force. Not every single commander believes what a sexual assault is. Not every single commander can distinguish between a slap on the ass and a rape because they merge all of these crimes together," Gillibrand told the uniformed men in 2013.

Four years later, Gillibrand added her voice to the growing number of male senators calling for Trump to resign in the face of multiple accusations of inappropriate sexual behavior. A day after her broadside, Trump singled her out.

The president tweeted: "Lightweight Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a total flunky for Chuck Schumer and someone who would come to my office "begging" for campaign contributions not so long ago (and would do anything for them), is now in the ring fighting against Trump. Very disloyal to Bill & Crooked-USED!"

Gillibrand was at a bipartisan Bible study in the office of Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., when she stepped out to take a call alerting her to Trump's tweet. She fired back, calling the president's tweet a "sexist smear" aimed at silencing her voice. She also renewed her call for a congressional inquiry into the accusations against Trump.

Gillibrand silently shook her head at the idea that she had "begged" Trump for campaign contributions. Democrats rushed to Gillibrand's defense.

"Are you really trying to bully, intimidate and slut-shame @SenGillibrand?" Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts tweeted back at Trump. "Do you know who you're picking a fight with? Good luck with that."

Senate Republicans steered clear of the latest uproar involving Trump's Twitter account. Sen. Jeff Flake of Arizona, a frequent Trump critic, was an exception, telling reporters he "didn't think it was appropriate at all."

At the White House, however, Trump's spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said "there's no way" the president's tweet was "sexist at all." She said Trump was talking about a rigged political system and the fact that lawmakers repeatedly plead for money. Federal Election Commission records show Trump and his daughter Ivanka Trump donated nearly \$8,000 to Gillibrand's congressional campaigns.

Gillibrand, of Dartmouth and UCLA law, has fought since 2013 to overhaul the way the U.S. armed forces deals with allegations of sexual misconduct. A bill she crafted aims to stop sexual assaults by stripping senior U.S. military officers of their responsibilities to decide whether to prosecute sexual assault cases and giving that authority to seasoned military trial lawyers.

But the Pentagon has stridently opposed the change and the bill has remained stalled.

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

Russian nuclear plant says it emits leaked nuclear isotope

MOSCOW (AP) — A senior executive at the Russian nuclear processing plant suspected of being behind a spike of radioactivity over Europe this fall admitted Wednesday that the isotope recorded does emerge as part of the plant's production cycle but said its levels are negligible.

Russian officials last month reported high levels of Ruthenium-106 in areas close to the Mayak nuclear plant in the Ural Mountains.

The environmental group Greenpeace alleged that Mayak could have been the source of a Ruthenium-106 leak, but the plant said it has not extracted the isotope or conducted any other operations that may lead to its release "for many years."

But Yuri Mokrov, adviser to Mayak's director general, said in a webcast press conference Wednesday that Ruthenium-106 routinely emerges during the processing of spent nuclear fuel. Mokrov insisted, however, the plant was not the source of any major leak, saying it does not produce the isotope on purpose and that the emissions that the plant makes are so insignificant "we can only see it in the chimney."

A Russian panel of experts dispatched to investigate the leak has failed to identify where the isotope came from, but alleged that it could have come from a satellite that came down from its orbit and disintegrated

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in the atmosphere. The commission said last week that a thorough inspection of the Mayak plant and its personnel had found no safety breaches.

"There is Ruthenium in spent nuclear fuel, and Mayak during its activities routinely comes across this isotope," Mokrov said, adding that "actual emissions are hundreds times lower the permitted levels."

Mayak, in Russia's Chelyabinsk region, saw one of the world's worst nuclear accidents on Sept. 29, 1957, when a waste tank exploded. That contaminated 23,000 square kilometers (9,200 square miles) of territory and prompted authorities to evacuate 10,000 residents from neighboring regions.

EU Parliament votes against banning key kebab additive

By RAF CASERT, Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Parliament on Wednesday narrowly defeated plans to ban an additive that is considered key in industrial meats for the popular doner kebab.

Needing an absolute majority of at least 376 votes for a ban on phosphates, the legislature fell 3 votes short. The vote was 373-272 with 30 abstentions.

The decision had been hotly awaited by the doner kebab industry, which says it needs the phosphates to keep the frozen meat juicy, tender and tasty for consumption. Others argued that the phosphates were a health risk for cardiovascular diseases.

"We saved your kebab. You're welcome," said the Christian Democrat EPP group, which argued for keeping the phosphates in since it claims there is no proof of negative health effects.

The Socialists and Greens led the arguments for the ban on health grounds.

"This is sad day for consumer rights, which have been trampled on," said Greens EU legislator Bart Staes.

The vote had been portrayed by some as a battle to save the kebab from EU encroachment. Still, even if phosphates had been banned, the industry would have been only forced to look for alternatives, not forced to stop producing a fast food that is as popular in some European cities as the hamburger is in the United States.

A study by the European Food Safety Agency next year could reignite the whole debate, however.

Las Vegas' struggles of the past decade are all too visible

By The Associated Press

Even as a handful of major U.S. cities around the country have flourished in the 10 years since the Great Recession officially began in December 2007, other large cities have eked out only modest recoveries. Some are still straining to shed the scars of recession.

Las Vegas is one of them. Families in that metro area still earn nearly 20 percent less, adjusted for inflation, than they did in 2007.

In parts of the Las Vegas area, the struggles are all too visible. Half-finished housing developments, relics of the housing boom that preceded the recession, pockmark the surrounding desert. They symbolize the belief in endless economic possibility that seized the Las Vegas area in the early 2000's — and its unraveling in the years that followed.

As Bitcoin, other currencies soar, regulators urge caution

By KEN SWEET, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The public's interest in all things bitcoin and efforts by entrepreneurs to fund their businesses with digital currencies is starting to draw more attention from regulators.

The head of the Securities and Exchange Commission this week warned investors on the risks of investing in largely-unregulated digital currencies.

Just this month, the SEC halted two attempts to raise money through what's known as an initial coin offering. Legal experts believe this signals that a crackdown on sketchy offerings is coming.

"The SEC has given so many warnings now that people should know they are on notice," said Joshua

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Klayman, a lawyer with the firm Morrison & Foerster who specializes in legal issues related to digital currencies.

The world of bitcoin and digital currencies can be split into large branches. There are investors who buy the currencies like bitcoin and ethereum. Related but separate from the currencies is an event known as an initial coin offering, or ICO, which allow startups to use the technology behind bitcoin, known as blockchain, to fund projects.

With an ICO, a startup will issue a currency, or sometimes called a token, that can be used to buy services with the company. For example, a startup offering online storage could have tokens that can be used to buy storage.

ICOs have soared in interest this year. CoinSchedule, which tracks the ICO market, says 234 ICOs this year have raised \$3.7 billion for startups. In 2016, 46 ICOs raised less than \$100 million.

How these tokens are marketed has become a central question for the SEC. Companies issuing tokens that are usable on their own platform right now aren't a concern, but when the company's marketing implies that these tokens can appreciate in value, that becomes a red flag.

"We have gotten to a point a few times where some of these tokens start looking an awful lot like securities," said Clyde Tinnen, a partner at Withers Bergman.

Investors in ICOs are oftentimes early investors in bitcoin or other digital currencies who, with the rapid rise in price, have become multimillionaires on paper and are now looking for the next hot idea. But some of the ICOs that have been funded are just that — an idea on paper. They might even use language copied and pasted from other ICOs to sell their startup to investors. Others have paid celebrities, like boxing legend Floyd Mayweather and socialite Paris Hilton, to endorse their ICOs. All this has raised concerns about the potential success of these projects and whether some are just outright scams.

"I am not sure why it took so long to chase down some of these," Tinnen said.

The SEC recently created a division to more closely monitor ICOs for potential scams. The unit brought its first charges last week against a Canadian company known as PlexCorps, which was trying to raise \$15 million in an ICO promising its investors "a 1,354 percent profit in less than 29 days." Two individuals were charged in the scam.

Just this week, a food review startup called Munchee was forced to withdraw from its \$15 million ICO after the SEC raised concerns that Munchee emphasized that investors should expect some sort of return for their investment. By doing so, a company would be offering securities, not tokens, the regulator said. The SEC's cyber unit also was involved in that investigation. Munchee admitted no wrongdoing as part of the settlement.

What made the Munchee case notable, Klayman said, was how quickly the SEC stepped in. Some ICOs have raised money in hours, or only a couple days. Munchee started selling tokens on October 31, and the SEC stepped in the next day.

"The SEC was basically monitoring the Munchee offering in real time - through social media, YouTube, etc. - and stopped it," Klayman said.

Following the launch of bitcoin futures on the Cboe Futures Exchange this week, SEC Commissioner Jay Clayton issued a statement warning investors to be cautious about putting any money into digital currencies like bitcoin.

As for those celebrity-endorsed ICOs, the SEC also put a stop to that, warning that these paid celebrities might be violating U.S. securities laws.

One reason regulators are concerned is the relative popularity of bitcoin and ICOs with non-traditional investors. Historically, the last group to jump into an asset in a bubble is retail investors, who are often the most hurt when the bubble pops. But in the case of bitcoin and other digital currencies, retail investors were among the first to invest.

"A number of concerns have been raised regarding the cryptocurrency and ICO markets, including that, as they are currently operating, there is substantially less investor protection than in our traditional securities markets, with correspondingly greater opportunities for fraud and manipulation," Clayton said.

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The price of bitcoin has soared this year, going from less than \$1,000 to \$18,000. Bitcoin's gains have rippled through other digital currencies as well. The price for ethereum is now at \$706 — it was a little over \$8 at the beginning of the year. That's a rise of nearly 8,300 percent.

The Walt Disney Company to Acquire Twenty-First Century Fox, Inc., after Spinoff of Certain Businesses, for \$52.4 Billion in Stock

BURBANK, Calif. & NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec 14, 2017--The Walt Disney Company (NYSE: DIS) and Twenty-First Century Fox, Inc. ("21st Century Fox" —NASDAQ: FOXA, FOX) today announced that they have entered into a definitive agreement for Disney to acquire 21st Century Fox, including the Twentieth Century Fox Film and Television studios, along with cable and international TV businesses, for approximately \$52.4 billion in stock (subject to adjustment). Building on Disney's commitment to deliver the highest quality branded entertainment, the acquisition of these complementary assets would allow Disney to create more appealing content, build more direct relationships with consumers around the world and deliver a more compelling entertainment experience to consumers wherever and however they choose. Immediately prior to the acquisition, 21st Century Fox will separate the Fox Broadcasting network and stations, Fox News Channel, Fox Business Network, FS1, FS2 and Big Ten Network into a newly listed company that will be spun off to its shareholders.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20171214005650/en/>

Under the terms of the agreement, shareholders of 21st Century Fox will receive 0.2745 Disney shares for each 21st Century Fox share they hold (subject to adjustment for certain tax liabilities as described below). The exchange ratio was set based on a 30-day volume weighted average price of Disney stock. Disney will also assume approximately \$13.7 billion of net debt of 21st Century Fox. The acquisition price implies a total equity value of approximately \$52.4 billion and a total transaction value of approximately \$66.1 billion (in each case based on the stated exchange ratio assuming no adjustment) for the business to be acquired by Disney, which includes consolidated assets along with a number of equity investments.

Popular Entertainment Properties to Join Disney Family

Combining with Disney are 21st Century Fox's critically acclaimed film production businesses, including Twentieth Century Fox, Fox Searchlight Pictures and Fox 2000, which together offer diverse and compelling storytelling businesses and are the homes of Avatar, X-Men, Fantastic Four and Deadpool, as well as The Grand Budapest Hotel, Hidden Figures, Gone Girl, The Shape of Water and The Martian— and its storied television creative units, Twentieth Century Fox Television, FX Productions and Fox21, which have brought The Americans, This Is Us, Modern Family, The Simpsons and so many more hit TV series to viewers across the globe. Disney will also acquire FX Networks, National Geographic Partners, Fox Sports Regional Networks, Fox Networks Group International, Star India and Fox's interests in Hulu, Sky plc, Tata Sky and Endemol Shine Group.

"The acquisition of this stellar collection of businesses from 21st Century Fox reflects the increasing consumer demand for a rich diversity of entertainment experiences that are more compelling, accessible and convenient than ever before," said Robert A. Iger, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The Walt Disney Company. "We're honored and grateful that Rupert Murdoch has entrusted us with the future of businesses he spent a lifetime building, and we're excited about this extraordinary opportunity to significantly increase our portfolio of well-loved franchises and branded content to greatly enhance our growing direct-to-consumer offerings. The deal will also substantially expand our international reach, allowing us to offer world-class storytelling and innovative distribution platforms to more consumers in key markets around the world."

"We are extremely proud of all that we have built at 21st Century Fox, and I firmly believe that this combination with Disney will unlock even more value for shareholders as the new Disney continues to set the pace in what is an exciting and dynamic industry," said Rupert Murdoch, Executive Chairman of 21st Century Fox. "Furthermore, I'm convinced that this combination, under Bob Iger's leadership, will be one

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of the greatest companies in the world. I'm grateful and encouraged that Bob has agreed to stay on, and is committed to succeeding with a combined team that is second to none."

At the request of both 21st Century Fox and the Disney Board of Directors, Mr. Iger has agreed to continue as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of The Walt Disney Company through the end of calendar year 2021.

"When considering this strategic acquisition, it was important to the Board that Bob remain as Chairman and CEO through 2021 to provide the vision and proven leadership required to successfully complete and integrate such a massive, complex undertaking," said Orin C. Smith, Lead Independent Director of the Disney Board. "We share the belief of our counterparts at 21st Century Fox that extending his tenure is in the best interests of our company and our shareholders, and will be critical to Disney's ability to effectively drive long-term value from this extraordinary acquisition."

Benefits to Consumers

The acquisition will enable Disney to accelerate its use of innovative technologies, including its BAMTECH platform, to create more ways for its storytellers to entertain and connect directly with audiences while providing more choices for how they consume content. The complementary offerings of each company enhance Disney's development of films, television programming and related products to provide consumers with a more enjoyable and immersive entertainment experience.

Bringing on board 21st Century Fox's entertainment content and capabilities, along with its broad international footprint and a world-class team of managers and storytellers, will allow Disney to further its efforts to provide a more compelling entertainment experience through its direct-to-consumer (DTC) offerings. This transaction will enable Disney's recently announced Disney and ESPN-branded DTC offerings, as well as Hulu, to create more appealing and engaging experiences, delivering content, entertainment and sports to consumers around the world wherever and however they want to enjoy it.

The agreement also provides Disney with the opportunity to reunite the X-Men, Fantastic Four and Deadpool with the Marvel family under one roof and create richer, more complex worlds of inter-related characters and stories that audiences have shown they love. The addition of Avatar to its family of films also promises expanded opportunities for consumers to watch and experience storytelling within these extraordinary fantasy worlds. Already, guests at Disney's Animal Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World Resort can experience the magic of Pandora—The World of Avatar, a new land inspired by the Fox film franchise that opened earlier this year. And through the incredible storytelling of National Geographic—whose mission is to explore and protect our planet and inspire new generations through education initiatives and resources—Disney will be able to offer more ways than ever before to bring kids and families the world and all that is in it.

Enhancing Disney's Worldwide Offerings

Adding 21st Century Fox's premier international properties enhances Disney's position as a truly global entertainment company with authentic local production and consumer services across high-growth regions, including a richer array of local, national and global sporting events that ESPN can make available to fans around the world. The transaction boosts Disney's international revenue mix and exposure.

Disney's international reach would greatly expand through the addition of Sky, which serves nearly 23 million households in the UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria and Italy; Fox Networks International, with more than 350 channels in 170 countries; and Star India, which operates 69 channels reaching 720 million viewers a month across India and more than 100 other countries.

Prior to the close of the transaction, it is anticipated that 21st Century Fox will seek to complete its planned acquisition of the 61% of Sky it doesn't already own. Sky is one of Europe's most successful pay television and creative enterprises with innovative and high-quality direct-to-consumer platforms, resonant brands and a strong and respected leadership team. 21st Century Fox remains fully committed to completing the current Sky offer and anticipates that, subject to the necessary regulatory consents, the transaction will close by June 30, 2018. Assuming 21st Century Fox completes its acquisition of Sky prior to closing of the transaction, The Walt Disney Company would assume full ownership of Sky, including the assumption of its outstanding debt, upon closing.

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Transaction Highlights

The acquisition is expected to yield at least \$2 billion in cost savings from efficiencies realized through the combination of businesses, and to be accretive to earnings before the impact of purchase accounting for the second fiscal year after the close of the transaction.

Terms of the transaction call for Disney to issue approximately 515 million new shares to 21st Century Fox shareholders, representing approximately a 25% stake in Disney on a pro forma basis. The per share consideration is subject to adjustment for certain tax liabilities arising from the spinoff and other transactions related to the acquisition. The initial exchange ratio of 0.2745 Disney shares for each 21st Century Fox share was set based on an estimate of such tax liabilities to be covered by an \$8.5 billion cash dividend to 21st Century Fox from the company to be spun off. The exchange ratio will be adjusted immediately prior to closing of the acquisition based on an updated estimate of such tax liabilities. Such adjustment could increase or decrease the exchange ratio, depending upon whether the final estimate is lower or higher, respectively, than the initial estimate. However, if the final estimate of the tax liabilities is lower than the initial estimate, the first \$2 billion of that adjustment will instead be made by net reduction in the amount of the cash dividend to 21st Century Fox from the company to be spun off. The amount of such tax liabilities will depend upon several factors, including tax rates in effect at the time of closing as well as the value of the company to be spun off.

The Boards of Directors of Disney and 21st Century Fox have approved the transaction, which is subject to shareholder approval by 21st Century Fox and Disney shareholders, clearance under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvements Act, a number of other non-United States merger and other regulatory reviews, and other customary closing conditions.

Investor Conference Calls

Disney will conduct an investor conference call at approximately 8:00 a.m. EST / 5:00 a.m. PST today, Thursday, December 14, 2017. To listen to the live webcast, please visit www.disney.com/investors. The webcast presentation will be archived.

21st Century Fox senior executives will host a conference call at approximately 9:00 a.m. EST / 6:00 a.m. PST today, Thursday December 14, 2017, to discuss the creation of "New Fox" and the Disney transaction. The conference call will be webcast on 21st Century Fox's investor relations website at www.21cf.com/investor-relations.

Disney will also hold a previously scheduled investor meeting with Disney management at approximately 5:00 p.m. EST / 2:00 p.m. PST today, Thursday, December 14, 2017, which will be webcast at www.disney.com/investors. The webcast presentation will be archived.

Asian shares mixed as Fed hike gives investors few surprises

By **KELVIN CHAN, AP Business Writer**

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian stocks were mixed on Thursday after the Fed raised rates again, meeting investor expectations but providing few surprises.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 index dipped 0.2 percent to 22,721.21 while South Korea's Kospi climbed 0.8 percent to 2,500.12. Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.1 percent to 28,258.05 but the Shanghai Composite in mainland China lost 0.2 percent to 3,297.78. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 inched up 0.2 percent to 6,032.00.

FED RAISES: In a widely expected move, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark rate for the third time this year, by increasing its short-term rate by a quarter point. Policymakers at the U.S. central bank said they plan to continue tightening and indicated that three more rate hikes are in store for 2018. The Fed also raised its growth forecast for the U.S. economy, the world's biggest, and predicted that the job market will continue improving. The dollar and U.S. Treasury yields fell on the news.

THE QUOTE: "Last night's market action suggests that currency and bond markets had built some risk premium into pricing for the Fed decision," said Ric Spooner, chief analyst at CMC Markets. "Stock markets, on the other hand, were already priced for a Goldilocks outcome."

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CHINA RATE HIKE: China's central bank reacted to the Fed's interest rate increase by nudging up its own rate for lending to commercial banks. It left rates for borrowing by companies and the public unchanged. The People's Bank of China said it was responding to market forces by raising the rate charged on its one-year lending facility by a relatively small margin of 0.05 percentage points.

HONG KONG HIKE: The de facto central bank in Hong Kong copied the Fed's hike with its own rate rise. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority said it was raising its base rate by a quarter point, "with immediate effect." Because the Chinese financial hub's currency is pegged to the U.S. dollar, it has no choice but to track U.S. monetary policy.

WALL STREET: Major U.S. stock indexes finished mostly higher. The S&P 500 index slipped 0.1 percent to 2,662.85 after closing at all-time highs earlier in the week. The Dow Jones industrial average gained 0.3 percent to 24,585.43 and the Nasdaq added 0.2 percent to 6,875.80.

CURRENCIES: The dollar rose to 112.61 Japanese yen from 112.54 yen late Tuesday. The euro rose to \$1.1837 from \$1.1826.

ENERGY: Oil futures rebounded. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 15 cents to \$56.75 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract fell 54 cents to settle at \$56.60 per barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, added 35 cents to \$62.79 per barrel in London.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 14, the 348th day of 2017. There are 17 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 14, 2012, a gunman with a semi-automatic rifle killed 20 first-graders and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, then committed suicide as police arrived; the 20-year-old had also fatally shot his mother at their home before carrying out the attack on the school.

On this date:

In 1799, the first president of the United States, George Washington, died at his Mount Vernon, Virginia, home at age 67.

In 1819, Alabama joined the Union as the 22nd state.

In 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (ROH'-ahl AH'-mun-suhn) and his team became the first men to reach the South Pole, beating out a British expedition led by Robert F. Scott.

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson vetoed an immigration measure aimed at preventing "undesirables" and anyone born in the "Asiatic Barred Zone" from entering the U.S. (Congress overrode Wilson's veto in Feb. 1917.)

In 1918, "Il Trittico," a trio of one-act operas by Giacomo Puccini, premiered at New York's Metropolitan Opera House. (The third opera, "Gianni Schicchi (SKEE'-kee)," featured the aria "O Mio Babbino Caro," which was an instant hit.)

In 1936, the comedy "You Can't Take It With You" by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart opened on Broadway.

In 1946, the United Nations General Assembly voted to establish the U.N.'s headquarters in New York.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States, ruled that Congress was within its authority to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against racial discrimination by private businesses (in this case, a motel that refused to cater to blacks).

In 1972, Apollo 17 astronauts Harrison Schmitt and Eugene Cernan concluded their third and final moonwalk and blasted off for their rendezvous with the command module.

In 1981, Israel annexed the Golan Heights, which it had seized from Syria in 1967.

In 1986, the experimental aircraft Voyager, piloted by Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager, took off from Edwards Air Force Base in California on the first non-stop, non-refueled flight around the world.

In 1996, a freighter lost power on the Mississippi River and barreled into the Riverwalk complex in New

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Orleans; miraculously, no one was killed.

Ten years ago: A man accused of being the Phoenix Baseline Killer was sentenced to 438 years in prison for the sexual assaults of two sisters. (Mark Goudeau was tried in 2011 for the slayings of eight women and a man in 2005-2006; he was convicted and sentenced to death.)

Five years ago: A triumphant North Korea staged a mass rally of soldiers and civilians to glorify the country's young ruler, Kim Jong Un, two days after the successful launch of a satellite into orbit.

One year ago: President-elect Donald Trump convened a summit at Trump Tower for nearly a dozen tech leaders whose industry largely supported Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton; the CEOs included Apple's Tim Cook, Google's Eric Schmidt, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Tesla's Elon Musk. Donald Trump announced his selection of former campaign rival Rick Perry to be secretary of energy. Yahoo said it believed hackers had stolen data from more than one billion user accounts in Aug. 2013 (in Oct. 2017, Yahoo raised that figure to 3 billion). Bernard Fox, the mustachioed actor known to TV viewers as Dr. Bombay on "Bewitched" and Col. Crittendon on "Hogan's Heroes," died at a Los Angeles-area hospital at age 89.

Today's Birthdays: Singer-actress Abbe Lane is 86. Actor Hal Williams is 83. Actress-singer Jane Birkin is 71. Pop singer Joyce Vincent-Wilson (Tony Orlando and Dawn) is 71. Entertainment executive Michael Ovitz is 71. Actress Dee Wallace is 69. Rhythm-and-blues singer Ronnie McNeir (The Four Tops) is 68. Rock musician Cliff Williams is 68. Actor-comedian T.K. Carter is 61. Rock singer-musician Mike Scott (The Waterboys) is 59. Singer-musician Peter "Spider" Stacy (The Pogues) is 59. Actress Cynthia Gibb is 54. Actress Nancy Valen is 52. Actor Archie Kao is 48. Actress Natascha McElhone is 48. Actress-comedian Michaela Watkins is 46. Actress-comedian Miranda Hart is 45. Rhythm-and-blues singer Brian Dalrymple (Soul For Real) is 42. Actress KaDee Strickland is 42. Actress Tammy Blanchard is 41. Actress Sophie Monk is 38. Actor-singer-musician Jackson Rathbone is 33. Actress Vanessa Hudgens is 29. Rock/R&B singer Tori Kelly is 25.

Thought for Today: "No one feels another's grief, no one understands another's joy. People imagine that they can reach one another. In reality they only pass each other by." — Franz Schubert, Austrian composer (1797-1828).