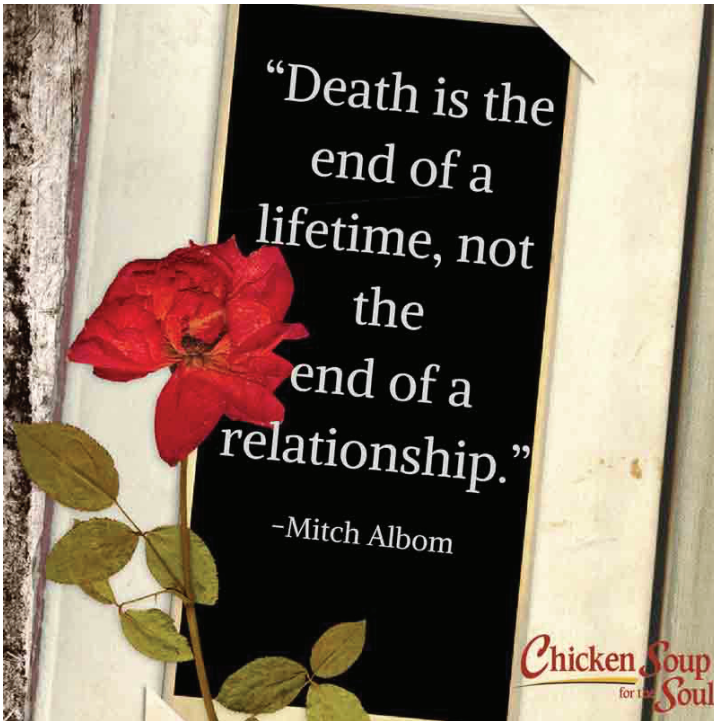


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Midwest Masonry & concrete Pumping

Greg Heilman, owner

405 E 1st Ave., Groton

Greg: 253/929-9137

Mike: 605/492-7041

midwestmasonry1@yahoo.com



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

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

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SHERMAN OFFERED CITY TO LINCOLN AS CHRISTMAS GIFT

Conclusion to Epic March to the Sea

By Tom Emery

When you do your Christmas shopping, what do you give the man who has everything? How about an entire city?

At Christmas 1864, William T. Sherman did just that for President Abraham Lincoln at the conclusion of his destructive March to the Sea. The general offered the key port city of Savannah, Ga. as a Christmas present to Lincoln, a holiday tidings that has become a part of Civil War lore.

Sherman's five-week march from Atlanta to Savannah that fall is considered a decisive blow by modern historians, but the movement was highly risky. The high command in Washington was concerned with Sherman's plan, as he wanted to advance deep into enemy territory without a supply line or communications.

As a result, Lincoln and other Union authorities were uncertain as to Sherman's exact location for about a month. "When someone asked Lincoln about Sherman's progress, he shrugged and said, "I know where he went in at, but I can't tell what hole he will come out of," said Dr. Samuel Wheeler, a research historian at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Ill. "When Lincoln received word that Sherman had indeed been successful, his relief must have been enormous."

Wheeler also notes that the fall of 1864 had been "exceptionally tense" for Lincoln, in part because of a stressful re-election campaign. "He went through an excruciating period in the run up to the election of 1864, and shared the popular opinion that he would not be re-elected," said Wheeler. "After the election, all eyes turned toward bringing the war to a conclusion. That, of course, brought a whole new series of anxieties."

Sherman's 62,000 men left for the sea on November 15 with twenty days of rations and, when those were exhausted, lived off the land. He moved rapidly through Georgia with little opposition, but as he approached Savannah and its rich stores, food and other supplies were running alarmingly low. A prolonged battle for the city posed a threat to the army's survival.

Fortunately for Sherman, the outnumbered Confederate garrison withdrew, and the city surrendered on December 21. He was shortly visited by a U.S. Treasury agent, A. G. Browne, who was on the scene to claim the cotton, rice, and government buildings.

Known for his hatred of bureaucrats, Sherman curtly refused Browne's demands. Avoiding a confrontation, the agent side-stepped the issue with a diplomatic suggestion -- that Sherman offer the city as a

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Christmas present to Lincoln. Saying that "the President particularly enjoys such pleasantries," Browne further noted that a message could be telegraphed from a nearby communications hub for receipt by Lincoln on Christmas Eve.

Sherman accepted Browne's advice and dashed off a brief message that read, "I beg to present to you as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah." Ever practical, Sherman added that the city came with "one hundred and fifty heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, also about twenty-five thousand bales of cotton."

Lincoln received the wire on December 24. The telegram captured the imagination of the nation was reprinted in major newspapers, including page one of the New York Times, with the subhead "Sherman's Christmas Present."

"Lincoln was very pleased to receive his 'Christmas gift' from Sherman," remarked Wheeler. "It was probably the best gift Lincoln could have received that year."

On the day after Christmas, Lincoln wrote Sherman with "many, many thanks for your Christmas gift" and conceded that he "was anxious, if not fearful" of the general's march from Atlanta. But, "the undertaking being a success," Lincoln offered the glory to his general, writing "the honor is all yours."

"Lincoln was not interested in receiving individual credit," commented Wheeler. "There's an old saying, 'it's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.' I think Lincoln's management of his generals personifies that statement."

The men of Sherman's army celebrated Christmas in the rain in Savannah. After hearing a congratulatory order from their commander, they were dismissed for dinner, an undertaking enjoyed by some more than others. William Humphrey of Jacksonville, Ill., the fife major of the 101st Illinois, wrote that his Christmas meals were "breakfast, rice and beef. Dinner, rice. Supper, beef and rice."

Others had it better, though with equally limited selection. Men of the 16th Illinois Cavalry feasted on oyster soup, oysters on the half-shell, fried oysters, roast oysters, roast goose, rice, raisins, and coffee with condensed milk.

The Christmas season of 1864 would prove to be the last in the field in the Civil War, as the Southern armies surrendered the following spring. Sherman's present of Savannah has become a hallmark of the smashing success of his march to the sea, though the general has been roundly criticized in some circles for forcing the war on the Southern people.

Tom Emery is a freelance writer and historical researcher from Carlinville, Ill. He may be reached at 217-710-8392 or ilcivilwar@yahoo.com.



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***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")**



More Control over Your Paycheck

I've told this story often, but it bears repeating because it's the foundation of what I've fought for in tax reform. A while back, I met a young mom in the grocery store. She had a handful of coupons and a cart of groceries. We got to talking about how much costs have gone up. Healthcare, electricity, you name it – all were on the rise. And so, she asked me: "When is it going to get better?" To that mom, I want to say this: 2018 will be better because of tax reform.

In South Dakota, the average household income is \$54,000. For that family of four, we doubled their standard deduction, meaning the first \$24,000 a married couple earns is now tax free. We're also doubling the Child Tax Credit to \$2,000 per child, and we're pushing the family's tax rate down to 12 percent. If you crunch the numbers, that the average family of four in South Dakota making \$54,000 will go from an \$830 tax liability under current law to a \$780 tax refund under tax reform. That's a change of \$1,600.

And it could be even higher. Families will continue to have access to the Child Care Credit, which I fought alongside Ivanka Trump and others to preserve. The home mortgage interest deduction, the Adoption Tax Credit, charitable contributions, and popular retirement savings options are also retained. Deductions for 529 education savings accounts and medical expenses are enhanced, as is the refundability of the Child Tax Credit.

These credits and deductions can have a powerful impact on those we care about, because they put money back into our families and communities, rather than into the greedy hands of Washington.

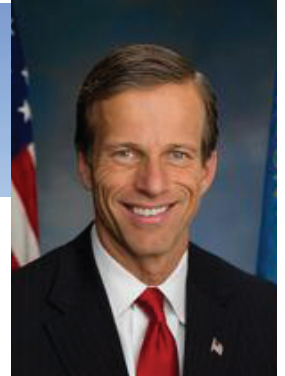
At the same time, this tax reform package is designed to create a healthier economy – one in which wages can rise. Already, we've seen a number of businesses respond by announcing they're moving jobs back to America and giving their employees a much-deserved Christmas bonus.

In South Dakota, our number one industry is agriculture, and I'm incredibly proud this tax reform package reflects so many of the priorities shared with me by farmers and ranchers across the state. I was the only farmer sitting at the negotiating table when the final deal was made, but I made sure producers would have access to enhanced expensing tools, immediate deductibility, and like-kind exchanges. Additionally, we created a 20 percent small business deduction that will benefit many farms and ranches as well as agricultural cooperatives. While the fight to repeal the un-American Death Tax will continue, I'm glad this bill gives farmers, ranchers, and small businesses some relief by doubling the exemption levels and maintaining the stepped-up basis.

I believe 2017 will be marked as the year in which you were put back in control. Federal regulations have been toppled by Congress and President Trump. The judicial system has been flooded with those who believe in liberty and the freedoms enshrined within our Constitution. Tax reform's passage was the capstone and the surest sign that things are going to get better for hardworking Americans.

During his remarks on the White House lawn, President Trump explained we were "warriors together" in tax reform. It's very true. We fought side by side throughout this process, and we did that for a singular reason: We both believe you deserve more control over your paycheck. You've worked hard for that money, and it's time the folks in Washington respect that.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



A Year of Accomplishments

The Senate Republican majority has made significant progress this year on behalf of the American people. We've confirmed numerous executive and judicial branch nominees, rolled back burdensome government regulations, laid important groundwork for the 2018 farm bill, repealed one of the fundamental pillars of Obamacare, and we delivered pro-growth tax reform to middle-income South Dakotans. It's been a big year.

A lot of folks forget that in addition to working on legislative items, the Senate is in a unique position of dealing with executive and judicial branch personnel, too. As the new administration took shape this year, we fulfilled our constitutional role of vetting and confirming nominees, of which 19 nominations, including two cabinet officials and the Federal Communications Commission chairman, came through the Senate Commerce Committee, which I chair.

In April, the Senate confirmed then-judge Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Gorsuch has always been known for his impartiality and commitment to the rule of law. When we were considering his nomination, I said he was the kind of jurist who called balls and strikes when it comes to interpreting the law, and he's proven that again since his confirmation.

The Republican-led Senate set records this year for the number of U.S. circuit court nominees we confirmed. Circuit court judges serve lifetime terms on the bench, and they are the last stop in the judicial system before the Supreme Court. In December, we confirmed the 12th circuit court judge of 2017 – the most for any president in his first year in office since the creation of circuit courts in 1891. By getting young and experienced judges who are committed to the rule of the law on the bench today, we can ensure the judicial system is in good hands for decades to come.

Slashing red tape has also been a priority in the Senate. Throughout the year, we used the Congressional Review Act – a legislative tool that allows Congress to weigh in on rules and regulations issued by executive branch agencies – to roll back more than one dozen heavy-handed government regulations that were implemented during the Obama administration.

On the agriculture front, with the current farm bill expiring next year, I spent much of this year laying the groundwork to ensure the next farm bill is done right and on time. Our hardworking farmers and ranchers deserve it, and I am working hard to ensure that Congress delivers.

We had a busy year in the Commerce Committee, too. Aside from the committee's role in the confirmation process, which included more than 250 U.S. Coast Guard promotions this year, my Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017 and No Human Trafficking on Our Roads Act made it to the president's desk. The Senate passed more than a half-dozen telecom bills, including my MOBILE NOW Act, which would increase access to broadband and other cutting-edge technologies. And the committee passed my AV START Act, FAA reauthorization bill, Surface Transportation and Maritime Security Act, and TSA Modernization Act.

We closed 2017 with what will be one of the greatest accomplishments during my time in Congress. We passed sweeping reforms to the tax code for the first time in more than three decades. These reforms will bring some much-needed relief to middle-income South Dakotans who have been looking for more opportunities to get ahead. Tax reform will lower tax rates for all Americans, and it will double the standard deduction and the child tax credit. Taxpayers will begin to see the benefits from these reforms in their paychecks early next year.

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Memories Of Christmas

I have many fond memories of Christmas. One year, I remember singing Christmas carols in Dell Rapids with my 4-H club. Afterward, we ended the evening at the Lutheran Church where we sang Silent Night with all the lights out and only the Christmas tree lit.

Some of my memories are of the one-room country school I attended as a child. Every year, all eight grades joined together to perform in a Christmas program. We stretched a wire across the front of the schoolroom and hung burlap curtains. When the curtain opened, Mrs. Hainje played the piano and we'd sing songs, or we'd recite poems, or perform little one-act plays. Our program lasted about an hour or two, and every year, my parents faithfully attended.

When I was in eighth grade the country school closed, and I began to ride the bus to school in Dell Rapids. I joined band, and when we had band concerts at Christmas time, my parents would always come to those too. We'd assemble on the stage in the gym, and all the parents sat on grey folding chairs in rows on the gym floor. I remember looking out into the crowd to find them, and they were always there. I also sang in the chorus, and my parents came to those concerts too.

Now, you may be thinking: That's nothing special, parents should always come to their children's Christmas concerts – and that's true. What's unusual, though, is that my parents didn't come to hear me perform. You see, my dad couldn't hear at all, and my mother could barely hear anything either. They were both deaf.

They came to those concerts and sat, sometimes for hours, not hearing a thing. Concert after concert, year after year, they came – not because they could hear me, but rather because I could see them. They came to show that they loved and cared about me.

Among all my Christmas memories – whether of a special gift I received or of a favorite dish at dinner – it was my parents and my sisters who made Christmas special. Christmas was a meaningful time of year because I celebrated it with the people I loved, and who loved me.

For some, the holidays are a difficult time. The parents of a son or daughter serving abroad, the person who just received a grim diagnosis, or the family who recently lost a loved one may not be looking forward to Christmas this year. This season, remember others like that. Do what you can for the sick and the poor and the lonely. Go Christmas caroling at the nursing home, invite someone new over for Christmas dinner, call that friend you haven't heard from in a while or give to a family in need. As my parents taught me, at Christmastime you don't just show up to the concert to hear the music. You're there to show that you care.

Merry Christmas.

GFP Commission Requests Input on Preference Point System

PIERRE, S.D. – Following a presentation by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP), the GFP Commission is requesting public input on a proposal to cube preference points for all limited draw seasons. This would be for all seasons in which preference points can be purchased and accrued.

This proposed adjustment is intended to provide those hunters with a higher number of preference points a greater chance of drawing a limited license than currently exists. The proposed action would take the number of preference points a hunter has and add one for the current year application. That total will then be cubed and would determine the number of times each applicant's name is entered into the drawing.

For example, an applicant who has three preference points going into the 2018 East River deer season drawing would have a total of four upon submitting their application for 2018. Then that would be cubed to total 64; which means that applicant's name would be entered 64 times for the 2018 East River deer season drawing. Under the current structure this example would result in a total of four chances in the drawing.

A more drastic example would be if an applicant has 20 preference points for the 2018 Black Hills elk season drawing. Adding one more point upon submitting an application for 2018 would bring the total to 21. Then this would be cubed to 9,261; which means that applicant's name would be entered 9,261 times for this drawing.

This proposal would not change the drawing to a true top down preference point system. A hunter with the most preference points would still not be guaranteed a license before another hunter with less preference points, but the odds of drawing a license would be increased.

To comment on this proposal, send written comments to 523 East Capitol Avenue, Pierre, SD 57501, or send an email to wildinfo@state.sd.us. To be included in the public record and to be considered by the Commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and meet the submission deadline of seventy-two hours before the public hearing (not including the day of the public hearing) per HB 1006. The GFP Commission will discuss this proposal Jan. 11-12, 2018, at the Red Rossa Convention Center in Pierre. For those unable to attend the meeting in person, the discussion will be livestreamed at <http://www.sd.net/home/>.



North Area Honor Band Members

The North Area Honor Band was held on Saturday Dec. 2nd at NSU in Aberdeen. Selection into Honor Band is based off of HS and MS All State Band Scores and Director's Nominations. **GREAT JOB ALL!**

From left to right: **HS Band Director Austin Fordham, Braden Freeman (Tuba), Ashley Garduno (French Horn), Hattie Weismantel (Bass Clarinet), Emily Thompson (1st Chair-Percussion), Kylie Kassube (1st Chair-Clarinet), and Rylee Rosenau (Trombone).**

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Today in Weather History

December 23, 1987: Five to sixteen inches of snow fell in 24 hours in east central and southeast South Dakota from the morning of the 23rd through the morning of the 24th. Some of the larger amounts measured were 9 inches at Huron, 10 inches at Mitchell, Platte and Brookings, twelve inches at Chamberlain, and sixteen inches at Alpena. Heavy snow also fell in southwestern Minnesota, with Big Stone and Traverse Counties in the west central portion of the state missing out on the heaviest snow. Considerable blowing and drifting snow hampered removal, particularly in South Dakota, due to reduced visibilities. Snowfall amounts also included three inches at Castlewood, five inches at Clear Lake, and six inches at Bryant.

December 23, 1996: Blizzard conditions developed across northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota in the late afternoon of the 23rd and continued into the late evening. Visibilities were frequently below one quarter of a mile. Two to six inches of new snowfall combined with the already significant snow cover and north winds of 20 to 40 mph to cause widespread blizzard conditions and heavy drifting on area roads. Travel was significantly impacted if not impossible, and one fatality resulted from a head-on collision. Some snowfall amounts in Minnesota included 5 inches at Artichoke Lake and 6 inches at Wheaton and Browns Valley. In South Dakota, 7 inches fell at Britton, Webster, and Clear Lake, with 6 inches at Sisseton and 5 inches at Summit.

1811 - A cold storm hit Long Island sound with a foot of snow, gale force winds, and temperatures near zero. During the storm many ships were wrecked, and in some cases entire crews perished. (David Ludlum)

December 23, 1921: An estimated F3 tornado struck the town of Clarkedale, Arkansas, killing 6 and injuring 60 others. Four people died in the destruction of the Banks and Danner store, where 50 people were doing their Christmas shopping.

December 23, 1924: A storm producing winds of 70 mph cause extensive damage to Sydney, Australia during the evening hours.

1955 - The barometric pressure dipped to 28.97 inches (981 millibars) at Boise ID, an all-time record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A major winter storm struck Colorado producing heavy snow and blizzard conditions. A record two feet of snow was reported at Stapleton Airport in Denver, which was shut down for 33 hours. Up to 44 inches of snow fell in the foothills surrounding Denver. The storm hurt the ski industry as skiers were unable to make it out of Denver to the slopes, and the closed airport became a campground for vacationers. (23rd-25th) (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1983 - The temperature plunged to 50 degrees below zero at Williston ND to equal their all-time record. Minneapolis MN reported an afternoon high of 17 degrees below zero, and that evening strong northerly winds produced wind chill readings of 100 degrees below zero in North Dakota. (The National Weather Summary)








1987 - A winter storm brought heavy snow to the Central Rockies, and also spread a blanket of snow across the Middle Missouri Valley in time for Christmas. Snow and high winds created near blizzard conditions in Wyoming. Snowfall totals in Wyoming ranged up to 25 inches at Casper, with four feet of snow reported at the Hogadon Ski Resort on Casper Mountain. The Wolf Creek Ski Resort in Colorado received 26 inches of snow. Totals in the Middle Missouri Valley ranged up to 16 inches at Alpena SD, with 14 inches at Harrison NE. Strong winds ushered unseasonably cold air into the southwestern U.S. Canyon winds gusting to 100 mph created ground blizzards in Utah. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure in the Upper Midwest produced strong and gusty winds across the Great Lakes Region and the Ohio Valley. Winds in Ohio gusted to 47 mph at Cincinnati, and reached 51 mph at Cleveland. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

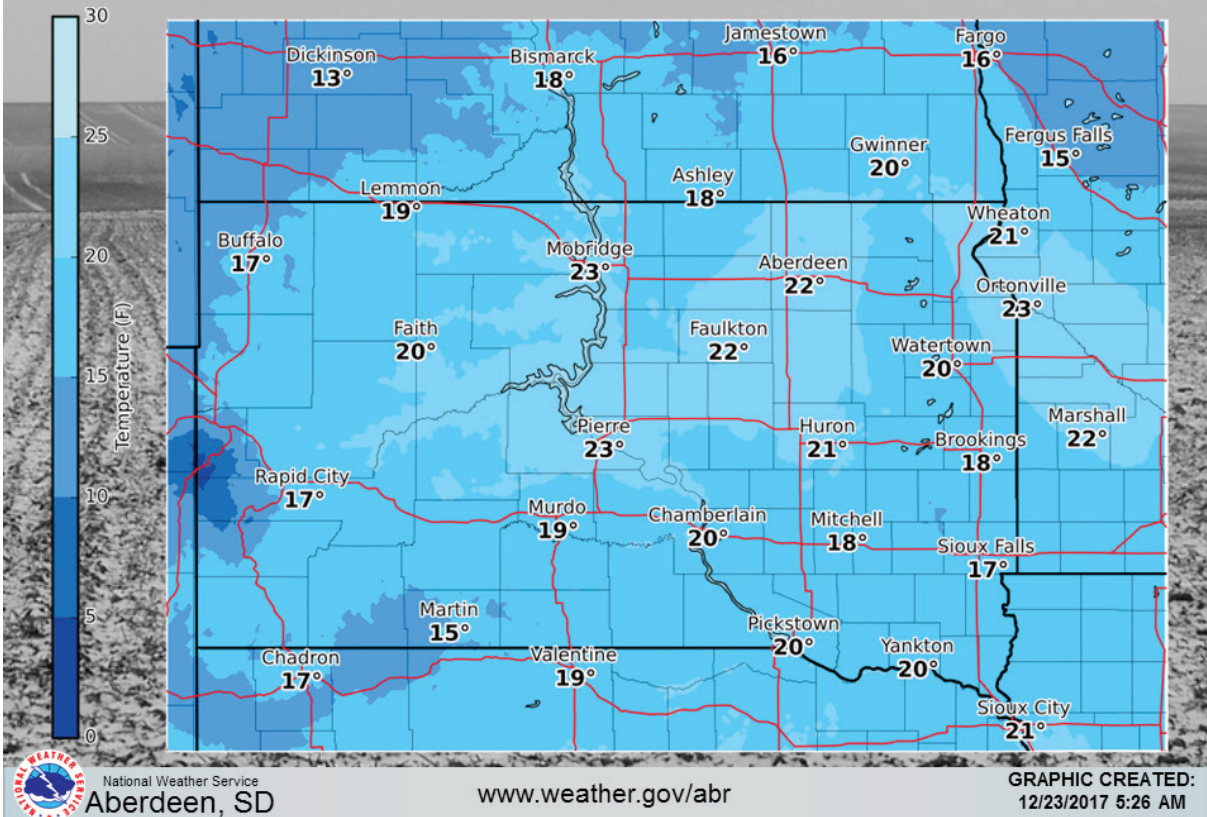
December 23, 1998: A major ice storm struck central and southeast Virginia and much of North Carolina beginning on Wednesday, December 23 and lasting until Christmas Day morning. Icy conditions caused injuries from slips and falls and numerous vehicle accidents. Ice accumulations of up to an inch brought down trees and power lines. Outages were so widespread with 400,000 customers were without power on Christmas Eve. Some people were without power for up to ten days.

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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Christmas Day	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Scattered Flurries	Mostly Cloudy	Cold	Mostly Clear	Cold
High: 21 °F	Low: 5 °F	High: 21 °F	Low: -4 °F	High: 5 °F	Low: -12 °F	High: 4 °F

Below Normal Temperatures Today



Dry conditions are expected today with highs in the upper teens and low 20s. A cold front will slide across the region Sunday afternoon with breezy northwesterly winds and light snow possible. Northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota will have the best potential of seeing snow. Monday will feature much colder temperatures with highs only in the single digits above zero.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 23.4

Low Outside Temp: -.05

High Gust: 20

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 54° in 1893

Record Low: -34° in 1983

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 4°F

Average Precip in Dec: 0.38

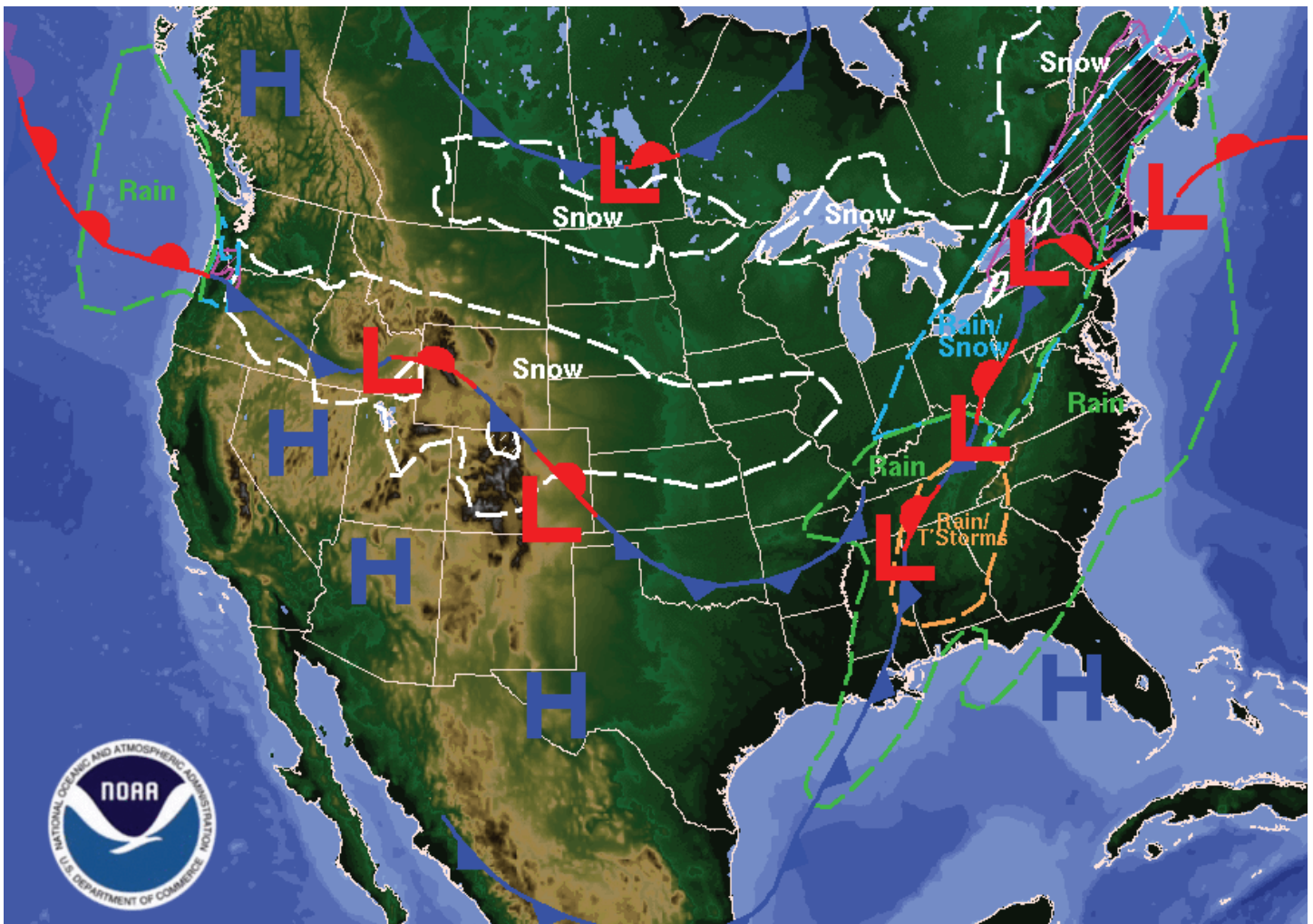
Precip to date in Dec: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.58

Precip Year to Date: 13.47

Sunset Tonight: 4:54 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:11 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Sat, Dec 23, 2017, issued 3:45 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Kong 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)



THE ANGEL'S VISIT TO MARY

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think of what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and He will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And though the angel left her, she was not alone.

Luke 1:26-38 New Living Translation

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

Friday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL

Belle Fourche 58, Lemmon 32
Beresford 62, Chester 59
Brandon Valley 63, Aberdeen Central 60
Ipswich 55, Florence/Henry 44
Oelrichs 80, Wakpala 59
Parkston 57, Winner 55
Rapid City Stevens 76, Alliance, Neb. 52
Redfield/Doland 64, Tiospa Zina Tribal 53
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 53, Pierre 33
Sisseton 61, Mobridge-Pollock 38
Sturgis Brown 65, St. Thomas More 39
Tri-State, N.D. 56, Great Plains Lutheran 55
Viborg-Hurley 68, Hanson 42
Watertown 62, Mitchell 41

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 46, Brandon Valley 39
Belle Fourche 69, Lemmon 24
Faith 59, Timber Lake 44
Hanson 57, Viborg-Hurley 20
Ipswich 44, Florence/Henry 40
Milbank 52, Webster 40
Northwestern 66, Aberdeen Christian 21
Parkston 38, Winner 37
Rapid City Stevens 63, Alliance, Neb. 50
Redfield/Doland 49, Tiospa Zina Tribal 20
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 70, Pierre 43
Sisseton 46, Mobridge-Pollock 17
St. Thomas More 65, Sturgis Brown 42
Wilmot 67, Wyndmere-Lidgerwood, N.D. 38

Family donates Christmas tree to church for 5 decades

By JACI CONRAD PEARSON, Black Hills Pioneer

LEAD, S.D. (AP) — For five decades, the Sternhagen family, led by patriarch Jim Sternhagen, have scouted, sawed, and celebrated their annual Christmas tree find by donating the mostly large-scale, towering specimens to the Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Lead.

This year was no exception. The family donated an 18-foot spruce tree now decorated with treasured and traditional hand-made church ornaments grace its boughs.

"How it started was, I was working the timber and Pastor Hubert Kaste asked me to get a tree," said Jim. "I logged in the forest a lot."

And a long-standing tradition was born out of the '60s.

Since then, Jim and his five sons — Fred, Jim Jr., Scott, John, and Lewis — have all been a part of the process over the years. And now, the festivities involve nine grandchildren, and sons-in-law, as well.

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"The lord always provided us with a tree," said John. "They've mostly been around 18 feet tall, which is what this year's is."

"And they've been out in every winter condition," added John's wife, Cindy.

"Due to the snow, we've had to haul it to the road with a snowmobile," John said. "Sometimes it's easy, sometimes not so easy, but it's always fun. Especially this year, with nearly all the family out there."

This year's tree was found in the Dumont area on Forest Service land, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

"But they've come from all over," John said.

Asked why the family has kept up a 50 year commitment to the church congregation in gathering its Christmas altar showpiece, Jim, who is very understated and humble, but agreed to a story for the 50th anniversary, simply stated.

"It's kind of a tradition, I guess," Jim said. "People do different things for the church and we were able to cut trees, so we cut trees."

Son Lewie pointed out that the crosscut saw traditionally used to cut the tree down with is, apparently, award-winning.

"When my dad was a logger, him and my mother's brother, Joel DeRider, used that saw in the Saw Dust Logging competitions in town," Lewie explained. "My dad said, 'I hope you guys know it's a six-time championship saw you're using.' So at Thanksgiving, when we cut the tree down, we each took a shot at it, and everybody was cutting down the tree with this championship saw my dad had. So that was pretty special."

John said the family normally goes out the day or so after Thanksgiving to cut the tree down, before the first week in Advent. And what follows is an annual church event.

"The church decorates it together and then we have a soup dinner or something like that," Cindy said.

Congregation members regularly tell the Sternhagens this is one of the days they look most forward to all year.

And how, exactly, does the tree transport go down?

This year, John popped it on a trailer and, the rest, well?

"We pull it in to the sanctuary by manpower," John said. "When we were younger, we were stronger. Then we take a pulley and a rope and guide the stump into a special stand. It's a deal. It's heavy. Heavier than your average tree."

On Dec. 10, congregation member Clifford Littau showed up to set up his integral and intricate watering system — a five-gallon bucket ciphering set-up that allows watering from a more strategic place than smack-dab under the monstrous tree.

The ornaments placed on the tree all have special meaning and were handmade by church members decades ago, as well.

They are called Chrismons, or Christmas decorations with Christian symbols on them, reminding Christians that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birthday. The word Chrismon, is a combination of the words Christ and monogram. Chrismons are traditionally colored white and gold. White is the church color for Christmas and symbolizes that Jesus was pure and perfect. Gold symbolizes his majesty and glory.

More than 100 Chrismons bedeck the Shepherd of the Hills tree, including hands in prayer, the scroll, the dove, the lamp and the candle, the shell, alpha and omega, the anchor cross and dozens more, each with symbolic meaning.

"My dad is a very humble person," Lewie said. "He likes to do stuff and doesn't want to do it for attention. When he was a logger, he enjoyed his job. He just loves Christmas. We've been doing this as long as I've been alive. He's 89 years old, so this year, he went out and supervised. At the end, my dad and I cut the tree down."

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

Father rushes to fund study into daughter's disease

By JONATHAN ELLIS, Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — As they stood outside Sanford Children's Hospital waiting for a valet to bring a car, Raena Brendtro's mother asked her if she wanted to sit down.

Raena responded no. She wanted to stand while she still could.

Two hours earlier, they had arrived for an appointment that changed their lives. After weeks of waiting for lab tests to return, they had learned that Raena was suffering from a rare disorder that was attacking her nervous system, known as Friedreich's Ataxia. Those who suffer from the disorder are often confined to wheel chairs by the time they graduate from high school. Many die in their 20s after the disease attacks the heart and other organs.

Her parents had been bracing for the diagnosis.

"You kind of hold out hope that somehow it's going to be something else," said her father, Dan Brendtro. "The problem is, that the other things that are on the list are brain cancer and things that were just as bad."

Today, four and a half years later, Raena, 16, is a junior at Lincoln High School. The disease is robbing her of her mobility.

But in a world where freakish coincidences happen, there's a ray of hope from Raena's own home town. One year before her diagnosis, Pete Vitiello, a scientist at Sanford Research, had been part of a study on a protein that is central to the disorder. The study found that the protein was linked to an antioxidant enzyme, but from there, the study ended, mothballed.

Now Dan Brendtro is raising money to resume the study, the Argus Leader reported. With Vitiello on board, Brendtro launched a fundraiser this week to raise \$75,000 that would enable Vitiello to begin research by the New Year. Typically, research studies rely on foundation or government grants that can take years before the funding comes through. As his daughter slips further into the grips of Friedreich's Ataxia, Brendtro hopes to bypass the slow, traditional route of funding studies by raising money directly.

If they can get started, the goal, Vitiello said, is to determine whether the antioxidant enzyme helps cause the disease, or whether it's simply a bystander. They could start to get answers within months of resuming the study.

"This is one of those instances where I feel something can be done," Vitiello said. "Dan and his daughter are pretty special. That's been a motivating force for me."

Three months ago, Brendtro had no idea that Sanford and Vitiello had already made a foray into Friedreich's Ataxia. But the drive to find a cure put Bendtro on a path to find Vitiello.

It started with the Sioux Falls Half Marathon. Brendtro, a casual runner, decided a few days before the event that he always wanted to run a half marathon, so why not. Following that, he decided he wanted to run a marathon. He contacted his marathoner cousin, Angie Roth, for advice. The two eventually agreed to run the Twin Cities Marathon. They joined with Tom Batta — a fellow Friedreich's Ataxia parent from Watertown — in running to raise money for Friedreich's Ataxia Research Alliance. Batta's team raised nearly \$45,000 while Brendtro raised nearly \$30,000.

As he pounded out more than 26 miles for a marathon he hadn't done much training for, Brendtro thought about what he could do next for his daughter and for 4,000 other kids and young adults in the U.S. who also suffer from the disorder. He came up with an idea: Why not raise \$100,000 for a study at Sanford Research.

It was naïve, he says now, thinking he could just show up and ask Sanford to take money for a study. But nonetheless, that's what he did.

What Brendtro didn't know about was Vitiello and the study that had ended in 2012. Vitiello had worked with the Mayo Clinic's Dr. Gracia Isaya, a noted researcher into Friedreich's Ataxia. And although their study had shown promise, it came to an end when its funding also came to an end.

Brendtro's offer got kicked over to a group that runs Sanford's registry for patients suffering from rare diseases. A former lab technician of Vitiello's was working with the group and knew about the mothballed study. That's how Brendtro and Vitiello got connected.

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Vitiello came up with a budget to see the study through. Brendtro started raising the money. Because it's a rare disease — only about 100 people a year are diagnosed with Friedreich's Ataxia in the United States — it doesn't get the research money that common diseases get, said Jennifer Farmer, the executive director of the Friedreich's Ataxia Research Alliance. Typically, there's about \$4 million to \$5 million a year available for research.

"One of the key things is finding the researchers with the expertise and interest in the disease," said Farmer. That is only going to get worse as Mayo's Isaya retires.

The original study that Vitiello and Isaya started opened a new path in conquering the disease, Farmer said. Vitiello's decision to reopen the study is the next step on that path.

"What's cool about this project is it's really opening a new direction," Farmer said.

Nobody is laboring under the illusion that the study is a sure thing. But even if it ends up demonstrating that the enzyme in question has no role in the disease, researchers can check it off their list and move onto something else.

"I don't know if it's going to be important or not, but I'm willing to give it a shot," Vitiello said.

Brendtro, who is raising money at TheFinishLine.org, has a goal of hitting \$75,000 in three weeks.

"What that would mean is we could give a Christmas gift of a research study to the 4,000 kids, young adults, in the United States who have this disease, and to their 8,000 parents," Brendtro said.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Mega Millions

01-20-30-33-42, Mega Ball: 16, Megaplier: 4

(one, twenty, thirty, thirty-three, forty-two; Mega Ball: sixteen; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$247 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$300 million

Iowa pulls away from Colorado 80-73 for fourth straight win

By MARCUS TRAXLER, Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — It will be listed as a neutral site game in the record books, but Iowa took full advantage of the heavily partisan crowd in their favor Friday.

The Hawkeyes shot 58 percent in the second half to pull away from Colorado late and beat the Buffs 80-73 at the Sanford Pentagon Friday.

Playing 10 miles from its own state borders, Iowa (8-6) trailed 51-48 with under 12 minutes to play, but Cordell Pemsil converted a key bucket and Dailey knocked down a go-ahead 3-pointer — one of only three converted in the game for Iowa — to put the Hawkeyes in front for good 53-51 with 10:35 left.

For a Hawkeye team that has struggled early in the season, it was another good sign for coach Fran McCaffery's team not panicking. The win marks four straight for Iowa, after starting the season with six losses in the first 10 games.

"We couldn't play any worse and we were down four," McCaffery said of a Colorado run early in the second half. "Whenever you have a lead and you give it up again, you have to fight through it."

With a starting lineup of a freshman, two sophomores and two juniors, McCaffery said his team grew up, led by the efforts of Isaiah Moss and sixth man Maishe Dailey, who each scored 16 points for Iowa.

Five Hawkeyes were in double figures, with Jordan Bohannon adding 13 points, while Nicholas Baer

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and Tyler Cook each had 12 points with Pemsil adding 10 points. Iowa controlled the glass for the entire game, finishing with a 43-31 edge. The Hawkeyes also took advantage of a big edge at the free throw line, converting 25-of-36 attempts, while Colorado was held to 9 of 17 at the line.

Buffaloes coach Tad Boyle said his team lost the game with its second-half defense and inability to rebound.

"Our defense really got a little soft, especially when they made a run. We just didn't get stops and we didn't do a very good job of handling their zone."

Iowa built a 27-16 lead in the first 12 minutes, thanks in large part to Moss' 11 points before the break. But the Buffaloes mounted a 14-2 run slowly before halftime, capped with Namon Wright's lay-up to give Colorado its first lead at 30-29 with 1:29 ahead of the intermission. Dailey's 3-pointer with 25 seconds left gave Iowa a 32-31 halftime edge.

McKinley Wright scored a game-high 21 points to lead four scorers in double-figures for Colorado (8-4). Dallas Walton had a career-high 13 points and Namon Wright had 12.

BIG PICTURE

Colorado: The Buffaloes received a strong performance from Wright, who has now made it 12 straight games with at least 10 points to open his career. But Colorado will wrap up its non-conference with some frustration, having lost four of its last six games.

Iowa: The Hawkeyes are now 8-0 in games in which they've scored at least 80 points and Iowa hit the magic number, despite a rough shooting night from the outside. But a tough effort inside from the likes of Moss and Cook helped do the job.

HAVEN'T SEEN THAT BEFORE

An odd scene took place with 4:45 remaining in the game, as the Buffaloes' Tyler Bey was at the free-throw line, with the Hawkeyes up 67-61. Bey's second free throw bounced wildly to the bench area, where Colorado assistant coach Kim English was bending over to pick up a water bottle that had rolled away from the bench. The ricochet from the free throw hit English, leaving the players on the court confused. After a conference from the officials, a technical foul was issued to the Colorado bench and the play led to a Bohannon free throw, which was missed.

UP NEXT

Colorado: The Buffaloes will proceed to Pac-12 Conference play, playing at Oregon State on Dec. 29.

Iowa: The Hawkeyes return home to play Northern Illinois Dec. 29 to close the non-conference slate.

Weber State beats Presentation College 88-48

OGDEN, Utah (AP) — Jerrick Harding and Ryan Richardson had 16 points each and Weber State wrapped its nonconference schedule with an 88-48 win over NAIA Presentation College on Friday night.

Dusty Baker added 15 points and Zach Braxton had 11 points and 10 rebounds. The Wildcats (7-5) will begin conference play with a three-game winning streak when they host Idaho State on Dec. 30.

Weber State led 37-23 at halftime and opened the second half by outscoring the Saints 43-15 to get the lead to 80-38 with 5:16 left, their largest of the game.

Mychal Deas had 15 points to lead Presentation, which made just 13 of 52 shots from the field and committed 21 turnovers to Weber State's four.

The game counted as an exhibition for the Saints.

South Dakota St.'s balance buries UMKC 85-60

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Reed Tellinghuisen scored 16 points with 10 rebounds and was one of six players to score in double figures for South Dakota State and the Jackrabbits handled UMKC 85-60 on Friday.

The Jackrabbits led 46-30 at halftime shooting 53 percent from 3-point range and saw seven-different players bury at least one trey. South Dakota State (11-5) built a 20-9 lead and never trailed.

Skyler Flatten scored 14 points, David Jenkins Jr., and Mike Daum each scored 12, Tevin King, 11 and Brandon Key 10. The Jackrabbits — winners of four of their last five — shot 51 percent (31 of 61) from

the field.

Flatten's 3 with 4:41 left extended South Dakota State's lead to 81-49.

Xavier Bishop scored 15 points and Jordan Giles added 13 for UMKC (3-11), which now has lost six straight.

Sioux Falls project developers couldn't pay \$20K state fine

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Developers behind a \$50 million parking ramp and hotel project lacked money to pay a roughly \$20,000 fine for illegally dumping asbestos in the Sioux Falls landfill.

The Argus Leader reports Norm Drake and Aaron Hultgren, players in a 2016 Sioux Falls building collapse, are personal guarantors of the new project the city council recently approved.

The state fined Hultgren Construction and the Drake-managed investment group that owned the building that collapsed, claiming the companies illegally removed asbestos from the building and dumped it among common construction debris.

But a settlement agreement says the companies demonstrated an "inability to pay all or part" of the penalty.

Meanwhile, Hultgren and Drake negotiated with the city to build the new parking and hotel project, which calls for over \$21 million in public money for the ramp portion.

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

Defense: Witness in Montana murder case was under indictment

By **MATTHEW BROWN, Associated Press**

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A psychologist who was the sole defense witness in a Montana first-degree murder trial had been indicted on drug charges days before she testified, a revelation that's prompting the convicted killer's attorneys to consider asking for a new trial.

Federal defenders representing 20-year-old defendant Dimarzio Swade Sanchez said they were unaware of the indictment. They said their client could have been acquitted or convicted of a lesser charge if another expert had testified.

Sanchez has until January 5 to ask for a new trial under a Wednesday order from U.S. District Judge Susan Watters.

He was convicted of strangling 28-year-old Roylynn Rides Horse, pouring gasoline on her and setting her on fire on the Crow Indian Reservation in June 2016.

Rides Horse survived the attack and was found 14 hours later by a passerby, but died of her injuries more than two months later.

Psychologist Teresa Hastings of Rapid City, South Dakota testified Dec. 6 at Sanchez's trial about his mental ability to form the intent to kill Rides Horse — a key factor in determining his guilt.

She had been indicted Nov. 29 on four felony counts of illegally obtaining the sedative zolpidem, which is prescribed as a sleep aid to treat insomnia and marketed under the brand name Ambien.

Hastings is scheduled to make an initial court appearance on Dec. 28 and her attorney, Ellery Grey, says she will plead not guilty. Hastings turned herself in after learning of the accusations against her, Grey said. Court records indicate she was taken into custody December 11 and released after posting a \$1,500 bond.

Sanchez's defense team said it became aware of the indictment a day after the trial ended from a counselor who knows Hastings. Sanchez' lawyers told a judge they wanted to review Hastings' examinations of Sanchez to determine if there were problems with her work.

"While Dr. Hastings enjoys the presumption of innocence, the fact that she faces four drug charges at least raises the question whether Dr. Hastings was under the influence when she examined Mr. Sanchez and/or when she testified at his trial," Assistant Federal Defender Gillian Gosch wrote in a Dec. 19 court filing.

Sanchez faces mandatory life in prison at his sentencing scheduled for March 29.

His brother, Frank, has pleaded guilty to being an accessory after the fact, and a third defendant, An-

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gelica Jo Whiteman, has pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting first-degree murder.

Putin vows to modernize Russia, challengers prepare for race

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — President Vladimir Putin presented his vision for modernizing Russia Saturday, while some of his challengers in next March's presidential vote were formally nominated for the race.

Putin is running as an independent candidate, keeping a distance from the top Kremlin party, United Russia, which consists mostly of officials and has been dogged by corruption allegations against some of its top members.

Despite that, Putin showed up Saturday at United Russia's congress to speak about his future goals. He pledged to offer broader incentives for business, fight corruption and pour extra resources into the underfunded health care and education system.

"Russia is a country with a 1,000-year history, but we mustn't treat her like our grandmother, just giving her pills to relieve her pain," he said in a speech televised live. "We must make Russia young, aimed into the future."

With his approval ratings topping 80 percent, the 65-year old Putin is set to easily win another six-year term in the March 18 vote.

His most visible opponent, opposition leader Alexei Navalny, is barred from the race by an embezzlement conviction he calls politically motivated. Nevertheless, the 41-year old anti-corruption crusader has run a yearlong grass-roots campaign and staged waves of rallies to push the Kremlin to let him run.

Navalny has threatened to organize a campaign for boycotting the vote, which would be an embarrassment to the Kremlin, which is worried about voter apathy and focused on boosting turnout to make Putin's victory more impressive.

The involvement of Ksenia Sobchak, a sharp-tongued 36-year old star TV host, could raise public interest in the race. While Sobchak has denied colluding with the Kremlin, her participation could weaken Navalny and attract younger voters to the polls.

She has criticized the Kremlin's policies and called for democratic changes, but steered clear of any personal criticism of Putin, who in the 1990s served as a deputy to Sobchak's late father, who was the mayor of St. Petersburg.

Sobchak was formally nominated for the race Saturday by a liberal party, the Civic Initiative.

The Communists this time decided to field a fresh candidate instead of their chief Gennady Zyuganov, a fixture of past campaigns. They nominated Pavel Grudinin, the director of a strawberry farm near Moscow.

Other veterans of the past elections liberal Grigory Yavlinsky and ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy are also running.

Storm leaves 75 dead, dozens missing in southern Philippines

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines (AP) — A tropical storm in the southern Philippines unleashed flash floods that swept away people and houses and set off landslides, leaving at least 75 people dead and 58 others missing, officials said Saturday.

Most of the deaths from Tropical Storm Tembin were in the hard-hit provinces of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur and on the Zamboanga Peninsula, said Romina Marasigan of the government's disaster-response agency. Officials were getting more details to confirm the reported fatalities, she said.

It's the latest disaster to hit the Philippines, which is battered by about 20 typhoons and storms each year, making the archipelago that lies on the Pacific typhoon belt one of the world's most disaster-prone countries.

A search and rescue operation was underway for more than 30 people swept away by flash floods in the fishing village of Anungan, Mayor Bong Edding of Zamboanga del Norte province's Sibuco town said by phone. Five bodies have been recovered so far in the village.

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"The floodwaters from the mountain came down so fast and swept away people and houses," Edding said. "It's really sad because Christmas is just a few days away, but these things happen beyond our control."

Edding blamed years of logging in the mountains near Anungan for the tragedy that unfolded Friday, adding that he and other officials would move to halt the logging operations.

The rest of the deaths were reported in Lanao del Norte, where floodwaters from a mountain also swept away several riverside houses and villagers, and Lanao del Sur, police and officials said.

Thousands of villagers moved to emergency shelters and thousands more were stranded in airports and seaports after the coast guard prohibited ferries from venturing out in the rough seas and several flights were canceled.

An inter-island ferry sank off northeastern Quezon province Thursday after being lashed by fierce winds and big waves, leaving at least five people dead. More than 250 passengers and crewmen were rescued.

Tembin, known locally as Vinta, was packing maximum sustained winds of 80 kilometers (50 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 95 kph (59 mph), and is forecast to blow away from the southern Philippines on Sunday toward the South China Sea, moving closer to Vietnam.

"It is unfortunate that another tropical cyclone, Vinta, made its presence felt so near Christmas," presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said, adding that food packs and other aid were being distributed in storm-hit communities.

Earlier in the week, a tropical storm left more than 50 people dead and 31 others missing, mostly due to landslides, and damaged more than 10,000 houses in the central Philippines before weakening and blowing into the South China Sea.

Among the areas battered by Tembin was Marawi, a lakeside city in Lanao del Sur that is still recovering from a five-month siege by pro-Islamic State group extremists that left more than 1,000 people dead.

Associated Press writer Jim Gomez in Manila, Philippines, contributed to this report.

33 killed as bus falls into river in western India

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least 33 people were killed on Saturday after a passenger bus veered off a bridge and plunged into a river in the western Indian state of Rajasthan, police said.

Seven injured passengers were hospitalized in Sawai Madhopur district of Rajasthan state, 375 kilometers (235 miles) south of New Delhi, said police officer Narain Singh.

The speeding bus was trying to overtake another vehicle when it rammed through the bridge railing, said B.L. Soni, another police officer. It fell 20 meters (65 feet) down into the Banas river.

The driver was among the dead, the Press Trust of India news agency said.

Rescuers have recovered 33 bodies from the river and all on board the bus have been accounted for, said Singh. The victims, who were from various Indian states, were on their way to a nearby Hindu temple in Lalsot, a town in Rajasthan state, for pilgrimage.

The bus had picked up passengers from the Sawai Madhopur railroad station when it crashed around 7 a.m., said Singh.

Police figures show India has the world's highest road accident death toll, with more than 110,000 people dying each year in crashes. Driver fatigue, negligence, poorly maintained roads and vehicle maintenance are the usual causes of such accidents in the country.

DC appeals court denies stay of transgender military ban

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House has lost another attempt to put a hold on a requirement that it allow transgender people to enlist in the military starting on Jan. 1.

A decision by the three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia is the latest court decision to go against the White House, meaning the issue may end up before the Supreme Court.

President Donald Trump tweeted in July that the federal government "will not accept or allow" transgender individuals to serve "in any capacity" in the military. That would reverse a 2016 policy change under

President Barack Obama allowing transgender people to serve openly.

Trump later formally directed the Pentagon to extend indefinitely a ban on transgender individuals joining the military, and he gave Defense Secretary Jim Mattis six months to come up with a policy on how to deal with those currently serving.

Several legal challenges to that proposed ban are ongoing. The Pentagon has said the enlistment of transgender recruits will start Jan. 1 and go on amid the legal battles.

At least four federal judges have refused to allow the ban to go into effect, including U.S. District Judge Jesus G. Bernal in California. On Friday, Bernal rejected an administration request to throw out a lawsuit asking for the ban to be voided and issued a preliminary injunction against the ban going into effect.

The Justice Department has asked federal appeals courts to intervene and put the Jan. 1 requirement on hold.

The D.C.-based appeals court and the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia, both turned away the administration's request.

Administration officials "have not shown a strong likelihood that they will succeed on the merits of their challenge to the district court's order," the judges on the D.C. appeals court panel said.

US officials say lethal weapons headed to Ukraine

By JOSH LEDERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukraine will soon have more lethal American-made weapons to help it fight Russian-backed separatists.

U.S. officials said Friday that the Trump administration approved a plan to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, in a long-awaited move that deepens America's involvement in the military conflict and may further strain relations with Russia.

The new arms include American-made Javelin anti-tank missiles that Ukraine has long sought to boost its defenses against Russian-backed separatists armed with tanks that have rolled through eastern Ukraine during violence that has killed more than 10,000 since 2014. Previously, the U.S. has provided Ukraine with support equipment and training, and has let private companies sell some small arms like rifles.

The officials describing the plan weren't authorized to discuss it publicly and demanded anonymity.

The move is likely to become another sore point between Washington and Moscow, as President Donald Trump contends with ongoing questions about whether he's too hesitant to confront the Kremlin. Ukraine accuses Russia of sending the tanks, and the U.S. says Moscow is arming, training and fighting alongside the separatists.

Trump had been considering the plan for some time after the State Department and the Pentagon signed off earlier this year. President Barack Obama also considered sending lethal weapons to Ukraine, but left office without doing so.

The State Department, responsible for overseeing foreign military sales, would not confirm that anti-tank missiles or other lethal weapons would be sent. But in a statement late Friday, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said the U.S. had decided to provide "enhanced defensive capabilities" to help Ukraine build its military long-term, defend its sovereignty and "deter further aggression."

"U.S. assistance is entirely defensive in nature, and as we have always said, Ukraine is a sovereign country and has a right to defend itself," Nauert said.

The White House's National Security Council declined to comment. Russia's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment late Friday.

Although the portable Javelin anti-tank missiles can kill, proponents for granting them to Ukraine have long argued they are considered "defensive" because the Ukrainians would use them to defend their territory and deter the Russians, not to attack a foreign country or seize new territory.

Under law, the State Department must tell Congress of planned foreign military sales, triggering a review period in which lawmakers can act to stop the sale. It was unclear whether the administration had formally

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notified Congress, but lawmakers are unlikely to try to block it given that Democrats and Republicans alike have long called on the government to take the step.

The move comes as the United States and European nations struggle to break a long logjam in the Ukraine-Russia conflict that erupted three years ago when fighting broke out between Russian-backed separatists and government troops in the east. France, Russia and Germany brokered a peace arrangement in 2015 that has lowered violence but not stopped it, and a political settlement outlined in the deal hadn't been fully implemented.

In recent days, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has warned that violence is up about 60 percent this year. In Europe earlier this month, Tillerson called Russia's involvement the biggest tension point between the former Cold War rivals.

"It stands as the single most difficult obstacle to us renormalizing the relationship with Russia, which we badly would like to do," Tillerson said.

The intensified support for Ukraine's military also comes amid early discussions about sending U.N. peacekeepers to eastern Ukraine, to improve security conditions not only for Ukrainians but for special monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe who are on the ground in Ukraine.

The U.S. and other nations were cautiously optimistic when Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed to send in peacekeepers. But there are major disagreements about how and where the peacekeepers would operate, especially about whether they'd be deployed only on the "line of conflict" between separatists and the government.

Both the Obama administration and the Trump administration had expressed concerns in the past that injecting more weapons into the conflict was unlikely to resolve it, especially considering that Russia is well-equipped to respond to any Ukrainian escalation with an even stronger escalation of its own. Sending lethal weapons to Ukraine also creates the troubling possibility that American arms could kill Russian soldiers, a situation that could thrust the two nuclear-armed nations closer to direct confrontation.

The United States, under Obama, also imposed sanctions on Russia for its invasion and annexation of Crimea. The Trump administration has insisted those sanctions will stay in place until Moscow gives up the Crimean Peninsula.

AP Diplomatic Writer Matthew Lee contributed to this report.

California wildfire now largest in state history

By **ROBERT JABLON, Associated Press**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A California wildfire that has killed two people and seared its way through cities, towns and wilderness northwest of Los Angeles became the largest blaze ever officially recorded in California on Friday, authorities said.

The Thomas fire took only 2 ½ weeks to burn its way into history books as unrelenting winds and parched weather turned everything in its path to tinder — including more than 700 homes.

The fire in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties had scorched 273,400 acres, or about 427 square miles of coastal foothills and national forest, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

That was 154 acres larger than California's previous fire record holder — the 2003 Cedar fire in San Diego County that killed 15 people.

The Cedar fire had been recognized as the biggest California wildfire in terms of acreage since 1932. Some fires before that date undoubtedly were larger but records are unreliable, according to state fire officials.

A firefighter and a civilian fleeing the flames died in the Thomas fire as days of unrelentingly dry, gusty winds drove the flames. At times firefighters were forced to retreat to safe areas and simply wait for the flames to pass so they could attack them from the rear.

Often erratic gusts combined with extremely low humidity — it dropped to just 1 percent on some days — pushed the blaze with virtually unprecedented speed, blackening more ground in weeks than other fires had consumed in a month or more.

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On Wednesday, as the fire continued to march north and west, Santa Barbara County fire Capt. David Zaniboni was awed by the speed of its growth.

"Those (other) fires burned for weeks and weeks and this fire is only a few weeks old," he said. "It's incredible."

By that point, firefighters already were beginning to take advantage of a lull in the weather. Several days of easing winds allowed crews to burn and bulldoze protective firebreaks in the foothills above threatened communities, including the celebrity enclave of Montecito.

By Thursday, most of the southern end of the fire also was surrounded and the last mandatory evacuation orders were called off.

As of Friday, while 18,000 homes and other buildings were technically still at risk, there was little flame showing in previously burned areas and the fire was moving slowly through remote wilderness.

The fire was 65 percent contained and colder, moister weather was helping. Although some 50-mph winds gusts were recorded, it produced "no remarkable fire activity" near Montecito or other areas, according to a state fire report.

Brush and timber in the area remain tinder dry, and fire crews are setting backfires to burn it out, and that could add to the fire's size.

"The main fire itself will not have any growth," Capt. Brandon Vaccaro of the California City Fire Department told the Los Angeles Times. "Any growth that we see or is reflected in the acreage will be based on the control burns."

Peru president avoids impeachment, now faces criminal probe

By FRANKLIN BRICENO, Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's troubles are far from over despite having dodged impeachment over ties to the Brazilian construction giant implicated in Latin America's biggest corruption scandal.

Peru's leader still faces a distracting criminal investigation into his involvement with Odebrecht, potentially opening another chapter in the bribery scandal that has ended the careers of some of the region's most prominent politicians. Kuczynski is due for questioning at the chief prosecutor's office next week.

Opposition legislators, who control Congress, fell eight votes short of the two-thirds threshold in the 130-seat chamber needed to oust the president Thursday night following a half-day of impassioned debate.

Kuczynski had argued that the opposition's rush to bring on the impeachment vote threatened Peru's democracy, and on Friday he said in a message to the nation that he will demand "firmly" respect for the separation of powers.

But the president, whose approval rating in polls is around 18 percent, also said he would carry out a "deep evaluation" of his administration and announce changes for 2018 "collecting lessons from the experience accumulated so far."

He also said Peruvians should be given the opportunity to reconcile and put aside "the polarized and hostile environment in which we live."

While the impeachment attempt left Kuczynski weakened, it also revealed divisions inside the opposition Popular Force party, which led the impeachment drive. Lawmaker Kenji Fujimori, brother of the party's leader, abstained from the impeachment vote. Both Kenji and party leader Keiko Fujimori are children of jailed former President Alberto Fujimori.

Keiko Fujimori, 42, has tried to push a conservative political agenda while her brother has maintained amicable relations with Kuczynski and other opponents as he presses for the release of their father from prison.

Some lawmakers said Kuczynski won support in Congress by agreeing to free the former strongman, a charge the president and his supporters denied. Kuczynski has said he is evaluating Alberto Fujimori's sentence based on factors including the former president's health.

Eduardo Dargent, a political science professor at Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, said a pardon by

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Kuczynski would insult in a "serious way his base of voters" who supported him over Alberto Fujimori's daughter.

Kuczynski is one of several politicians in Latin America to be dogged by allegations of taking illicit money from Odebrecht. The Brazilian firm admitted in a 2016 U.S. Justice Department agreement to paying nearly \$800 million in kickbacks to politicians, their campaigns and political parties to secure lucrative public works contracts.

In Ecuador, Vice President Jorge Glas has been sentenced to six years in prison for orchestrating an Odebrecht bribery scheme. Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is appealing his conviction on charges of corruption and money laundering related to the plot. In Peru, two former presidents stand accused of accepting money from Odebrecht. One is behind bars and the other in the U.S. seeking to avoid extradition.

Kuczynski found himself fighting for survival after an opposition-led investigative committee revealed documents last week showing Odebrecht made \$782,000 in payments to his private consulting firm more than a decade ago. Some of the payments overlapped with years that Kuczynski spent as a high-ranking government minister.

During his 30-minute testimony Thursday, Kuczynski showed the contracts in question on an overhead screen, pointing out that none contained his signature. He said that he had no knowledge of the payments and that he never favored any company while in office.

"I am here to look you in the eye, and tell you that I am not corrupt and I have not lied," he said.

The president's detractors contended that he should have disclosed the payments before taking office and that as a high-ranking government minister when the money was paid should have done a better job to shield himself from potential conflicts of interest.

Miss America suspends CEO in email flap; more are on the way

By WAYNE PARRY, Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — The Miss America Organization suspended its CEO on Friday, less than 24 hours after leaked emails surfaced showing him and others disparaging the appearance, intellect and sex lives of former Miss Americas.

Sam Haskell said he will abide by the suspension, even while decrying the Huffington Post story on Thursday that publicized the emails as "unkind and untrue."

"My mistake is a mistake of words," Haskell wrote in a statement issued Friday night, shortly after the board suspended him indefinitely while it investigates the situation. "Much of what was reported is dishonest, deceptive, and despicable.

"The story is so unkind and untrue, and hurts me, my family, and the stewardship of this nonprofit," he wrote. "Those who know my heart know that this is not indicative of my character, nor is it indicative of my business acumen."

Yashar Ali, who wrote the Huffington Post article, defended its accuracy Friday night, saying he was given the emails by two sources "who felt that Mr. Haskell's behavior was egregious." Ali said he now plans to publish all the emails he received in a future story.

The Miss America Organization said its board "will be conducting an in-depth investigation into alleged inappropriate communications and the nature in which they were obtained."

The statement came hours after 49 former Miss Americas signed a petition demanding the resignation of Haskell and other pageant officials, as did more than 1,600 state and local titleholders, contestants and pageant volunteers.

The Miss America Organization did not indicate whether Haskell would be paid during his suspension.

The emails included one that used a vulgar term for female genitalia to refer to past Miss America winners, one that wished that a particular former Miss America had died, and others that speculated about how many sex partners another former Miss America has had.

Several of the emails targeted Mallory Hagan, who won the 2013 pageant, claiming she had gained

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weight after winning and speculating about how many men she had sex with.

"My hope is that this story that broke will bring light to the type of behavior that's been in leadership of the Miss America Organization and really help us put in place some people who care and who embody the mission of Miss America," Hagan said in a Twitter video. "Having somebody bully you, demean you, degrade you in any way is not OK."

Haskell said he was attacked for a year by two former Miss Americas who he did not name, "which impaired my judgment when responding to the inappropriate emails sent to me about them. For that, I deeply apologize.

"I have the utmost respect for the women of this program and contestants at every level," he continued. "It breaks my heart for anyone to think otherwise."

Miss America 2016 Betty Cantrell, who signed the petition, told The Associated Press she "lived under this misogynistic leadership for a year of my life, and I'm definitely glad to see all of this evidence come into the light."

She also said pageant officials "told me which former Miss Americas I wasn't allowed to associate with or pose for photos with."

On Friday, the state Casino Reinvestment Development Authority began reviewing its contract with the Miss America Organization, which has about \$4 million left on it, after numerous local and state officials called for the final year of the deal to be killed.

The emails already cost the pageant its television production partner and raised questions about the future of the nationally televised broadcast from Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall the week after Labor Day each year. Dick Clark Productions told the AP on Thursday night that it cut ties with the Miss America Organization over the emails, calling them "appalling."

The Huffington Post article shows that Haskell and others directed considerable attention to Hagan. He forwarded an email he had been sent regarding Hagan to a writer for the pageant, who has since been terminated.

The writer responded by questioning whether he and Haskell were part of a tiny group of people who had not had sex with Hagan.

According to the Huffington Post, Haskell replied: "It appears we are the only ones!"

Follow Wayne Parry at <http://twitter.com/WayneParryAC>

Tribe will move from shrinking island to farm in Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Louisiana officials have chosen a sugar cane farm as the next home for residents of a tiny, shrinking island — a move funded with a 2016 federal grant awarded to help relocate communities fleeing the effects of climate change.

Dozens of Isle de Jean Charles residents are to be relocated about 40 miles (64 kilometers) to the northwest, in Terrebonne Parish, Nola.com|The Times-Picayune and The New Orleans Advocate report.

The state is negotiating to purchase the 515-acre (208-hectare) tract, which is closer to stores, schools and health care — and which is less flood-prone than the island, which has been battered by hurricanes and tropical storms.

Louisiana's Office of Community Development expects to finalize the purchase in the coming weeks.

"Everybody seems to think it'll be a pretty quick property negotiation," said Mathew Sanders, the community development office's resilience program manager.

Construction on the new settlement could begin in late 2018 or early 2019, meaning island residents likely will have to endure at least one more hurricane season before moving.

Last year, Isle de Jean Charles became the first community in the U.S. to receive federal assistance for a large-scale retreat from the effects of climate change. About \$48 million was allotted to purchase land, build homes and move the island's approximately 80 full-time residents.

Isle de Jean Charles is home to members of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw tribe. It has lost 98 percent

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of its area since 1955. Causes include erosion, sinking of coastal land, and Mississippi River levees that block replenishing river sediment.

Climate change-triggered sea-level rise is expected eventually to drown the island.

Owned by Acadia Agricultural Holdings, the sugar farm is valued at \$19.1 million, but the actual purchase price may be about half that, Sanders said.

Albert Naquin, the tribe's chief, said he looked at the site two years ago and it was immediately his favorite.

"It's in the best part of the parish; it's the highest area," he said. "I pushed for that one."

A master plan for the new development being created by the consulting firm CSRS will include not just houses but also community spaces and maybe even features such as crawfish ponds.

"We want to move the people on the island in such a way that the community can sustain itself," Sanders said. To that end, officials may try to attract some businesses, including retail.

Bitcoin goes on wild ride and it may only get crazier

By MARLEY JAY, AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — What's a bitcoin worth? Lately nobody knows for sure, but after a wild ride on Friday, it's worth a good deal less than it was Thursday.

After losses over the last few days, the digital currency fell as much as 30 percent overnight in Asia, and the action became so frenzied that the website Coinbase suspended trading. It later made up much of that ground, and slumped 9.5 percent to \$14,042 Friday, according to the tracking site CoinDesk.

Experts are warning that bitcoin is a bubble about to burst, but things might get crazier before it does: A lot of people have heard of bitcoin by now, but very few people own it.

"Bubbles burst when the last buyers are in," said Brett Ewing, chief market strategist for First Franklin. "Who are the last buyers? The general public, unfortunately."

Ewing said 40 percent of bitcoin belongs to just 1,000 people, and hedge funds and other major investors are going to start buying it soon. But those funds may buy bitcoin and also protect themselves by placing bets that it will fall. Retail investors may just buy it only to see it fall.

"I think investors should approach it with caution and I think many people will dive into it not understanding what it is," he said.

As bitcoin skyrocketed this month, the volume of trading was unprecedented as investors hoping to catch a ride up piled in. Prices have risen so fast, the Friday returned the price of bitcoin only to where it was trading two weeks ago.

The volatility has created a circus-like atmosphere. Some companies that have added the word "bitcoin" or related terms to their names to get in on the action. The craziest thing is, it's worked.

Long Island Iced Tea Corp. until this week had been known for its peach-, raspberry-, guava-, lemon- and mango-flavored drinks. Then, on Thursday, the company announced a radical rebranding. It's changing its name to Long Blockchain Corp., shifting its primary focus from iced tea to "the exploration of and investment in opportunities that leverage the benefits of blockchain technology."

Blockchain is a ledger where transactions of digital currencies, like bitcoin, are recorded.

Shares in Long Island Iced Tea soared 200 percent in one day.

The Hicksville, New York, company did what investors are doing, hitching a ride on a currency that raced from less than \$10,000 at the end of November to almost \$20,000 on Sunday. And it cost less than \$1,000 at the beginning of the year.

The rise of price of bitcoin, which is still difficult to use if you actually want to buy something, has led to heated speculation about when the bubble might burst.

The currency has been, if nothing else, highly elastic, bouncing back every time it crashes, which occurs about once every quarter.

It fell 11.5 percent over two days in early December and 21.5 percent over five days in November.

Curiosity has now driven bitcoin to the futures market, where investors bet on which direction it will go. Bitcoin futures started trading on two major exchanges — the Cboe and CME — this month. Those

futures fell about 8 percent Friday.

If people get burned, it won't be because they were not warned.

The Securities and Exchange Commission put out a statement last week warning investors to be careful with bitcoin and other digital currencies. The Commodities Futures Trading Commission has proposed regulating bitcoin like a commodity, similar to gold or oil.

Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, a financial watchdog, issued a similar warning recently.

Dutoit out at 8 symphonies amid sexual assault accusations

By JOCELYN GECKER and JANIE HAR, Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The stellar career of world-renowned conductor Charles Dutoit has come crashing down in the wake of sexual assault accusations by three singers and a musician. Symphonies from Boston to Sydney have severed ties with the maestro, and he has canceled guest appearances with other major orchestras.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, where the 81-year-old Dutoit is artistic director and principal conductor, issued a statement early Friday saying the symphony and Dutoit "have jointly agreed to release him from his forthcoming concert obligations with the orchestra for the immediate future."

The Royal Philharmonic statement says the facts should be determined by a legal process and that Dutoit "needs to be given a fair opportunity to seek legal advice and contest these allegations."

Later Friday, The Philadelphia Orchestra became the latest to sever ties with Dutoit, its chief conductor from 2008-12, and said in a statement it has removed Dutoit's title of conductor laureate following the allegations of sexual misconduct.

It brought to eight the number of major symphonies that have ended long relationships with Dutoit since Thursday when The Associated Press published a story with graphic sexual assault accusations by the four women.

The Sydney, Boston and San Francisco symphonies also announced they were cutting ties with Dutoit, citing the "serious nature of the allegations" detailed by the AP. Meanwhile, orchestras in New York, Chicago and Cleveland quickly released statements saying that Dutoit has withdrawn his services for upcoming concerts. He was scheduled to appear at the New York Philharmonic next month; the other performances were scattered through 2018.

Aside from the orchestra statements attributed to Dutoit about his voluntary withdrawals, the famous conductor has remained silent.

Prior to release of the AP story, Dutoit did not respond to multiple attempts for comment through the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and his office in Montreal. The Royal Philharmonic said Dutoit was on vacation, but that it had forwarded the AP's emailed requests for comment directly to him. The AP also reached out to Dutoit's office with several phone calls and emails.

The reaction has been swift in the classical music world, accompanied by assertions about Dutoit's decades-long reputation for inappropriate behavior. The developments also have left the orchestras scrambling to find substitute conductors.

Joe Kluger, former president of The Philadelphia Orchestra from 1989 to 2005, told The AP that Dutoit's reputation as "extremely flirtatious" was one factor that caused the organization to pass him over twice for the job of music director during those years.

He said rumors of Dutoit's "inappropriate behavior with women were common knowledge in the classical music business." He added: "I do recall telling our staff to be wary around him and encouraged them to report any inappropriate behavior immediately."

Kluger said he was unaware of any formal complaints filed about Dutoit by musicians or staff members. He said he had never heard that Dutoit had assaulted women.

The four women who spoke to AP said Dutoit attacked them on the sidelines of rehearsals and performances with orchestras in five cities — Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and Saratoga Springs, New York. All four told the AP they never filed formal complaints because they were young and

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Dutoit was the maestro; they figured they would lose their jobs, not him.

They said the incidents occurred between 1985 and 2010 in a variety of places, including a moving car, Dutoit's dressing room, a hotel elevator and his suite at the Four Seasons Hotel in Chicago.

The women, two who were named, said the Swiss-born conductor physically restrained them, forced his body against theirs, sometimes put his tongue in their mouths and, in one case, stuck her hand down his pants.

One of the women who spoke to the AP said Dutoit attacked her on four occasions during performances with The Philadelphia Orchestra in 2006 and 2010.

The accusations against Dutoit made him the second high-profile figure in the classical music world to be accused of sexual misconduct recently. Earlier this month, the Metropolitan Opera suspended conductor James Levine when misconduct accusations surfaced.

In a long, distinguished career, Dutoit has traveled the world as a guest conductor and led several highly regarded orchestras, including the Orchestra National de France, the NHK Symphony in Tokyo and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

Pascale Ouimet, spokesman for the Montreal Symphony, where Dutoit served as music director for nearly 25 years until 2002, said he had no comment on the allegations.

Dutoit's long relationship with Montreal came to an acrimonious end in 2002, following a dispute with the musicians' union. UN Security Council imposes new sanctions on North Korea

By EDITH M. LEDERER, Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council unanimously approved tough new sanctions against North Korea on Friday in response to its latest launch of a ballistic missile that Pyongyang says is capable of reaching anywhere on the U.S. mainland.

The resolution adopted by the council includes sharply lower limits on North Korea's refined oil imports, the return home of all North Koreans working overseas within 24 months, and a crackdown on ships smuggling banned items including coal and oil to and from the country.

But the resolution doesn't include even harsher measures sought by the Trump administration that would ban all oil imports and freeze international assets of the government and its leader, Kim Jong Un.

The resolution, drafted by the United States and negotiated with the North's closest ally China, drew criticism from Russia for the short time the 13 other council nations had to consider the draft, and last-minute changes to the text. Two of those changes were extending the deadline for North Korean workers to return home from 12 months to 24 months — which Russia said was the minimum needed — and reducing the number of North Koreans being put on the U.N. sanctions blacklist from 19 to 15.

U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley said after the vote that "the unity this council has shown in leveling these unprecedented sanctions is a reflection of the international outrage at the Kim regime's actions."

The Security Council has stood united for the 10th time "against a North Korean regime that rejects the pursuit of peace," she said.

President Donald Trump tweeted the 15-0 vote, adding: "The World wants Peace, not Death!"

China's deputy U.N. ambassador, Wu Haitao, said it's "imperative" to pursue a peaceful settlement and resume dialogue and negotiations at an early date, warning that resorting to force "will only lead to disastrous consequences."

Deputy Russian Ambassador Vladimir Safronkov also demanded that key parties display "openness to genuine, meaningful political dialogue." Stressing the importance of "creative approaches," he said that "isolation and pressure must give way to dialogue and talks."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also called for a political solution, "which requires de-escalation and open communication channels now," his spokesman said.

Haley recalled that the previous sanctions resolution approved in September, when combined with earlier measures, would ban over 90 percent of North Korea's exports reported in 2016.

That resolution, adopted in response to North Korea's sixth and strongest nuclear test explosion on Sept. 3, banned North Korea from importing all natural gas liquids and condensates. It also banned all textile exports and prohibited any country from authorizing new work permits for North Korean workers — two

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key sources of hard currency for the northeast Asian nation.

Haley told the council Friday that the new resolution “bans all remaining categories of major North Korean exports — a loss of nearly \$250 million in revenue to the regime.”

Here are key provisions of the new sanctions:

—The import of refined oil products, including diesel and kerosene that are key to North Korea’s economy, is capped at 500,000 barrels a year. That represents a reduction from the 4.5 million barrels North Korea imported in 2016, and a cap of 2 million barrels in September’s resolutions. And it means the North’s refined oil imports have been cut by 90 percent.

—The import of crude oil is capped at 4 million barrels a year and countries supplying oil are required to provide quarterly reports to the Security Council committee monitoring sanctions on North Korea.

—North Korea is banned from exporting food and agriculture products, machinery, electrical equipment, earth and stones, wood and vessels — and all countries are banned from importing these items.

—All countries are banned from exporting industrial machinery, transportation vehicles, iron, steel and other metals to North Korea.

—All countries must expel North Korean workers and safety monitors by the end of 2019. The resolution expresses concern that earnings from these workers are being used to support the country’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs. According to the U.S. Mission, there are nearly 100,000 overseas North Korean workers, with about 50,000 in China and 30,000 in Russia.

—U.N. member states are authorized to seize, inspect and impound any ship in their ports or territorial waters suspected of being involved in illegal smuggling and evasion of U.N. sanctions. The resolution expresses “great concern” that North Korea is illegally exporting coal and other prohibited items “through deceptive maritime practices and obtaining petroleum illegally through ship-to-ship transfers.”

—All countries are banned from providing insurance or re-insurance to North Korean-affiliated ships believed to be involved in illegal smuggling and sanctions evasion and are required to de-register these vessels.

—Fifteen North Koreans, including 13 representing banks overseas, and the Ministry of the People’s Armed Forces were added to the U.N. sanctions blacklist. The two others facing a travel ban and asset freeze are Kim Jong Sik, identified as a leading official guiding North Korea’s development of weapons of mass destruction, and Ri Pyong Chul, an alternate member of the Political Bureau of the ruling Workers’ Party of Korea and first vice director of the Munitions Industry Department.

North Korea’s test on Nov. 29 of its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile yet was its 20th launch of a ballistic missile this year, and added to fears that it will soon have a military arsenal that can viably target the U.S. mainland.

British Ambassador Matthew Rycroft said the Security Council was sending “a very strong united signal to the North Korean regime that enough is enough — that they must stop their nuclear program and they must stop their intercontinental ballistic missile program.”

France’s U.N. ambassador, Francois Delattre, said: “We believe maximum pressure today is our best lever to a political and diplomatic solution tomorrow ... (and) our best antidote to the risk of war.”

The new resolution reiterates the Security Council’s regret at North Korea’s “massive diversion of its scarce resources toward its development of nuclear weapons and a number of expensive ballistic missile programs.” It notes that 41 percent of the population is undernourished.

The resolution reaffirms the council’s support for a resumption of six-party talks on North Korea’s nuclear program aimed at the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

It also reiterates the importance of maintaining peace and stability in northeast Asia and “expresses its commitment to a peace, diplomatic and political solution to the situation ... through dialogue.”

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Video: Train crew not using electronic devices before crash

By PHUONG LE, Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Video from the cab of the Amtrak train that hurtled off the tracks in Washington state, killing three people and injuring dozens, shows that the engineer did not appear to be using a cellphone or any other personal electronic device just before the derailment, federal investigators said Friday.

The video and audio captured from a camera facing inside the cab also revealed that the engineer was heard commenting about the train’s speed just before the train crashed while traveling more than double the posted 30 mph (48 kph) speed limit. But authorities did not provide a transcript of what he said, saying only in a summary that “about six seconds prior to the derailment, the engineer made a comment regarding an over speed condition.”

The video also showed that the engineer did not place the train’s brake handle in the emergency-braking mode as the locomotive was recorded traveling 78 mph (126 kph), according to the preliminary details of an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board.

The video recording “ended as the locomotive was tilting and the crew was bracing for impact” south of Seattle on Monday, the safety board said.

The train was carrying 85 passengers and crew members as it made its inaugural run along a fast, new 15-mile (24-kilometer) bypass route. Officials have said previously that another person was inside the locomotive’s cab being trained by the engineer.

Federal investigators trying to determine the cause of the wreck have gathered data from the locomotive’s

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tive's event data recorder as well as inward- and outward-facing train cameras. They have said their full investigation could take more than a year.

NTSB board member Bella Dinh-Zarr said earlier this week that the locomotive's emergency brake went off automatically and was not manually activated by the engineer.

Rail-safety experts have said the engineer should have activated the brake about a minute before the train reached the curve posted for 30 mph (48 kph), and that not doing so strongly suggested that the engineer may have been distracted for an extended period. The engineer, who was among the injured, has not been identified and investigators have said they planned to speak with him soon.

None of the critical train speed-control technology that could have prevented a derailment was active on the section of track where the derailment happened before the train set off on its maiden voyage Monday.

Work to install the GPS-based technology known as positive train control is not expected to be completed until next spring on the newly opened span where the train derailed, according to Sound Transit, the public agency that owns the tracks.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, said on Wednesday that Amtrak had committed to making sure the technology will be in place statewide as soon as possible and before the Dec. 31, 2018 deadline.

Amtrak President and CEO Richard Anderson said in a statement Friday that the technology will make the entire U.S. railroad network safer.

"It is imperative that the rail industry urgently work together to get PTC activated on the national network as soon as possible — and certainly by the December 2018 federal deadline, if not before," he said.

Passenger service along the rail line where the train derailed will not resume service until the advanced safety systems are in place, Washington transportation officials have said.

Experts have said it is likely the technology would have prevented Monday's derailment in Washington state.

Rail crash data obtained by The Associated Press found that nearly 300 people have died in train crashes that could have been prevented if railroads across the U.S. implemented that critical speed-control technology — something federal safety investigators have been pushing for close to five decades.

Congress for years has extended the deadlines for railroads to implement positive train control.

On Friday, 15 Democratic U.S. senators, including Sens. Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray in Washington state, sent a letter to Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao saying it's imperative that railroads put the technology in place before the December 2018 federal deadline.

Investigators have also said they are looking into whether the engineer was distracted by a second person in the cab or by something else. The other person inside the cab was an in-training conductor familiarizing himself with the route.

For complete coverage of the deadly derailment, click here: <https://www.apnews.com/tag/TrainDerailment>

Trump signs tax cut in "rush job" Oval Office signing event

By LAURIE KELLMAN and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the end, Donald Trump's top achievement as president— a \$1.5 trillion tax overhaul — was finalized in a "rush job" of an affair. And that was OK with him.

None of the members of Congress who muscled through the biggest tax overhaul in 30 years were in the Oval Office on Friday as Trump signed the measure into law. That's because the president was not pleased with news coverage that morning questioning whether he would get the bill signed before Christmas. So he ordered up a spur-of-the-moment signing event where he ticked through what he described as the "tremendous" accomplishments of his first year in office.

"This is the capper," Trump said of the tax package, using his last moments of the year in the White House to sign the bill before flying to Florida for the holidays. He also signed a temporary spending bill to keep the government running and provide money to upgrade the nation's missile defenses.

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But the tax cut was at the top of Trump's mind after months of struggling to deliver his agenda through a Republican-controlled Congress. Trump on Friday thanked the absent GOP leaders and called the bill "something I'm very proud of."

Then, with no legislators on hand, he offered to distribute pens from his signing event to reporters assembled in the Oval Office. Clearly feeling some end-of-year cheer, the president who loves to decry "fake news" gave reporters and camera crews credit for "working very hard" and said, "We really appreciate that."

Starting next year, the new tax law will deliver big cuts to corporation and wealthy Americans and more modest reductions to other families. The tax law is the largest since 1986, but far from the biggest in American history, as the president repeatedly claims.

The first major overhaul of the nation's tax laws since 1986 could add \$1.5 trillion to the national debt over the next decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Republican leaders have said they're willing to take that step in pursuit of a boost to the economy. But some in the GOP worry their party could face a political backlash without an aggressive public relations tour.

Trump continued to pitch the new law as a win a for the middle class, insisting that even though polling indicates the tax cut is unpopular, the results will win people over.

"I don't think I'm going to have to travel too much to sell it" during the 2018 midterm elections, Trump said. "I think it's selling itself."

Passage of the tax bill marked a significant victory for a president hungry for a win after chaos and legislative failures during his first year in office. Trump also ended the year with his sights still trained on his treatment by the press, tweeting that the mainstream media "NEVER talk about our accomplishments in the end of year reviews."

"We are compiling a long @ beautiful list," he tweeted.

Trump did celebrate passage of the tax bill at with a big ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House earlier in the week. But he scrapped plans for a more formal signing ceremony in the new year to get it signed before heading to his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

"I said that the bill would be on my desk before Christmas," Trump said, as a Marine helicopter whirred outside, waiting to ferry him to Air Force One. "I didn't want you folks to say that I wasn't keeping my promise."

There were more big promises to come, including Trump's suggestion that he'll work with Democrats in the election year to rebuild the nation's roads and bridges. Infrastructure, he said, is "easy."

And there was no looking back.

Asked if he had any regrets, Trump shook his head and said, "No."

Lemire reported from New York. Follow Kellman on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@APLaurieKellman>

More than 4 in 5 enrolled in 'Obamacare' are in Trump states

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and KEVIN S. VINEYS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans in states that Donald Trump carried in his march to the White House account for more than 4 in 5 of those signed up for coverage under the health care law the president still wants to take down.

An Associated Press analysis of new figures from the government found that 7.3 million of the 8.8 million consumers signed up so far for next year come from states Trump won in the 2016 presidential election. The four states with the highest number of sign-ups — Florida, Texas, North Carolina and Georgia, accounting for nearly 3.9 million customers — were all Trump states.

"There's politics, and then there's taking care of yourself and your family," said analyst Chris Sloan of the consulting firm Avalere Health. "You can have political views about a program like the Affordable Care Act, but when you get an opportunity to get subsidized health insurance for you and your family ... politics is a distant consideration."

AP's analysis found that 11 states beat 2017's enrollment figures. Of them, eight — Iowa, Kansas, Ken-

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tucky, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming— went for Trump, who posted double-digit victories in all but Iowa.

To be sure, Trump states are also home to many people who voted for Democrat Hillary Clinton. But the AP's analysis points to a pattern of benefits from the health law in states the president won. The premium dollars have economic ripple effects, reimbursing hospitals and doctors for services that might otherwise have gone unpaid and written off as bad debt. Also, people with health insurance are better able to manage chronic medical problems, remaining productive, tax-paying members of society.

Such economic and political realities will be in the background when Congress returns in January to another installment of the nation's long-running debate over health care. Republicans and Democrats seem to have battled to a draw for now.

The year 2019 — the effective date for repeal of the ACA's requirement that most people have coverage — is looking like a time of reckoning for the law's insurance markets, which offer subsidized private plans to people who don't have job-based coverage.

Unexpectedly strong enrollment numbers announced this week for the 39 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov website testify to consumer demand for the program and its guarantee that people with medical problems can't be turned away. Yet those numbers still lag behind last season's sign-up total.

It's unclear what the final count for next year will be. HealthCare.gov numbers released Thursday are incomplete, and some states running their own insurance websites will continue enrolling people throughout January.

Separately, actions by the Trump administration and the GOP-led Congress are creating incentives for healthy people to stay out of the health law's insurance markets.

Starting in 2019, people won't have to worry about incurring a fine from the IRS for being uninsured, because the tax overhaul repeals that mandate. At the same time, the administration is taking regulatory action to open a path for the sale of low-cost insurance plans that don't provide the health law's benefits or guarantees.

"The real worry for me is what the health plans do," said Sloan. "If they decide that without the mandate it's not worth staying in this market, you could end up with swaths of the country having no insurers."

Bipartisan legislation to stabilize insurance markets is still alive in Congress, but its prospects are unclear.

On Friday, Trump said he thinks repealing the mandate as part of the tax overhaul "ultimately leads to the end of Obamacare." The president continued to ignore other parts of the law that remain untouched by the tax bill, including its Medicaid expansion benefiting low-income adults and the popular protections for people with pre-existing conditions.

Others say a corner has been turned in the health care debate, but where it will end up is still uncertain.

Former President Barack Obama's law "is more durable and important to Americans in terms of getting affordable health insurance than even its advocates expected," said John McDonough, a professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, who served as an adviser to Senate Democrats during the ACA debate more than seven years ago.

"With the end of the attempts to bring it down and to repeal it, perhaps there will be opportunities in the near future to try to actually build up and improve it, because it could use some work," he added.

AP broadcast journalist Shelley Adler contributed to this report.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 23, the 357th day of 2017. There are eight days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 23, 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson, on his way home from a visit to Australia and Southeast Asia, held an unprecedented meeting with Pope Paul VI at the Vatican; during the two-hour conference,

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Johnson asked the pope for help in bringing a peaceful end to the Vietnam War.

On this date:

In 1788, Maryland passed an act to cede an area "not exceeding ten miles square" for the seat of the national government; about 2/3 of the area became the District of Columbia.

In 1823, the poem "Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas" was published in the Troy (New York) Sentinel; the verse, more popularly known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas," was later attributed to Clement C. Moore.

In 1913, the Federal Reserve System was created as President Woodrow Wilson signed the Federal Reserve Act.

In 1928, the National Broadcasting Company set up a permanent, coast-to-coast network.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt restored the civil rights of about 1,500 people who had been jailed for opposing the (First) World War.

In 1941, during World War II, American forces on Wake Island surrendered to the Japanese.

In 1948, former Japanese premier Hideki Tojo and six other Japanese war leaders were executed in Tokyo.

In 1954, the first successful human kidney transplant took place at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston as a surgical team removed a kidney from 23-year-old Ronald Herrick and implanted it in Herrick's twin brother, Richard.

In 1968, 82 crew members of the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo were released by North Korea, 11 months after they had been captured.

In 1975, Richard S. Welch, the Central Intelligence Agency station chief in Athens, was shot and killed outside his home by the militant group November 17.

In 1986, the experimental airplane Voyager, piloted by Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager, completed the first non-stop, non-refueled round-the-world flight as it returned safely to Edwards Air Force Base in California.

In 1997, a federal jury in Denver convicted Terry Nichols of involuntary manslaughter and conspiracy for his role in the Oklahoma City bombing, declining to find him guilty of murder. (Nichols was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

Ten years ago: The New England Patriots set an NFL record with their 15th regular-season win, the best start in league history, as they beat the Miami Dolphins 28-7. Jazz pianist Oscar Peterson died in Mississauga, Canada, at age 82. Choreographer Michael Kidd, 92, died in Los Angeles. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II launched her own special Royal Channel on YouTube.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, Hawaii Gov. Neil Abercrombie and other dignitaries attended a memorial service for the late Sen. Daniel Inouye at Honolulu's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. Jean Harris, the patrician girls' school headmistress who spent 12 years in prison for the 1980 killing of her longtime lover, "Scarsdale Diet" doctor Herman Tarnower, died in New Haven, Connecticut, at age 89.

One year ago: The United States allowed the U.N. Security Council to condemn Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem as a "flagrant violation" of international law; the decision to abstain from the council's 14-0 vote was one of the biggest American rebukes of its longstanding ally in recent memory. Actress-writer Carrie Fisher was transported to a Los Angeles hospital after suffering a severe medical emergency on an international flight; she died four days later at age 60.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ronnie Schell is 86. Emperor Akihito of Japan is 84. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Paul Hornung is 82. Actor Frederic Forrest is 81. Rock musician Jorma Kaukonen (YOR'-mah KOW'-kah-nen) is 77. Rock musician Ron Bushy is 76. Actor-comedian Harry Shearer is 74. U.S. Army Gen. Wesley K. Clark (ret.) is 73. Actress Susan Lucci is 71. Singer-musician Adrian Belew is 68. Rock musician Dave Murray (Iron Maiden) is 61. Actress Joan Severance is 59. Singer Terry Weeks is 54. Rock singer Eddie Vedder (Pearl Jam) is 53. The former first lady of France, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, is 50. Rock musician Jamie Murphy is 42. Jazz musician Irvin Mayfield is 40. Actress Estella Warren is 39. Actress Elvy Yost is 30. Actress Anna Maria Perez de Tagle (TAG'-lee) is 27. Actor Spencer Daniels is 25.

Thought for Today: "Only the thinking man lives his life, the thoughtless man's life passes him by." — Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Austrian writer (1830-1916).