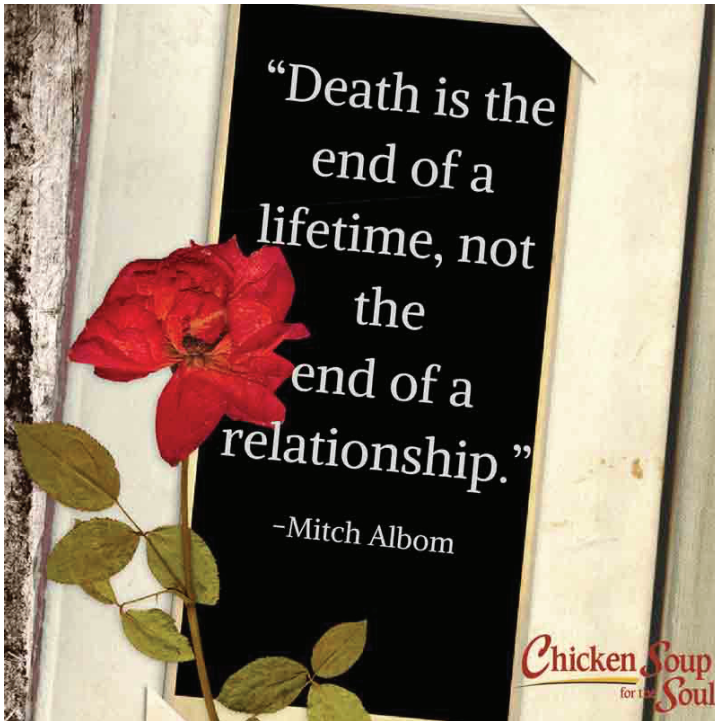


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POINSETT'S LEGACY LIVES ON IN CHRISTMAS FLOWER 19th-Century American Diplomat is Namesake of Poinsettia

By Tom Emery

Some say it just isn't Christmas without the poinsettia, a colorful addition to the holiday season. Outside of his native state, the flower's namesake has been lost to history.

The plant is named for Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first American ambassador to Mexico, who distributed cuttings of the flower he found during a diplomatic excursion. Botany was one of many interests for Poinsett, a renaissance man ahead of his time.

Born on March 2, 1779 in Charleston, S.C., Poinsett was educated in England and spoke six languages. One scholar described him as "socially skilled, well-connected, and...a gracious host."

Extensive travel in Europe as a young man brought him in contact with many European dignitaries. Poinsett then spent 1810-1815 in South America upon appointment of President Madison, who sent him to determine which nations in rebellion with Spain were interested in treaties with America.

After a stint in the South Carolina legislature, Poinsett was elected to three terms in the U.S. House as a Democrat. He resigned during his third term in 1825 to accept an appointment by President Monroe as the first U.S. Minister to Mexico.

He held the position until 1829 and was often at the center of controversy, particularly over Texas annexation. Poinsett unsuccessfully attempted to broker a \$5 million deal to acquire Texas, and his relations with the Mexican government were strained.

While in Mexico, Poinsett became fascinated with a red flower called Flor de Noche Buena, or the Christmas Eve Flower. In 1828, he shipped cuttings of the flower to friends, and one made its way to the Royal Botanic Garden in Scotland.

Despite the turmoil surrounding his time in Mexico, Poinsett had scattered support as a Presidential candidate. Elected to another term in the South Carolina house in 1830, he earned a spot in President Van Buren's Cabinet as Secretary of War in 1837.

During his term, Poinsett advocated exploration of the American West and played a key role in the creation of the National Institution for the Promotion of Science, now the Smithsonian Institution. He also hired Robert Mills, another South Carolina resident, to create what became the National Mall in Washington.

For much of the 1830s and 1840s, Poinsett spent time at his fine home near Greenville, S.C., which featured a scenic garden that he designed.

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He remained politically active after leaving the Cabinet in 1841 and opposed both the Mexican War and his state's secession movement.

Poinsett died near Statesburg, S.C. on Dec. 12, 1851 and is buried in the Episcopal Cemetery there.

The day of his death has been designated National Poinsettia Day in the United States, a holiday that, like Poinsett himself, is largely obscure.

However, he remains a stalwart of South Carolina history. A state park and electronic combat range for military training south of Sumter both bear his name, while in Greenville, a bridge, highway, and hotel all are named for him. A statue of Poinsett is also a Greenville attraction.

The poinsettia has become a \$250 million industry in the United States, largely due to the efforts of Albert Ecke, a German immigrant in southern California at the turn of the century who shared Poinsett's fascination with the flower. His son, Paul Sr., created a grafting technique to aid production, while his grandson, Paul Jr., helped launch the poinsettia into an American holiday fixture.

Today, the Paul Ecke Ranch near Encinitas, Calif. accounts for 70 percent of all American poinsettia purchases and half of worldwide sales. The best-selling potted plant in both the U.S. and Canada, poinsettias are usually bought by women, resulting in eighty percent of sales.

Some 100 varieties of poinsettias are available today, though 74 percent of Americans still prefer red poinsettias, followed by eight percent white and six percent pink.

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

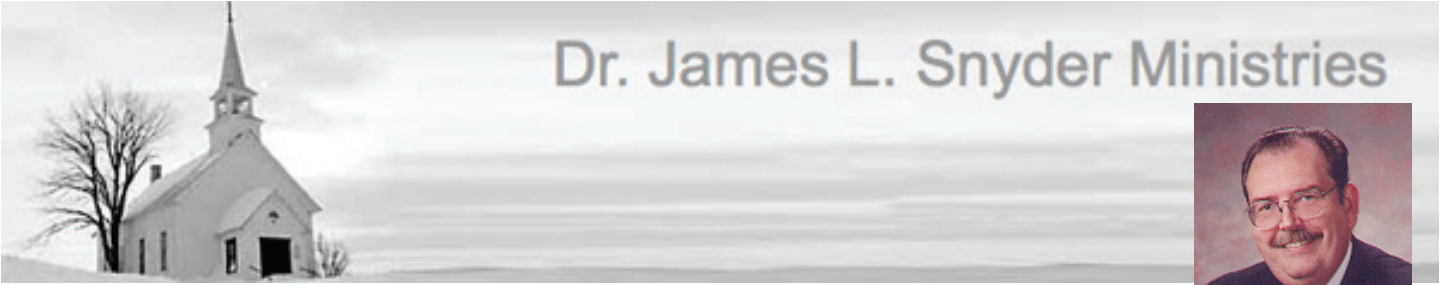


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year old founder of Ace
and legendary ethanol
supporter... "because it is
the right thing to do")**

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The Year Slipped into the Silence of the Night

No time in the year is busier than the Christmas holiday season. Under normal circumstances, it would not be too bad, except for the fact that the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is in charge.

Not complaining, mind you, but she is in charge 365 days out of the year. Her battery never runs down and never needs charging.

I am glad she is like that because it gives me less to do during such busy holiday times. She knows exactly what she is going to do and how she is going to do it and when she is going to do it. My job during the holiday season is to Stay Out Of Her Way.

However, the hustle and the bustle of the holiday season is over and for a minute or two, we can relax.

I never know when that time comes. Like I got up early the other morning and heard from the other side of the bed, "What are you getting up for? Don't you know Christmas is over?"

When we did get up, she fixed our morning coffee and we sat around the Christmas tree just enjoying the quietness. A few days ago, the whole room was alive with chatter and laughter. You might recognize that as "grandchildren." Of course, this was the first year we had our great grandson with us. It was a hilarious time of noise and activity.

What would Christmas be without that kind of celebration?

Now it is over and we were sitting around staring at the Christmas tree drinking our After-Christmas-Morning-Joe.

Not paying attention to anything that was going on, just enjoying the silence I did not hear my wife sighing. It was a gentle sigh, so I did not hear it right away.

That is the difference between husbands and wives. My wife can hear what I am thinking seven days before I even start thinking. A man, on the other hand, takes seven days just to hear something.

It finally came to me what she was doing and so I asked, "What are you in such deep thought about?"

That brought another deep sigh and a moment of silence and then she said, "I can't believe another year is gone."

At first, I did not know what she was talking about so I asked her to repeat and explain what she was talking about.

"I can't believe," she repeated with a deep sigh, "that another year has gone by so quickly."

After a few thoughtful seconds, I begin to understand what she was saying. Another year has slipped by into the silence of the night to be seen no more.

At first, it was a little disconcerting. I was having fun, or so I thought, during the year. To see that go was a little bit disturbing and so I began sighing deep sighs. We formed a wonderful duet singing the "Silent-Night-Sighing-Duo."

With only a few more hours left of the old year I really did not know how to spend it. It goes by so fast that it is hard for me to keep up. What could I do for a couple of hours that would make this year a remarkable year?

Then my wife challenged me with a very sophisticated question. She certainly knows how to interrogate a person and should be on the FBI's payroll.

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"What was," she said rather thoughtfully, "the one most important part of this year for you?"

What a question. How can you boil a whole year down to one thing? After all, you have 365 days, 52 weeks and 12 months, how in the world can you boil all that down to one thing?

"I'm not sure," I said rather hesitatingly. "What was your one important aspect of the year?"

I thought I could deflect the question and get her talking about her year and forgetting about my year. She had many things that were very important to her during the year. Most of it had to do with her grandchildren. If there were an annual award for the best grandmother, she would probably win.

Then of course, there were the thrift store shopping escapades. She knows every thrift store in the county and knows everybody working those stores. The most important aspect of this is, they know her and quite well.

I would be failing in my duty as a husband if I did not mention the marvelous cooking and baking she has done throughout the year. She once mentioned that maybe I should go on a diet and I rebutted by saying, "How in the world could I give up eating your delicious food?" She smiled and never mentioned going on a diet again.

Hoping she had forgotten about me, she turned to me and ask, "So, what was the best part of your year?"

Finally, a thought came to me, and I replied, "Spending the year was someone like you." I thought that would get me off the hook for a while until she responded by saying, "What do you mean someone like me?"

Sometimes no matter what you do or say, it's not the right thing.

David knew something of this when he wrote, "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search" (Psalm 77:5-6).

Cherishing good memories makes the New Year that much more exciting.

Debaters at Brookings Tourney

The GHS debate team competed at the Brookings Bell Invitational Debate tournament December 15-16. Schools from across the state participated in this event. The GHS team placed 3rd in the A school division sweepstakes. Leading GHS to this team placing was the novice public forum debate team of Payton Colestock and Indigo Rogers. Colestock and Rogers placed 2nd overall and were undefeated. Placing first in this division, and also undefeated but with a few more speaker points, was a team from Yankton High School. Samantha Pappas also just missed a berth into the final of Novice Extemporaneous Speaking. Also helping to earn team points were the following GHS competitors: novice public forum debate-- S. Pappas, KaSandra Pappas, Rily Rosenau, and Kayla Jensen; novice Lincoln Douglas debate-- James Cranford; drama-- Cranford; informative-- Rogers and Rosenau; novice oratory-- K. Pappas and Jensen.



Payton Colestock and Indigo Rogers placed second at the Brookings Bell Invitational Debate Tournament.



Restoring Balance to the Court System

In the United States, we expect our judicial system to treat all Americans equally. After all, it is our judicial system which we rely on to assure due process of law.

The federal courts play a critical role in our constitutional system. Because of this, it is important that federal judges faithfully apply the law as written. This year, the Senate has been able to put a number of highly-qualified judges on the federal bench who are committed to fulfilling that role.

The process for filling vacant federal judgeships begins with a nomination by the president. The nominee then must be confirmed by the Senate following a thorough vetting process. Confirming highly-qualified judges is one of the most important roles of the United States Senate. Because the federal judges hold lifetime appointments, it is vital to make certain that they base their decisions on the rule of law rather than their personal policy preferences or feelings.

Under the previous administration and a Democrat-controlled Senate, court vacancies were filled with liberal, activist judges seeking to rule based on what they want the law to be, not on what Congress actually legislated. With President Trump in office, we have been able to change course and begin to balance out the courts with judges who interpret the law as it was written. In 2017, we have appointed 12 highly-qualified circuit court judges who are committed to this view of the law.

Last year, while he was a circuit court judge, Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch explained that a good judge should strive to “apply the law as it is, focusing backward, not forward, and looking to text, structure, and history to decide what a reasonable reader at the time of the events in question would have understood the law to be – not to decide cases based on their own moral convictions or the policy consequences they believe might serve society best.”

I agree with Justice Gorsuch that the role of a judge is to apply the law faithfully and impartially, not to legislate from the bench. It’s important that we continue confirming the dozens of pending nominations to keep the judicial system fully functioning. There are still more than 100 federal court vacancies across the country. I look forward to continuing to do my part in putting fair-minded judges on the bench who understand the role of the judiciary is to interpret the law as written, not to make the law.

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Koehler receives first place in GDI Lighting Contest



The Rick and Sherry Koehler home at 801 N 3rd St. in Groton took first place in the second annual GDI Lighting Contest sponsored by the Groton Daily Independent. The Koehler's received a tree ornament reflecting the first place and also a \$25 gift certificate from the Groton Dairy Queen and Subway of Groton. Julianna (left) and Jeslyn (right) presented the award to Sherry Koehler.



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Today in Weather History

December 24, 1985: Snow fell over western South Dakota on December 23, with the greatest amounts in the northern Black Hills. Strong winds gusting to 50-60 mph developed over the western part of the state on the evening of December 23rd and continued into the morning of the 24th, with gusts to above 40 mph in the east. The winds caused ground blizzard conditions in the northern and central sections of South Dakota, and many vehicles were reported in ditches. Many people were stranded for a time in Martin in Bennett County. Several roads were completely blocked during this time, such as Highway 248 near Murdo in Jones County.

December 24, 1992: A deep area of low pressure traveled across the United States/Canada border, dragging a cold front southward across South Dakota and Minnesota by Christmas Day. Southerly winds gusted up to 50 mph over western Minnesota on the 23rd in advance of the storm, causing ground blizzard conditions. As the arctic cold front swept across the area, temperatures tumbled from the 20s and 30s to well below zero by Christmas morning. Wind gusts were up to 50 mph behind the front, causing ground blizzard conditions and wind chill readings from 40 to 60 degrees below zero. A church that was under construction in Litchfield in Meeker County, Minnesota was destroyed by strong winds. Many motorists were stranded on Christmas Eve and spent the night at area homes and motels. Interstate 94 from Alexandria to Moorhead, MN was closed for nearly eight hours. High winds gusted up to 55 mph in the Watertown, SD area, causing a steel frame building under construction to collapse sometime between 9 and 10 pm CST.

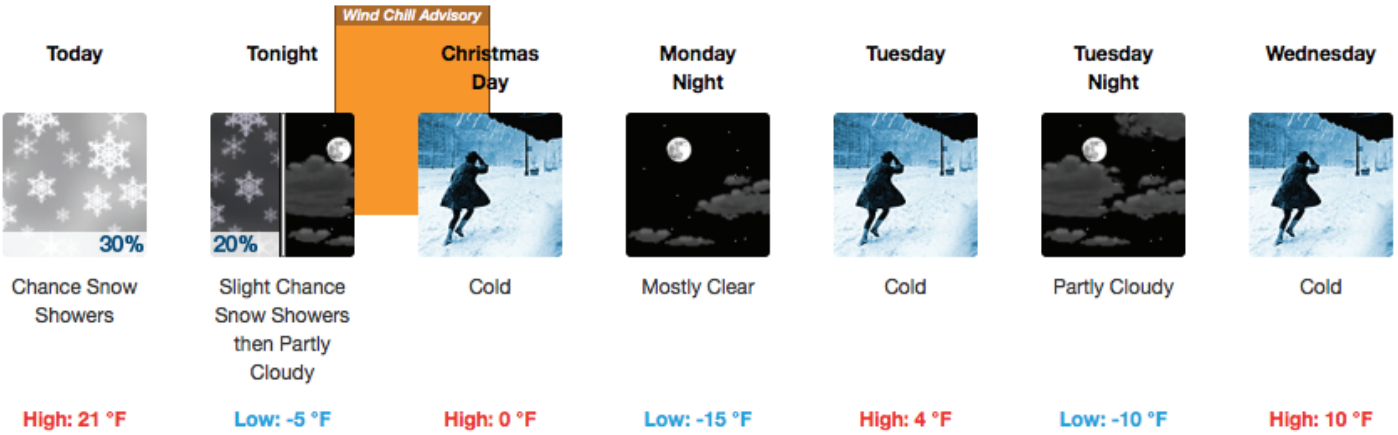
December 24, 2009: A broad upper level low pressure area over the Upper Midwest associated with an intense surface low pressure area brought widespread heavy snow along with blizzard conditions to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. The storm was a slow mover and produced several rounds of snow over a three-day period. Total snowfall amounts were from 7 to as much as 25 inches. The heavy snow combined with winds of 25 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with visibilities frequently less than a quarter of a mile. This blizzard ranked in the top three for South Dakota snowfall with a state average of 15.4 inches. Most of the state received 10 inches of snowfall or more with many locations with 20 inches or more. Pollock in north central South Dakota set an all-time high three-day snowfall total with 17 inches. Prior to the onset of the storm, the Governor declared a state of emergency for South Dakota. Large portions of both Interstates 29 and 90 across South Dakota were closed late on Thursday, December 24th. Both Interstates were closed through Christmas Day and into Saturday, December 26th. There were some stranded holiday travelers due to the road closings along with a few rescues. Most roads were reopened by Sunday morning, December 27th. There were also several vehicle accidents with nothing serious. Several airports were also closed throughout the storm along with a few spotty power outages occurring in Lyman County in central South Dakota. Total snowfall amounts over the three-day period predominantly ranged from 1 to 2 feet. Snowfall amounts with a foot or more included; 12 inches at Mobridge, Eureka, Waubay, and Eagle Butte; 13 inches at Highmore and Miller; 14 inches at

Castlewood, Summit, Watertown, Pierre, and Ree Heights; 15 inches at Groton, Gettysburg, Webster, Wilmot, Hayti, and McLaughlin; 16 inches at McIntosh, east of Hayes and east of Hosmer; 17 inches at Timber Lake, Britton, and Pollock; 18 inches near Victor; 20 inches near Keldron; 22 inches at Murdo; 23 inches at Sisseton and 25 inches at Kennebec. In west central Minnesota Wheaton received 11 inches, Browns Valley received 15 inches with 16 inches at Ortonville and Artichoke Lake.

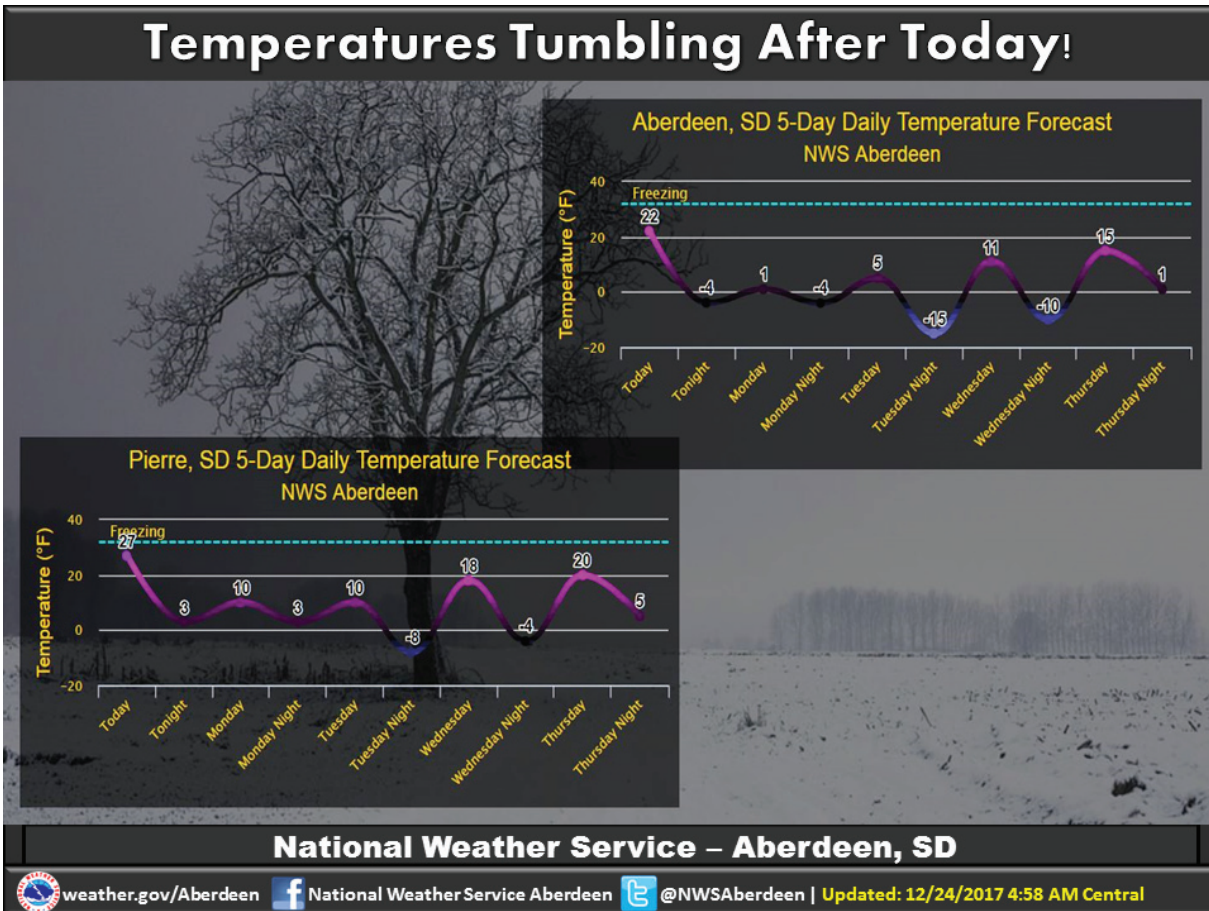
December 24, 2004: An extremely rare snowstorm impacts southeastern Texas on this day. Corpus Christi International Airport officially measured 4.4 inches from this event. This was their second white Christmas ever recorded in Corpus Christi. The other white Christmas occurred in 1918 when 0.1 inches was reported.

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Temperatures Tumbling After Today!



Published on: 12/24/2017 at 5:37AM

Today will be the last day of temperatures warming anywhere close to climate normal, since an arctic cold front will push its way south through the region late today and overnight. The front will aide in the formation of some isolated to scattered snow showers by this afternoon through this evening. Temperatures generally in the single digits above zero can be expected on Christmas Day. Some areas may end up experiencing steady or even slowly falling temperatures throughout the day on Monday. A Wind Chill Advisory has been posted for late tonight into Christmas morning across north central South Dakota where wind chills are forecast to dip to 20 below to 25 below zero.

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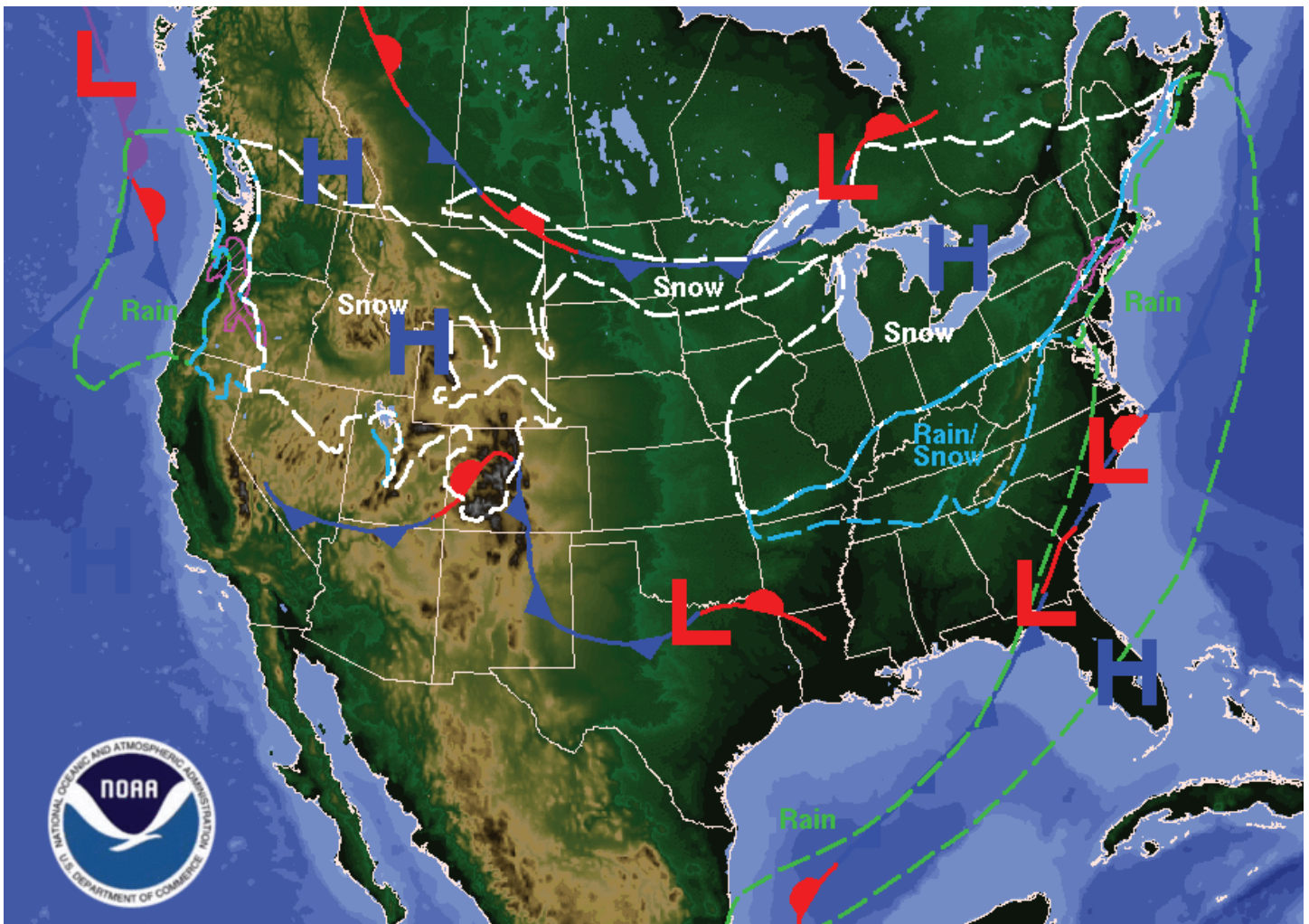
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 22.3 at 3:04 PM
Low Outside Temp: -4.2 at 6:43 AM
Wind Chill: -13.0 at 6:33 AM
High Gust: 17 mph at 3:48 PM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 50° in 1943
Record Low: -24° in 1996
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 4°F
Average Precip in Dec: 0.39
Precip to date in Dec: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.59
Precip Year to Date: 13.47
Sunset Tonight: 4:55 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Sun, Dec 24, 2017, issued 4:14 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Hurley 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)



JOSEPH'S DREAM

"...Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

'Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means "God is with us."'

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife."

When the Lord calls us to do His work, and we are faithful and obedient to Him, great things happen!

Matthew 1:18-24 New Living Translation

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2018 Groton SD Community Events

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

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash

01-23-27-29-34

(one, twenty-three, twenty-seven, twenty-nine, thirty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$52,000

Lotto America

02-32-37-39-51, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 4

(two, thirty-two, thirty-seven, thirty-nine, fifty-one; Star Ball: five; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$16.72 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$277 million

Powerball

01-03-13-15-44, Powerball: 25, Power Play: 2

(one, three, thirteen, fifteen, forty-four; Powerball: twenty-five; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$300 million

Vikings shut out Packers 16-0, keep eye on 1st-round bye

By GENARO C. ARMAS, AP Sports Writer

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — While winning at Lambeau Field means a lot to the Minnesota Vikings, the NFC North champions have bigger goals in mind.

A first-round playoff bye is well within reach, and could be secured as soon as Sunday.

The Vikings took care of business on their end with a 16-0 victory Saturday night over the injury-depleted Green Bay Packers, the team's first shutout in 24 years. Having already clinched the division title, Minnesota (12-3) can wrap up a first-round bye if the Carolina Panthers lose or tie on Sunday against Tampa Bay.

"I'm hoping we can get one more win, work on some things we need to work on ... and then go out and play our rear ends off in the playoffs," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said.

Stefon Diggs caught a 4-yard pass from quarterback Case Keenum just inside the back line of the end zone in the first quarter for the only touchdown. After the game, Keenum stopped before heading up the tunnel at Lambeau, clapping his hands above his head while Vikings fans chanted "Skol! Skol!"

They felt right at home in Titledown.

"Defense played absolutely incredible today, and we did enough. It doesn't matter how, it matters how many," Keenum said.

The Packers (7-8) managed to hold a 239-236 edge in total yards. They were still shut out twice in a season for the first time since 2006.

"I never felt more defeated, more embarrassed by a performance. Yeah, we had opportunities, and we didn't connect when we did," receiver Randall Cobb said.

In its defense, the team fielded a lineup that often looked like one coach Mike McCarthy might send out for a game late in the preseason. The Packers had already been eliminated from playoff contention.

Brett Hundley was 17 of 40 for 130 yards with two interceptions in taking over at quarterback again for

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Aaron Rodgers, who returned to injured reserve this week after missing seven games earlier in the year with a collarbone injury.

"It's so frustrating just because of the fact that I know what I can do," Hundley said. "But to go out there and not be consistent — which is my number one goal — and just give our team an opportunity to win each game, that hurts."

MINNESOTA MILESTONES: The Vikings forced an incompleteness into the end zone on fourth-and-4 from the 14 early in the fourth quarter to turn away the Packers' last best effort to cross the goal line. Minnesota safety Harrison Smith ended another Green Bay drive with an interception at the Vikings 5 late in the second quarter. Minnesota left frigid Lambeau Field with its first shutout since a 13-0 win over Detroit on Dec. 5, 1993. It was the first shutout over the Packers since Nov. 14, 1971.

THAT HURTS: Starting outside linebackers Clay Matthews (hamstring) and Nick Perry (ankle/shoulder) missed the game for Green Bay, along with cornerback Damarious Randall (hamstring). The Packers didn't have leading receiver Davante Adams, who is in the concussion protocol, and then lost wideout Jordy Nelson and tight end Richard Rodgers to shoulder injuries in the first half.

"Injuries are unfortunate. We had a lot of opportunities tonight. We didn't make the plays," McCarthy said.

FROZEN TUNDRA: The hard turf at chilly Lambeau didn't help, either, as some players had trouble with their footing early in the game. With the Packers unable to connect on medium-to-long-range passes, their best plays came when Hundley broke free for big gains on the run.

In the stands, fans bundled up in parkas, huddled under blankets and sipped on free hot chocolate to stay warm. Purple-clad Minnesota backers celebrated on a night when temperatures were in the single digits.

STAT WATCH: Diggs finished with five catches for 60 yards. Keenum was 14 of 25 for 139 yards. ... The Packers were also shut out 23-0 by Baltimore on Nov. 19. ... Hundley finished the home schedule having thrown no touchdowns and seven interceptions in six games at Lambeau.

INJURY REPORT: The Vikings said left guard Nick Easton will have surgery after breaking his right ankle in the first quarter. Long snapper Kevin McDermott (shoulder) left late in the second quarter, with backup TE David Morgan taking over snapping duties. ... For the Packers, RT Jason Spriggs was carted off the field with a knee injury on the first play from scrimmage. Justin McCray, who was starting at right guard for Jahri Evans (knee), slid over to tackle with Lucas Patrick taking over at guard. ... Green Bay RB Aaron Jones (knee) didn't return after getting hurt in the first half.

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

Saturday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Red Cloud 83, Todd County 66

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Todd County 67, Red Cloud 53

Vets worker says she was fired for complaining about state

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — A former Davison County veterans service officer is alleging the state Department of Veterans Affairs got her fired because she raised concerns about errors in veterans' files and what she felt was improper use of military insignia on souvenir coins.

The Daily Republic reports Jessica Davidson was fired Nov. 29 after three years on the job by Brenda Bode, chairwoman of the county commission. Davidson maintains she was fired because her "whistleblowing" upset DVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman.

Davidson said that in one instance she sent an email to DVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard raising concerns about 12 veteran files that either had errors or were taking multiple weeks to be processed. She said the "final nail in the coffin" came when she raised concerns about whether the DVA's use of military

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insignia on commemorative coins for World War II veterans infringed on U.S. Department of Defense trademark guidelines.

She said she contacted DVA public information officer Audry Ricketts about her concerns and Ricketts told her it was fine. She wasn't convinced so she sent emails to trademark offices to make sure she wouldn't face any legal action for handing out the coins. One response from the Air Force Branding and Trademark Licensing Office, asked that the coins be destroyed, Davidson said.

Bode, Pollard and Zimmerman declined to speak to the newspaper. Ricketts said in a brief response to a request for comment that the DVA doesn't hire or fire county employees.

Davidson says she's contemplating a lawsuit. The county personnel manual states that the county can fire employees without any reason. State law also allows county commissioners to fire veterans service officers upon recommendation of the DVA secretary.

But Davidson's attorney, R. Shawn Tornow says a new state statute protects local government employees from retaliation for reporting violations, abuses or a danger to the public.

Commission looks for new state's attorney after resignation

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Hughes County officials are looking for a new chief prosecutor.

The Capital Journal reports the county's current state's attorney, Wendy Kloepfner, told county commissioners behind closed doors on Monday that she was trying to land a new job as Lake County's state's attorney and would resign if she got the position. Lake County commissioners gave her the job on Tuesday. She'll make \$99,651 in Lake County compared with \$83,970 in Hughes County.

Hughes County Manager Kevin Hipple began advertising the opening on Thursday and so far hasn't received any applications. Whoever gets the job would have to stand for election next year.

South Dakota nonresident pheasant licenses down 18 percent

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota wildlife officials say they've sold thousands fewer pheasant hunting licenses to out-of-state residents this year.

The Capital Journal reports sales are down about 18 percent compared with last year, when the state sold 82,522 licenses to nonresidents. As of this past Dec. 11, the state had sold 67,651. The season runs from Oct. 21 through Jan. 7.

State Wildlife Division Director Tony Leif told the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission on Friday that the reduced sales means the state will collect about \$1.7 million to \$1.8 million less than last year. He called the lost revenue "substantial."

Leif says many out-of-state hunters likely stayed away because drought hurt broods last summer. He says the state needs precipitation during the breeding season.

Rapid City residents call for pedestrian safety

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Some residents are calling for safety improvements for pedestrians along a busy, four-lane thoroughfare in Rapid City.

Six pedestrians have been struck by a car in the past five years in the area of Haines Avenue, which sees 20,000 cars a day, the Rapid City Journal reported. Figures from the South Dakota Department of Public Safety show that there have been 158 pedestrian accidents in Rapid City since 2012.

Residents have been calling for action to improve pedestrian safety in the area at recent Rapid City Council meetings. The city placed two digital radar speed limit signs to notify drivers of their current speed in the area on Thursday.

Resident Jenny Robertson has collected more than 70 signatures for a petition requesting a crosswalk sign, overhead pedestrian bridge, a reduced speed limit, school crossing sign, installation of an island in the median and/or increased street lighting.

Robertson witnessed the aftermath of an accident that killed a pedestrian crossing the thoroughfare in

November.

Steve Frooman, the city's traffic engineer, said the situation is "complicated." Frooman said installing street lighting would require moving utilities below ground. He said that reducing the speed limit would be the easiest but least effective solution.

Rapid City Police Captain James Johns believes better education is the answer, not increased enforcement. He said speed isn't a factor in the crashes.

"The factor is we have pedestrians that are out in the roadway where they should not be, and they get hit by a car," Johns said.

Frooman said installing a crosswalk near the intersection seems like the likely solution. "We have not made up our minds yet," he said.

Judge partially lifts Trump administration ban on refugees

By MARTHA BELLISLE, Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A federal judge in Seattle on Saturday partially lifted a Trump administration ban on certain refugees after two groups argued that the policy prevented people from some mostly Muslim countries from reuniting with family living legally in the United States.

U.S. District Judge James Robart heard arguments Thursday in lawsuits from the American Civil Liberties Union and Jewish Family Service, which say the ban causes irreparable harm and puts some people at risk. Government lawyers argued that the ban is needed to protect national security.

Robart ordered the federal government to process certain refugee applications. He said his order applies to people "with a bona fide relationship to a person or entity within the United States."

President Donald Trump restarted the refugee program in October "with enhanced vetting capabilities."

The day before his executive order, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Acting Homeland Security Secretary Elaine Duke and Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats sent a memo to Trump saying certain refugees must be banned unless additional security measures are implemented.

It applies to the spouses and minor children of refugees who have already settled in the U.S. and suspends the refugee program for people coming from 11 countries, nine of which are mostly Muslim.

In his decision, Robart wrote that "former officials detailed concretely how the Agency Memo will harm the United States' national security and foreign policy interests."

Robart said his order restores refugee procedures in programs to what they were before the memo and noted that this already includes very thorough vetting of individuals.

In a statement, Department of Justice spokeswoman Lauren Ehrsam said: "We disagree with the Court's ruling and are currently evaluating the next steps."

The ACLU argued the memo provided no evidence for why additional security was needed and didn't specify a timeframe for implementing the changes. The groups say the process for imposing the policy violated a federal law.

August Flentje, a Justice Department attorney, told the judge that the ban is temporary and "is a reasonable and appropriate way for agency heads to tackle gaps" in the screening process.

The lawsuits from the two groups were consolidated and represent refugees who have been blocked from entering the country.

The ACLU represents a Somali man living in Washington state who is trying to bring his family to the U.S. They have gone through extensive vetting, have passed security and medical clearances, and just need travel papers, but those were denied after the ban.

Lisa Nowlin, staff attorney for the ACLU of Washington, said in a statement they were happy for their client — "who has not yet had the opportunity to celebrate a single birthday with his younger son in person — will soon have the opportunity to hold his children, hug his wife in the very near future, and be together again as a family for the first time in four years."

Two other refugees included in the Jewish Family Service lawsuit are former Iraqi interpreters for the U.S. Army whose lives are at risk because of their service.

Another is a transgender woman in Egypt "living in such extremely dangerous circumstances that the U.S. government itself had expedited her case until the ban came down," said Mariko Hirose, a lawyer with the Jewish Family Service case.

Yet another is a single woman in Iraq, Hirose said. Her husband divorced her after she was kidnapped and raped by militants because she worked with an American company. Her family is in the U.S. but she's stranded by the ban, Hirose said.

Associated Press writer Chris Grygiel contributed to this report.

Judge: American accused of fighting for IS must get lawyer

By DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge ruled Saturday that the U.S. military must provide legal counsel to an American citizen who was picked up months ago on the Syrian battlefield and accused of fighting with Islamic State militants.

The unidentified American, who has not been charged, surrendered to U.S.-backed fighters in Syria around Sept. 12 and is currently being held in Iraq as an unlawful enemy combatant.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a court petition challenging his detention and asking to act on his behalf to provide him access to legal counsel.

Late last month, the U.S. government acknowledged that it has detained an American citizen accused of fighting with IS for months without fulfilling his request to see a lawyer. Responding to a court order, the government said the man picked up on the Syrian battlefield indicated he was willing to talk to FBI agents but "felt he should have an attorney present."

In her ruling, U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan denied the Defense Department's motion to dismiss the matter and ordered the military to let the ACLU "immediate and unmonitored access to the detainee" so that it can determine whether he wants the ACLU to represent him. The judge also ordered the Defense Department not to transfer the detainee until the ACLU tells the court of the detainee's wishes.

"This is a landmark ruling that rejects the Trump administration's unprecedented attempt to block an American citizen from challenging his executive imprisonment," said Jonathan Hafetz, senior staff attorney for the ACLU. "Ensuring citizens detained by the government have access to a lawyer and a court is essential to preserving the Constitution and the rule of law in America."

Kathryn Wyer, an attorney in the Justice Department's civil division, earlier told the court that the U.S. military was working "diligently" on the matter, but had not yet decided what to do with the detainee. Wyer cited case law stating the executive branch should be given a reasonable period of time to determine a detained individual's status.

The government said that during questioning that FBI special agents advised the detainee of his right to remain silent even though he might have spoken earlier to other interrogators. That was an apparent reference to intelligence agents who are believed to have questioned the detainee first. The government said the detainee also was advised of his right to an attorney.

But the government also acknowledged that the detainee said he "understood his rights and said he was willing to talk to the agents, but also stated that since he was in a new phase (of questioning), he felt he should have an attorney present."

Typhoon ravages south Philippines with 120 dead, 160 missing

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines (AP) — One of the deadliest storms to hit the Philippines this year blew out of the country's south Sunday after leaving more than 120 people dead and 160 missing in landslides and flash floods.

Tropical Storm Tembin strengthened into a typhoon before moving into the South China Sea. Most of the dead and missing were reported in the hard-hit provinces of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur and on the Zamboanga Peninsula.

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Intense rainfall in the mountains most likely caused landslides that blocked rainwater, said Marina Marasigan of the government's disaster-response agency. When the naturally formed dams broke from the pressure, torrents of rainwater smashed into the villages below.

Mayor Bong Edding of Sibuco town blamed logging operations in the mountains for flash food that swept away houses with more than 30 residents. Five bodies have been recovered so far in the village and a search and rescue was continuing.

A large number of dead and missing was also reported in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur provinces, where floodwaters from a mountain washed away several riverside houses.

Marasigan asked the public to heed storm warnings and evacuation orders to avoid casualties.

"We're really sad that we have this news especially because our countrymen were looking to celebrate Christmas," Marasigan told a televised news conference.

Thousands of villagers fled to emergency shelters and more than 500 passengers remained stranded in airports and seaports after the coast guard prohibited ferries from venturing out in the rough seas and several flights were canceled as the storm raged Saturday.

The typhoon was packing maximum sustained winds of 120 kilometers (75 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 145 kph (90 mph).

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.

Earlier in the week, another 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.

Among the areas battered by the latest storm 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 and displaced its entire population of about 200,000 people.

It was 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.

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

1 body recovered, 36 feared dead in Philippine mall fire

DAVAO, Philippines (AP) — Philippine firefighters recovered one body from a burning shopping mall Sunday and there was "zero" chances of survival for 36 other trapped people inside the four-story building in southern Davao city, an official said.

Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio said firefighters told distraught relatives of the 36 trapped employees of a business outsourcing company at the top floor of the NCCC Mall that nobody could survive the extreme heat and thick black smoke.

"They were told that the chances of survival are zero," she said, adding that one of those trapped may be a Chinese or a South Korean, based on the name.

It is unclear when firefighters can break into most areas of the mall, where the blaze was put under control Sunday morning although smoke continued to billow from the building. The firefighters won't stop until all those reported missing are found, Duterte-Carpio said.

Investigators will determine the cause of the fire and the prospects of criminal lawsuits against the mall owners and officials would depend on the outcome of the investigation, said the mayor, who is the daughter of President Rodrigo Duterte.

Duterte, the mayor and Roman Catholic Church officials went to the site and met with relatives of the trapped office employees late Saturday and asked them to pray. The president was photographed wiping his eyes with a handkerchief, his head bowed, at an emotional moment with the relatives.

The mall's marketing manager, Janna Abdullah Mutalib, said the fire started Saturday morning at the third floor where clothes, appliances and furniture are sold, after a storm hit Davao and flooded parts of

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the city. Except for a grocery at the ground floor and the business outsourcing company at the top floor, the shopping areas were still closed to the public when the fire started mid-morning, preventing a bigger tragedy amid the peak Christmas shopping season.

Duterte served as Davao mayor for many years before being elected to the presidency last year.

It's been a difficult year for the tough-talking, 72-year-old leader, who faced his most serious crisis when hundreds of pro-Islamic State group extremists laid siege on Marawi city, also in the southern third of the Philippines. He declared martial law in the south to deal with the insurrection, which troops crushed in October.

The storm that blew out of the southern Philippines Sunday reportedly left more than 120 people dead with 160 others still missing.

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

3 Miss America officials resign, 1 apologizes to ex-winner

By WAYNE PARRY, Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — The top leadership of the Miss America Organization, implicated in an email scandal that targeted past pageant winners for abuse based on their appearance, intellect and sex lives, resigned on Saturday, with the outgoing president apologizing to a winner whose weight he ridiculed.

The president, Josh Randle, told The Associated Press his comment responding to an email to his private account about the physical appearance of 2013 winner Mallory Hagan came months before he started working for the Miss America Organization in 2015. But he said it was wrong.

"I apologize to Mallory for my lapse in judgment," Randle said on Saturday. "It does not reflect my values or the values I worked to promote at the Miss America Organization. Although this terrible situation was not caused or driven by me, in light of recent events and new developments, I am no longer willing to continue in my capacity as president and earlier today offered my resignation to the MAO Board of Directors."

Randle said his resignation was voluntary and had not been requested by the board of Miss America, which is based in Atlantic City.

Hagan did not respond to a message seeking comment on the resignations of Randle, CEO Sam Haskell and Chairwoman Lynn Weidner, a former Miss New Jersey.

Weidner told the AP Saturday night she has "nothing but love for the Miss America Organization and the incredible women" who comprise it.

"Although I have certainly been vilified unjustly by some in recent days, I know that all will be made more clear with time," she said. "My 46 years of involvement and my past 10 years on the board as a full-time volunteer have been a gift. It is amazing how most of the greatest blessings in my life can be traced back to that summer day when I was 16 years old and entered my first local Miss America Pageant."

The scandal began Thursday, when the Huffington Post published leaked emails showing pageant officials ridiculing past Miss Americas, including crass and sometimes vulgar comments about them.

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 Hagan has had.

Randle noted that the worst communications were exchanged in 2013 and 2014, years before he joined the Miss America Organization, and said the article's implication of "complicit participation on my part in a years long array of inappropriate email communication" is untrue.

Haskell's resignation is effective immediately, while Randle and Weidner will remain for a few weeks to help with a leadership transition. Dan Meyers, who had been vice chairman of the board, was named interim chairman.

The organization announced the resignations a day after dozens of former Miss Americas, including Hagan, signed a petition calling on the group's leadership to step down because of the emails.

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 that it cut ties with the Miss America Organization over the emails, calling them "appalling."

Also on Saturday, one of the main recipients of fundraising from the Miss America Organization said it was reviewing its association with Miss America. The Children's Miracle Network Hospitals said it was "conducting an immediate review of the situation and will take appropriate actions."

And New Jersey officials are reviewing their Miss America Organization contract, in which the state still owes \$4 million toward the cost of next year's pageant.

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

Conductor Dutoit denies sexual misconduct allegations

By GREGORY KATZ, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Renowned conductor Charles Dutoit on Saturday denied serious accusations of sexual misconduct that have caused major symphonies in Europe, Australia and the United States to suspend relationships with him.

Dutoit's office issued a statement saying the allegations "have absolutely no basis in truth" and vowed to mount a meaningful defense. The Associated Press reported Thursday that three opera singers and a classical musician had accused him of sexual assault in incidents they say occurred between 1985 and 2010.

His first public response to the allegations was defiant.

"The allegations made against me are as shocking to me as they are to my friends and colleagues. I do not recognize the man or the actions being described in the media," Dutoit said in a brief statement emailed to the Associated Press.

"Whilst informal physical contact is commonplace in the arts world as a mutual gesture of friendship, the serious accusations made involving coercion and forced physical contact have absolutely no basis in truth. I am taking legal advice and plan to meaningfully defend myself and I believe within this current climate, media accusations on serious physical abuse do not help society tackle these issues properly if the claims are in fact not true."

The 81-year-old Dutoit is artistic director and principal conductor at the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London. The orchestra said Friday it had jointly decided with Dutoit to relieve him of upcoming concert obligations.

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 Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Sydney, Boston and San Francisco symphonies 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.

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 at the time but were inspired to speak out now because of the national conversation about sexual misconduct by powerful men.

The women, two who were named in the AP story, 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.

Dutoit is 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. Levine says the allegations against him are "unfounded."

Associated Press Writer Jocelyn Gecker in San Francisco contributed to this report.

US agrees to send lethal weapons to Ukraine, angering Russia

By JOSH LEDERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration has approved a plan to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, a long-awaited move that deepens America's involvement in the military conflict and may further strain relations with Russia. Moscow responded angrily on Saturday.

The new arms include American-made Javelin anti-tank missiles, U.S. officials said late Friday. 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.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said the U.S. decision will only make the conflict more deadly and suggested that Russia could be forced to respond. He also said the U.S. can no longer cast itself as a mediator. "It's not a mediator. It's an accomplice in fueling the war," Ryabkov said in a statement.

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 monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe who are on the ground.

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. The U.S. and Ukraine want peacekeepers deployed throughout the separatist-controlled regions stretching to the Ukraine-Russia border.

By approving a plan to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, the Trump administration could see it as providing leverage in these negotiations. While some are skeptical about Putin's proposal, others suggest he may be looking for a way out of the conflict. Alexander Vershbow, former deputy secretary general of NATO and a former ambassador to Moscow, said a U.N. peacekeeping mission could serve as cover for Russia to withdraw its forces and weapons from eastern Ukraine.

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.

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.

In thanking the U.S. for its support, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko addressed the concerns over

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how the weapons would be used.

"American weapons in the hands of Ukrainian soldiers are not for an offensive, but for a decisive rebuff of the aggressor, the protection of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, as well as for effective self-defense," he wrote on Facebook. "It is also a trans-Atlantic vaccination against the Russian virus of aggression."

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 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.

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, Lynn Berry and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Dec. 24, the 358th day of 2017. There are seven days left in the year. This is Christmas Eve.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 24, 1914, during World War I, impromptu Christmas truces began to take hold along parts of the Western Front between British and German soldiers.

On this date:

In 1814, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812 following ratification by both the British Parliament and the U.S. Senate.

In 1851, fire devastated the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., destroying about 35,000 volumes.

In 1865, several veterans of the Confederate Army formed a private social club in Pulaski, Tennessee, that was the original version of the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1871, Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Aida" had its world premiere in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1906, Canadian physicist Reginald A. Fessenden became the first person to transmit the human voice (his own) as well as music over radio, from Brant Rock, Massachusetts.

In 1939, Pope Pius XII delivered a Christmas Eve address in which he offered a five-point program for peace and denounced "premeditated aggressions."

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In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe as part of Operation Overlord.

In 1951, Gian Carlo Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors," the first opera written specifically for television, was broadcast by NBC-TV.

In 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts, orbiting the moon, read passages from the Old Testament Book of Genesis during a Christmas Eve telecast.

In 1974, Cyclone Tracy began battering the Australian city of Darwin, resulting in widespread damage and causing some 65 deaths.

In 1980, Americans remembered the U.S. hostages in Iran by burning candles or shining lights for 417 seconds — one second for each day of captivity.

In 1995, fire broke out at the Philadelphia Zoo, killing 23 rare gorillas, orangutans, gibbons and lemurs.

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush made Christmas Eve calls to 10 U.S. troops serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other spots around the world, thanking them for their sacrifice and wishing them a happy holiday. French news cameraman Gwen Le Gouil was released eight days after he had been abducted by Somali gunmen outside the town of Bossaso.

Five years ago: An Afghan policewoman walked into a high-security compound in Kabul and killed an American contractor, the first such shooting by a woman in a spate of insider attacks by Afghans against their foreign allies. An ex-con gunned down two firefighters in Webster, New York, after luring them to his suburban Rochester neighborhood by setting a car and a house ablaze, then took shots at police and committed suicide as seven homes burned down. Death claimed actors Charles Durning, 89, and Jack Klugman, 90.

One year ago: President-elect Donald Trump said he would dissolve his charitable foundation before taking office to avoid conflicts of interest; the Democratic Party said that wasn't enough and called for the billionaire businessman to put his assets in a blind trust. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused President Barack Obama of a "shameful ambush" at the United Nations and said he was looking forward to working with his "friend" Donald Trump; Netanyahu's comments came a day after the U.S. broke with past practice and allowed the Security Council to condemn Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Today's Birthdays: Songwriter-bandleader Dave Bartholomew is 99. Author Mary Higgins Clark is 90. Federal health official Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., is 77. Recording company executive Mike Curb is 73. Actress Sharon Farrell is 71. U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions is 71. Actor Grand L. Bush is 62. Actor Clarence Gilyard is 62. Actress Stephanie Hodge is 61. The former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeye), is 60. Rock musician Ian Burden (The Human League) is 60. Actor Anil Kapoor (ah-NEEL' kuh-POOR') is 58. Actress Eva Tamargo is 57. Actor Wade Williams is 56. Designer Kate Spade is 55. Rock singer Mary Ramsey (10,000 Maniacs) is 54. Actor Mark Valley is 53. Actor Diedrich Bader is 51. Actor Amaury Nolasco is 47. Singer Ricky Martin is 46. Author Stephenie Meyer is 44. TV personality Ryan Seacrest (TV: "Live With Kelly & Ryan") is 43. Actor Michael Raymond-James is 40. Rock singer Louis Tomlinson (One Direction) is 26.

Thought for Today: "Christmas is the day that holds all time together." — Alexander Smith, Scottish poet and essayist (1830-1867).