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Dakota Outdoors



Erik Dean

402 N Main St
Aberdeen, SD 57401
605.229.0123

dakoutdoors@midconetwork.com

Today

Girls Region: Groton Area at Tiospa Zina (We have an internet line being installed so we should have good internet service), 7 p.m.

Wednesday: Lifetouch Photos

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

The cardboard/paper
recycling trailer at the school is

Closed

It snowed!



One wouldn't think that it was a big deal that it snowed, but for this winter season, it is. The first major winter storm hit the Groton Area on Monday dropping up to four inches of the white fluffy stuff. Area residents were digging out and Groton Area was two hours late this morning. Dick Kolker is pictured above blowing a path through the windrow to his office.

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Region 1A Girls Basketball Tournament

#1 Aberdeen Roncalli

Score:

Date: 2-22-18

Time: 7 PM

Site: Roncalli

Score:

ROUND OF 16 QUALIFIER

#4 Tiospa Zina

Score:

Date: 2-20-18

Time: 7 PM

Site: Tiospa Zina

Score:

#5 Groton Area

#2 Redfield/Doland

Score:

Date: 2-20-18

Time: 7 PM

Site: Redfield

Score:

#7 Sisseton

Score:

Date: 2-22-18

Time: 7 PM

Site: High Seed

ROUND OF 16 QUALIFIER

#3 Milbank

Score:

Date: 2-20-18

Time: 7 PM

Site: Milbank

Score:

#6 Webster Area

School	Seed Pts.
Aberdeen Roncalli	44.000
Redfield/Doland	40.400
Milbank	40.300
Tiospa Zina	38.850
Groton Area	38.800
Webster Area	38.800
Sisseton	37.947

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Region 4 Small Group Music Contest in Aberdeen

Instrumental:

Superior plus ratings: Emily Thompson (Marimba and Timpani Solos), Tylan Glover (Piano)

All solos received superior ratings: Ashley Garduno (French Horn), Braden Freeman (Tuba), Samantha Pappas (Bari Sax), Kylie Kassube (Clarinet), AnneMarie Smith (Piano)

Excellent ratings: Percussion Ensemble (Emily, Jennie, Chandler, Lucas, Portia, and Claire), Isaac Smith (Piano), and Emily Thompson (Piano)

Vocal:

Superior solo ratings: AnneMarie Smith, Tylan Glover, Ashley Garduno, Jenifer Fjelstad, and Madeline Schuelke

All ensembles received Superior Ratings: Bile Them Cabbage Down (Boys), Dancin' at the Rock (Girls), Shut De Do (Seniors), and Swing Low, Sweet Chariot (Chamber Choir)

Excellent solo ratings: Alyssa Fordham, Micah Poor, Madilyn Wright, and Hattie Weismantel

Groton Coffee Cup League

Feb. 19 Team Standings: James Valley 20, Ten Pins 17, Kens 15, Jungle Lanes 12

High Games: Nancy Radke 190, LaVonne Raap 180, Rachel Otter 176

High Series: Nancy Radke 463, Vickie Kramp 463, LaVonne Raap 444, Vicki Walter 443

Maintenance Supervisor Wanted:

Under the direction of the Facility Administrator, the Maintenance Supervisor oversees the daily operations of the Maintenance. Performs maintenance and repair of physical structures of buildings.

Day Shift C.N.A. Wanted

Sign-on Bonus

☆☆☆ \$1,500 for CNAs ☆☆☆

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

EOE/AA/M/F/V/D-Drug Free Workplace



1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton

Toby Keith Should've Been A Cowboy Tour Coming to the SD State Fair

HURON, S.D. –The South Dakota State Fair and Legend Seeds are proud to announce that the Toby Keith Should've Been A Cowboy Tour XXV presented by Ford F-Series will be coming to the SD State Fair grandstand on Friday, Aug. 31, 2018.

The familiar maxim of triple threat – singer, songwriter, musician – doesn't begin to cover it for Toby Keith, one of the modern era's most complete self-directed hit makers. From the moment his debut single "Should've Been A Cowboy" was released in 1993 and shot the charts to become his first No. 1, the engine driving everything else has been the music. He writes it. He arranges and produces it. And he releases it on his record label, Show Dog Nashville.

With hits like "Red Solo Cup," "Beer for My Horses," and "Courtesy Of The Red, White And Blue (The Angry American)," Keith's albums have sold more than 40 million copies. His tours have drawn more than a million fans each year for more than a decade straight. The awards are too numerous to count and include Artist of the Decade nods from Billboard and the American Country Awards, as well as the ACM's Career Achievement honor.

"Toby Keith is a country superstar and has huge drawing power. Our excitement level is through the roof," said SD State Fairgrounds manager, Peggy Besch. "The grandstand celebrates its 100th birthday this year, so we are honored and thrilled to have him kick off the concert line up."

Pre-sale on tickets will begin June 4 for backrest holders, followed by Friends of the Fair ticket sales on June 7. General public ticket sales will begin June 11.

The 2018 South Dakota State Fair will run from Thursday, Aug. 30, through Monday, Sept. 3. Preview night will be Wednesday, Aug. 29. This year's theme is "Experience the Magic." For more information on State Fair events, contact the Fair office at 800.529.0900, visit www.sdstatefair.com or find them on Facebook or Twitter.

Agriculture is a major contributor to South Dakota's economy, generating \$25.6 billion in annual economic activity and employing over 115,000 South Dakotans. The South Dakota Department of Agriculture's mission is to promote, protect and preserve South Dakota agriculture for today and tomorrow. Visit us online at <http://sdda.sd.gov> or find us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Service Notice: Winifred Fawcett

Services for Winifred Fawcett (Winifred is Anita Lowary's mother), 97, of Groton will be 11:00 a.m., Friday, February 23, 2018 at the Gettysburg United Methodist Church. Rev. Jeff Adel will officiate. Burial will follow in the Gettysburg Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel.

Visitation will be held on Wednesday at the Groton United Methodist Church from 5-7:30 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:30 p.m. Rev. Thomas Carlson will preside.

Winifred passed away February 19, 2018 at Groton Care and Rehabilitation Center.

Thinking About Health

If Idaho ditches the ACA, other states may follow

By Wendell Potter, Rural Health News Service

What happens in Idaho in the coming weeks undoubtedly will not stay in Idaho. What happens there could make a big difference in how much you pay for your health insurance – or whether you can even get insurance.

Idaho's Republican governor, C. L. "Butch" Otter, signed an executive order last month that, if not blocked by the federal government, will do what Republicans in Washington have not been able to do: turn the clock back to the days before the Affordable Care Act, at least in the state's individual health insurance market.

The only significant change to the ACA that members of Congress have been able to enact so far is the removal of the penalty Americans must pay to stay uninsured. That was accomplished through a provision of the recently enacted tax reform law. Otter said he viewed the repeal of the penalty as a green light for states to make much more far-reaching changes to rules governing the sale of health insurance.

"Congress and President Donald Trump have eliminated the individual mandate requiring all Americans to buy Obamacare plans or face financial penalties," Otter said when he announced the executive order on Jan. 5. "That means we will no longer be penalized for buying coverage that doesn't meet all the Obamacare rules. Now the door is open for states to pursue our own reasonable solutions." He said his move would give consumers more choices and lower their insurance costs.

Otter's executive order would allow health insurers to once again sell policies — and engage in practices — that were made unlawful by the ACA. Although many health care policy experts believe the order is in violation of federal law, the governor is counting on the Trump Administration to look the other way.

Under the proposal, insurers in Idaho would once again be able to charge applicants who are ill or who have pre-existing conditions considerably more than what they charge healthier people. Insurers would also be able to turn down prospective customers because of their health status.

Applicants would be required to complete a questionnaire detailing their health status and past health claims, noting whether they have been treated for conditions ranging from allergies and depression to diabetes and breast cancer. Based on the answers, insurers' underwriters would determine how much to charge applicants — if they were willing to sell them coverage at all. As they were able to before the ACA, insurers in Idaho would again be able to declare an applicant "uninsurable."

If the Trump Administration allows the state to move forward, Idaho's youngest and healthiest residents could soon be paying less for health insurance. Older and less healthy Idahoans, however, could be paying much more.

Under current law, insurers cannot charge older applicants more than three times what they charge younger applicants for the same policy. Under Otter's plan, insurers would be able to charge older Idahoans five times as much as younger ones.

Insurers would also once again be able to charge co-payments for preventive care and set a \$1 million annual cap on claims. And they could sell policies that do not cover maternity care. That could result in many women in Idaho once again paying more for coverage than men.

Blue Cross of Idaho became the first insurer to announce plans to sell policies under the new rules. It

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said it would begin marketing five new plans next month. They would go into effect in April.

All five plans would include a maximum annual benefit payout of \$1 million per person. And premiums would vary based on an applicant's health. Under one plan, for example, the monthly premium for a 45-year-old in good health would be \$104.67. A less healthy person of the same age could pay as much as \$525.69. The insurer would also be able to charge an older applicant \$1,000 a month for a policy that it would sell to younger applicants for \$200.

Blue Cross would continue to sell at least one policy in the state that meets all the requirements of the Affordable Care Act, as required by the governor's executive order. Blue Cross could not bar people from enrolling in that plan, impose an annual cap on claims, charge women more than men or base the premium on an applicant's health status. It also couldn't charge older applicants more than three times as much as younger applicants. Whether that plan would continue to be priced at a point that is affordable for most Idahoans remains to be seen.

The governor and his team insist they are on solid legal ground and believe the Trump Administration will not stand in their way, even though Idaho has not sought a waiver from the federal government to proceed.

When asked during a Feb. 15 Senate hearing what he thinks of Otter's executive order, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said he wasn't familiar enough with it to speculate on any actions his department will take.

"We'll be looking at that very carefully and measure it up against the standards of the law," he said.

Lawmakers in other states will also be looking very carefully at what happens in Idaho. If the Trump administration allows the governor's idea to move forward and the plan survives any lawsuits that likely would be filed, other states might follow Idaho's lead.

Are you concerned about how individual states' actions might affect the future of your healthcare? Send me your questions, concerns and personal stories at Wendell@tarbell.com.

Wendell Potter is a former health insurance executive, author and founder of the journalism nonprofit Tarbell.org.

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Today in Weather History

February 20, 1962: Another round of heavy snow fell across the southeastern half of the state from the 20th through the 22nd with up to 10 inches of new snowfall. Snowfall amounts included, 5 inches at Bryant, 6 inches at Kennebec, 7 inches at Redfield, Brookings, Mitchell, and Sioux Falls, 8 inches at Miller, and 10 inches at Huron. Snowfall amounts for the record-setting month of February 1962 ranged from 30 to 50 inches across much of the southeast part of the state.

February 20, 1997: Warm weather resulted in snowmelt runoff and ice breakup on the Bad River. As a result, the Bad River went above flood stage from Capa to Fort Pierre late in the evening of the 20th. Flood stage at Fort Pierre is 21 feet, and the river rose to around 25 feet on the 21st. The Bad River went below flood stage during the afternoon of the 22nd. Lowlands near the river were flooded along with some county roads with some of the roads damaged. Late in the evening of the 20th, the trailer court on the southern edge of Fort Pierre was evacuated where they did some sandbagging. Also, on the west side of Fort Pierre, some roads were flooded.

February 20, 2011: The snowfall/blizzard event on 20-21 February 2011 produced yet another round of impressive snowfall totals across central and northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Storm total snowfall amounts ranged from 8" to 12" with locally higher amounts of more than 18" reported in a few locations.

1912: An F3 tornado killed nine people and injured 50 others as it crossed Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana. Centenary College would be hit again in 1940.

1995: The temperature at the Civic Center in Los Angeles, California soared to 95 degrees. This temperature is the highest ever recorded at the location during the month of February.

2004: A nor'easter brought heavy snow and strong winds to the Nova Scotia and Prince Edwards Island from the 17th through 20th. The Maritimers called this storm White Juan, a hurricane disguised as a blizzard. Halifax, Yarmouth, and Charlottetown broke all-time 24-hour snowfall records, receiving about 3 feet of snow. For Halifax, the 34.8 inches of snow on February 19 nearly doubled its previous record for a single day.

1805 - The Potomac River was opened after being closed by ice for a period of two months. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1898 - Eastern Wisconsin experienced their biggest snowstorm of record. Racine received thirty inches, and drifts around Milwaukee measured fifteen feet high. (David Ludlum)

1953 - A snowstorm in Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota produced drifts ten feet high which derailed trains. (David Ludlum)








1987 - A storm system over Arizona spread heavy snow from the Southern Rockies into the Southern Plains Region. Thunderstorms in central Texas produced golf ball size hail about the same time north central Texas was being blanketed with up to 8 inches of snow, closing many schools. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Snow and strong northerly winds ushered arctic air into the Great Lakes Region. The temperature at Sault Ste Marie MI plunged from 30 degrees at 5 AM to one below zero by 3 PM, with a wind chill reading of 40 degrees below zero. Five cities in Florida reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 90 degrees at Lakeland was just a degree shy of their February record. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing during the early afternoon produced severe weather from eastern Texas to Alabama and northwest Florida. Thunderstorms spawned a dozen tornadoes during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms also produced 90 mph winds around Vicksburg MS, and 100 mph winds around Jackson MS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Tue Feb 20	Wed Feb 21	Thu Feb 22	Fri Feb 23	Sat Feb 24	Sun Feb 25	Mon Feb 26
						
11°F -13°F	16°F -1°F	24°F 8°F	19°F 5°F	26°F 10°F	29°F 10°F	29°F 10°F
N 15 MPH Precip 50%	SSW 8 MPH	S 10 MPH Precip 50%	W 6 MPH	SSW 8 MPH	SSW 9 MPH	WNW 9 MPH Precip 20%

Snow Winding Down



Additional Light Accumulation Through The Morning Hours

Today



Single
Digits/Teens

Tonight



Single
Digits/Teens

Below Zero

Wind Chills

25 to 35 Below

Wed



Teens
& 20s



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 2/20/2018 4:46 AM Central

Published on: 02/20/2018 at 4:56AM

Light snow will remain across the area for most of the morning and into the afternoon with slow, gradual clearing. With high pressure moving into central South Dakota overnight, temperatures will crash with wind chills falling to 25 to 35 degrees below zero. Temperatures will recover little Wednesday with another chance for snow in eastern South Dakota Thursday.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 11.4 F at 12:52 PM

Low Outside Temp: 3.2 F at 10:57 PM

Wind Chill:

High Gust: 30.0 Mph at 3:00 AM

Precip: 0.00 4" Snow

Today's Info

Record High: 61° in 1930

Record Low: -30° in 1918

Average High: 30°F

Average Low: 9°F

Average Precip in Feb: 0.35

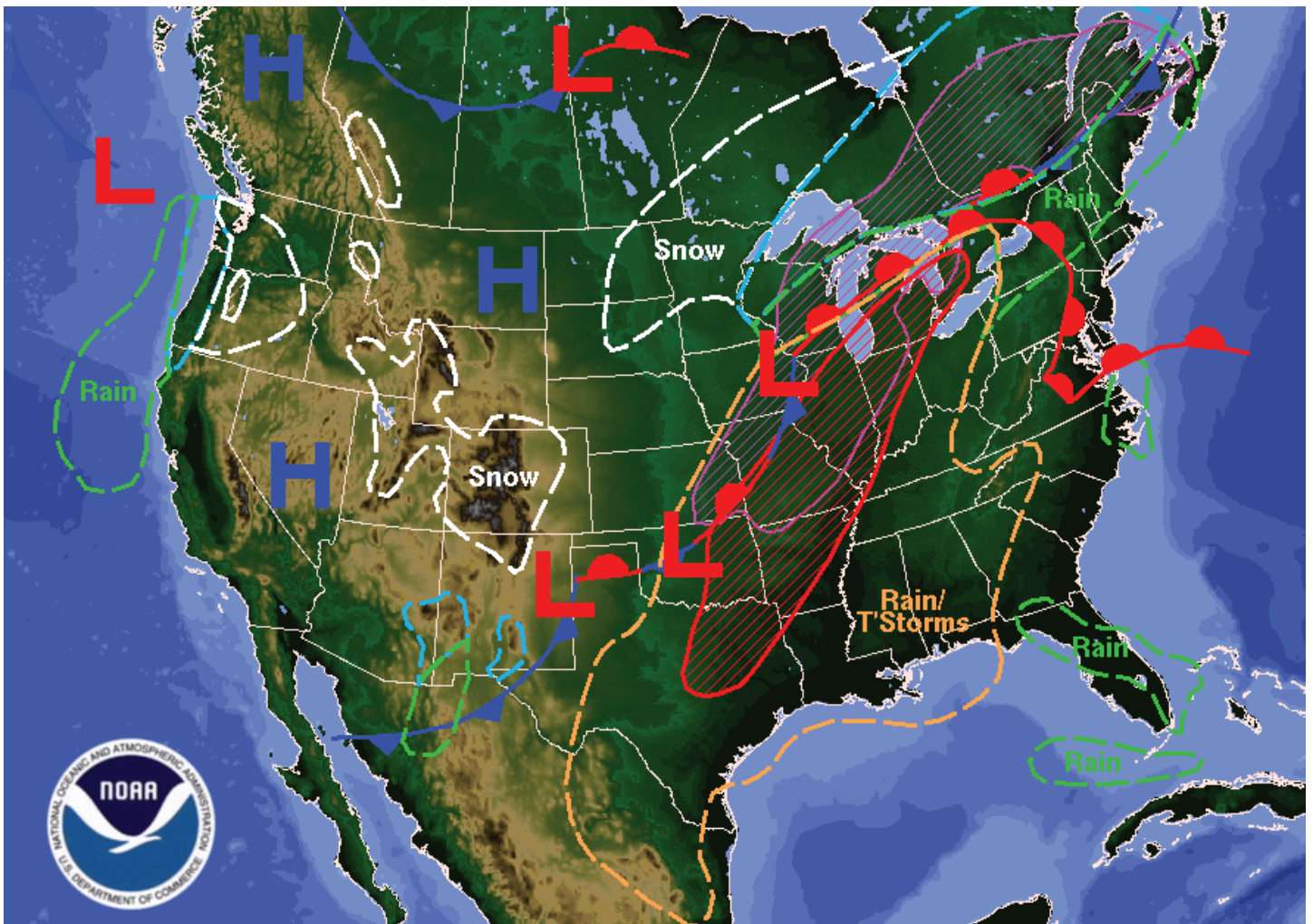
Precip to date in Feb: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.82

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 6:08 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:25 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Tue, Feb 20, 2018, issued 4:37 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain

Rain and T'Storms

Rain and Snow

Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)

Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)

Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)

Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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FINDING LIFE

A Roman soldier once asked his superior for the privilege of speaking to Julius Caesar. His request was granted and when he approached Caesar, he pled for permission to end his life. Looking at the man who stood before him the general saw a man who led a wretched and worthless life. After a moment's thought Caesar said to him in disgust, "Man, were you ever alive?"

God intended for each of us to enjoy a life that has meaning and is fulfilling and satisfying. Man, created in the image of God, is to do the things of God and bring honor to our creator. Without God at the core of our life we will be, as the soldier was, living a wretched, worthless life.

The last verse of Psalm 91 presents a picture of a person who has God at the core of his or her life. It tells us that the goal of this God-centered person is to satisfy God – to live a life that can be blessed by, empowered by and honored by God Himself.

Recently I asked a student to share with the class what Romans 6:23 meant to him. Standing before us he said, "Let me tell you about this verse. For me it reads, 'The wages of sin is an empty life.' I know because I've been there, worked hard and felt like my needle was on empty. It did not matter how successful my life appeared to be to those around me, it did not matter how much land I owned or how many houses I had or how much money I earned. My life was on 'empty' because I could never fill it with enough things for the needle to move to 'full.'"

Prayer: We ask You, Father, to help us live lives that are pleasing to You, knowing that if we do we will be satisfied. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 91:16 With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation."

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)
- 4/13/2018 Elementary School Carnival, 5 p.m.
- 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

Teen killed after crashing van near Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A teenager has died in a highway crash near Rapid City. The South Dakota Department of Public Safety says the 18-year-old man died Monday when he crashed his van on Highway 79 about four miles south of Rapid City. He was pronounced dead at the scene. The man has not yet been identified.

Monday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Bon Homme 67, Irene-Wakonda 58
Corsica/Stickney 64, Parkston 41
Sioux Falls Christian 102, Garretson 54
Sisseton 56, Morris Area/Chokio-Alberta, Minn. 52
Tri-Valley 74, Baltic 46
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS
Milbank vs. Madison, ppd. to Feb 23rd.
Miller vs. Stanley County, ppd. to Feb 21st.
Red Cloud vs. Bennett County, ppd. to Feb 23rd.
Spearfish vs. Rapid City Stevens, ccd.
West Central vs. Elk Point-Jefferson, ppd. to Feb 22nd.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Region 1B
First Round
Langford 49, Great Plains Lutheran 30
Northwestern 82, Aberdeen Christian 19
Wilmot 48, Britton-Hecla 28
Region 2B
First Round
Eureka/Bowdle 34, Sunshine Bible Academy 31
Highmore-Harrold 71, Edmunds Central 37
Region 3B
First Round
Wessington Springs 40, Estelline 31
Wolsey-Wessington 52, Iroquois 14
Region 4B
First Round
Colman-Egan 23, Mitchell Christian 21
Region 5B
First Round
Gayville-Volin 52, Freeman Academy/Marion 44
Viborg-Hurley 58, Centerville 28

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

South Dakota lawmakers to weigh education and casino bills

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers this week plan to debate legislation on early childhood education and a proposed casino and entertainment complex in Yankton, among other things.

Here's a look at some of the measures they plan to take up after they return to the Capitol on Tuesday: —CROSSOVER DAY: Friday is the final day of the 2018 legislative session to pass bills or joint resolutions out of their house of origin. The House and Senate will likely work late to get through legislation remaining to be considered by the end of crossover day. The main part of the session ends March 9.

—EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A new Early Learning Advisory Council would examine early childhood education in South Dakota under a bill scheduled for debate Tuesday in the Senate Education Committee. The panel established by Senate Bill 132 would make recommendations for increasing participation in early childhood education programs, research the economic effects of early childhood education in South Dakota and identify potential new funding sources.

The legislation is a priority for Democratic Sen. Billie Sutton, a candidate for governor. The committee defeated a similar bill last year.

—CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES: The House State Affairs Committee on Wednesday plans to debate new restrictions on amendments to the state constitution. The proposed changes would have to pass at the ballot.

Amendments would need approval from the voters and the Legislature to pass under House Joint Resolution 1008. Right now, people who collect enough signatures to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot can ask the people to pass it without lawmakers' blessing.

House Joint Resolution 1006 aims to require constitutional amendments to encompass only one subject. House Joint Resolution 1007 would end citizens' ability to gather signatures to propose constitutional changes, but Republican Rep. Mark Mickelson has said he's not going to push to pass it.

Senate lawmakers have advanced a plan to ask voters to increase the majority vote threshold required for a constitutional change to 55 percent of the votes cast on the amendment.

—YANKTON CASINO: The Senate Local Government Committee plans to debate a measure Wednesday that would help clear the way for a proposed casino and entertainment complex in Yankton. Senate Joint Resolution 9 would ask voters to allow a nonprofit group to have a gaming license in the southeastern South Dakota city. One assessment projected that first-year gambling, hotel, restaurant and entertainment revenue would be more than \$35 million.

Supporters say it would help the community compete with Iowa and Nebraska for tourists. Native American tribes and a Deadwood gambling association oppose the plan.

—LEGISLATIVE MAKEOVER: South Dakota's Legislature would be cut from 105 to 75 members under a bill set to be discussed Wednesday in the Senate Local Government Committee. Senate Bill 189 would reduce the roster to 25 senators and 50 representatives after the 2020 federal census.

The Senate State Affairs Committee is scheduled to consider a separate resolution Wednesday that would ask voters to give state legislators a major salary hike. House Joint Resolution 1001 would set legislators' salaries at one-fifth of the South Dakota median household income. U.S. Census numbers for 2015 show that would mean a raise of 70 percent for lawmakers to nearly \$10,200. The House has already approved the plan.

Rounds surrenders \$18,500 in illegal campaign contributions

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds surrendered \$18,500 in illegal campaign donations that he received from 2009 through 2014 from Cancer Treatment Centers of America executives.

The Republican senator is among 31 politicians to have received the illegal contributions, which totaled nearly \$700,000, according to the Federal Elections Commission.

Cancer Treatment Centers of America and several executives broke the law by reimbursing company officials with bonuses for individual contributions to candidates and campaign committees, the Rapid City

Journal reported.

The FEC said there are no indications that any of the recipients knew the contributions were illegal. Rob Skjonsberg, chief of staff to Rounds and assistant treasurer of the Rounds for Senate committee, said the campaign knew nothing about the illegality of the contributions until being notified by the FEC.

"It seems like the FEC came down on them appropriately," Skjonsberg said of the offending contributors.

The company and three current or former company officials signed an agreement in July that required them to jointly pay a \$288,000 fine to the FEC. The agreement also obligated the company and the officials to ask the candidates and committees who received the illegal contributions to forward those donations to the U.S. treasury.

Cancer Treatment Centers' bonus program that reimbursed executives for political contributions began in 2002, but it was not discovered by the FEC until after the company conducted an internal investigation and self-reported the matter in 2015.

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

8 people, including young children, escape house fire

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Eight people, including five children, escaped from a house fire in Rapid City. Fire officials say the family had an escape plan and the children, ages 3 to 13, following the route to safety Sunday afternoon. The fire apparently started in a garage below the home and spread to the living area. The cause is under investigation.

KOTA-TV says crews from four stations battled the fire that began about 4:30 p.m. for about two hours.

Information from: KOTA-TV, <http://www.kotatv.com>

Students going to state capital to push for gun law changes

By **TERRY SPENCER, CURT ANDERSON and BRENDAN FARRINGTON, Associated Press**

PARKLAND, Fla. (AP) — A hundred Stoneman Douglas High School students are busing 400 miles to Florida's capital Tuesday to urge lawmakers to act to prevent a repeat of the massacre that killed 17 students and faculty last week.

The students plan to hold a rally Wednesday in hopes that it will put pressure on the state's Republican-controlled Legislature to consider a sweeping package of gun-control laws, something some GOP lawmakers said Monday they would consider. Shortly after the shooting, several legislative leaders were taken on a tour of the school to see the damage firsthand and they appeared shaken afterward.

"I really think they are going to hear us out," said Chris Grady, a 19-year-old senior who is going on the trip. He said he hopes the trip will lead to some "commonsense laws like rigorous background checks."

The attack last Wednesday seemed to overcome the resistance of some in the state's leadership, which has rebuffed gun restrictions since Republicans took control of both the governor's office and the Legislature in 1999. However, there is still strong resistance by many in the party to any gun-control measures, leaving the fate of new restrictions unclear.

Students also have vowed to exert pressure on Congress as the aftermath of the rampage resonates beyond Florida and from coast to coast. Hundreds of chanting protesters converged Monday on a downtown Los Angeles park, demanding tougher background checks and other gun-safety measures after the shooting. Some signs held up by the California demonstrators read, "Your Children Are Counting On You."

Sen. Bill Galvano, a Republican and the incoming Florida senate president, said the state Senate was preparing a package that would include raising the age to purchase any firearm to 21, creating a waiting period for purchasing any type of firearm, banning bump stocks that can allow semi-automatic guns to spray bullets quickly and creating gun-violence restraining orders.

Authorities said suspect Nikolas Cruz, 19, had a string of run-ins with school authorities that ended with

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his expulsion. Police also were repeatedly called to his house throughout his childhood. Cruz's lawyers said there were repeated warning signs that he was mentally unstable and potentially violent. Yet he legally purchased a semi-automatic rifle.

"We need to make sure everything is working and to learn from the experience," said Galvano, who was among those who visited the school.

The Senate is also considering boosting spending on mental health programs for schools and giving law-enforcement greater power to involuntarily hold someone considered a danger to themselves. The body will also look at a proposal to deputize a teacher or someone else at school so they are authorized to have a gun.

Galvano said senators want to examine ways to protect schools that do not have resource officers — often armed law enforcement officers — on site.

State House leaders and Gov. Rick Scott also are considering possible changes to firearms rules but have not given any details. Scott planned meetings Tuesday on school safety, and said he would announce proposals on mental health issues later in the week.

Still, some Republicans questioned whether additional gun restrictions are the answer.

"I really don't want to see this politicized into a gun debate," Republican Sen. Dennis Baxley.

Referring to gun-control advocates, he said: "Sometimes I wish they were right, that this would fix it, but it won't ... We have a terrible problem with obesity, but we're not banning forks and spoons."

Democrats believe raising the age limit and creating a waiting period to buy rifles isn't enough.

"That's unacceptable. That's a joke," said Democratic Sen. Gary Farmer of Broward County. "I don't see that as a restriction. It never should have been that an 18-year-old could buy an assault weapon. No Floridians should be able to buy an assault weapon."

Cruz legally purchased at least seven long guns, including an AK-47-style rifle he bought less than a month ago, a law enforcement official said Monday. The official is familiar with the investigation but isn't authorized to discuss it and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Federal law allows those 18 and over to buy rifles, and Cruz passed background checks necessary to obtain the weapons.

Cruz made his first appearance in court Monday. Wearing a prison jumpsuit, he kept his head down and did not appear to make eye contact with the judge or others in the courtroom, though he responded briefly to someone on the defense team. A previous appearance was by a video connection from jail.

His lawyers have said he will plead guilty if prosecutors agree not to pursue the death penalty. No decision has been made on that.

Since the attack, students from the school have become increasingly vocal in their demands for gun-control measures. Many have pointed out politicians who take financial support from the National Rifle Association, and some have lashed out at President Donald Trump, saying he was busy blaming Democrats for failing to pass gun restrictions while taking no action of his own.

After staying largely mum in the last few days about the massacre and the escalating debate about weapons, Trump said Monday that he was supportive of a bipartisan effort to strengthen federal background checks for gun purchases.

Students are also calling for anti-gun violence demonstrations in Washington and other cities March 24.

Organizers behind the anti-Trump Women's March called for a 17-minute nationwide walkout by teachers and students on March 14, and a gun-control group was calling for a rally to ban assault weapons Wednesday at the Florida Capitol.

Anderson reported from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Farrington reported from Tallahassee, Florida. Associated Press Writer Gary Fineout in Tallahassee and Sadie Gurman in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow the AP's complete coverage of the Florida school shooting here: <https://apnews.com/tag/Floraschoolshooting> .

Trump offers support for background checks on gun buys

By CATHERINE LUCEY and MARIA DANILOVA, Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump supports a limited strengthening of federal background checks on gun purchases, the White House said, as pressure mounts on Trump to take action after 17 students and teachers were killed in last week's shooting at a Florida high school.

One side of the renewed gun-control debate was embodied outside the White House on Monday as dozens of teens lay down in the street to symbolize the dead and call on the president to limit access to firearms.

Trump was not in Washington, but rather at his Florida club about 40 miles from the Parkland community grieving lost friends and loved ones. Trump gave a nod toward a specific policy action with the White House saying he had spoken Friday to Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican, about a bipartisan bill designed to strengthen the FBI database of prohibited gun buyers.

Trump spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders qualified the support, stressing that talks continue and "revisions are being considered," but said "the president is supportive of efforts to improve the federal background check system."

The main action Trump has taken on guns has been to sign a resolution blocking an Obama-era rule designed to keep guns out of the hands of certain mentally disabled people. The president has voiced strong support for gun rights and the National Rifle Association.

The bipartisan background check legislation would be aimed at ensuring that federal agencies and states accurately report relevant criminal information to the FBI. It was introduced after the Air Force failed to report the criminal history of the gunman who slaughtered more than two dozen people at a Texas church.

The White House statement comes as shooting survivors and other young people press for more gun control in a rising chorus of grief and activism. Their "March for Our Lives" is planned March 24 in Washington.

Ella Fesler, 16-year-old high school student in Alexandria, Virginia, was among the students at the "lie-in" in front of the White House. She said it was time for change, adding: "Every day when I say 'bye' to my parents, I do acknowledge the fact that I could never see my parents again."

But previous gun tragedies have not led Congress to act. After the Las Vegas massacre in the fall, Republicans and Democrats in Congress talked about taking a rare step to tighten the nation's gun laws. Four months later, the only gun legislation that has moved through Congress eases restrictions for gun owners.

Kristin Brown, co-president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, said the measure Trump discussed with Cornyn would help to enforce existing rules but would not close loopholes permitting loose private sales on the internet and at gun shows. She's pressing for a ban on assault-type weapons and for laws enabling family members, guardians or police to ask judges to strip gun rights temporarily from people who show warning signs of violence.

"We need a comprehensive system," Brown said. "One of these isn't enough."

Trump, who visited first responders and some victims Friday, has focused his comments on mental health, rather than guns. The White House says the president will host a "listening session" with students and teachers on Wednesday and will discuss school safety with state and local officials on Thursday. They have offered no further details on who will attend those sessions.

Trump spent most of the weekend at his private Palm Beach estate, Mar-a-Lago. White House aides advised against golfing too soon after the shooting. But on Presidents Day, the avid golfer headed to his nearby golf club. The White House did not answer questions about whether he was playing golf.

President Barack Obama took heavy criticism in 2014 when he went golfing during a vacation just minutes after denouncing the militants who had beheaded an American journalist. He later regretted playing golf so soon after the killing.

Trump watched cable television news during the weekend and groused to club members and advisers about the investigation of Russian election meddling.

In a marathon series of furious weekend tweets from Mar-a-Lago, Trump vented about Russia, raging at the FBI for what he perceived to be a fixation on the Russia investigation at the cost of failing to deter

the Florida school attack.

Danilova reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report.

Trump urges GOP to fight Pennsylvania's congressional map

By MARC LEVY, Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday encouraged Republicans to fight Pennsylvania's new court-imposed map of congressional districts, issued a day earlier in a move expected to improve Democrats' chances at chipping away at the GOP's U.S. House majority.

Trump tweeted that Republicans should challenge the new map of Pennsylvania's 18 congressional districts all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, if necessary.

"Your Original was correct! Don't let the Dems take elections away from you so that they can raise taxes & waste money!" Trump tweeted.

Republicans have already vowed to challenge it in federal court, as early as Tuesday.

The Democratic-majority state Supreme Court met its own deadline Monday to issue the new boundaries after it threw out a 6-year-old GOP-drawn map as unconstitutionally gerrymandered. The Republican-controlled Legislature and Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf did not produce a consensus replacement map in the three weeks allotted by the court.

The new map is to be in effect for the May 15 primary and substantially overhauls a Republican-drawn congressional map widely viewed as among the nation's most gerrymandered.

New boundaries will likely usher in changes to Pennsylvania's predominantly Republican delegation, which has provided a crucial pillar of support for GOP control of the U.S. House.

Most significantly, the new map gives Democrats a better shot at winning a couple more seats, particularly in Philadelphia's heavily populated and moderate suburbs. There, Republicans have held seats in bizarrely contorted districts, including one described as "Goofy Kicking Donald Duck."

Republican Rep. Ryan Costello, whose suburban Philadelphia district was narrowly won by Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016, is in even more dire straits now that his district adds the heavily Democratic city of Reading.

The state's delegation is already facing big changes in a year with six open seats, the most in decades. Meanwhile, candidates finding themselves in a new political landscape are rethinking campaigns a week before they can start circulating petitions to run.

The map removes the heart of one district from Philadelphia, where a crowd of candidates had assembled to replace the retiring Democratic Rep. Bob Brady, and moves it to suburban Montgomery County.

The new map does not apply to the March 13 special congressional election in southwestern Pennsylvania's 18th District to fill the remaining 10 months in the term of former Republican Rep. Tim Murphy, who resigned amid a scandal. But it renders the special election virtually meaningless: the court's map puts each candidate's homes in a district with a Pittsburgh-area incumbent.

The court ruled last month that Republicans who redrew district boundaries in 2011 unconstitutionally put partisan interests above neutral line-drawing criteria. It was the first time any state court threw out congressional boundaries in a partisan gerrymandering case, this one brought by registered Democratic voters and the League of Women Voters last June.

The new map repackages districts that had been stretched nearly halfway across Pennsylvania and reunifies Democratic-heavy cities that had been split by Republican map drawers six years ago.

Democrats cheered the new map, while Republicans blasted it.

Independent analysts said the map should improve Democratic prospects while still favoring Republicans as a whole. An analysis conducted through PlanScore.org concluded the court's redrawn map eliminates "much of the partisan skew" favoring Republicans on the old Republican-drawn map, although not all of it.

University of Florida political science doctoral student Brian Amos said Clinton beat Republican Donald Trump in eight of 18 districts in the 2016 presidential election on the court's map. That compared with six

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of 18 districts Clinton won in 2016 under the invalidated map.

Republicans who controlled the Legislature and the governor's office after the 2010 census crafted the now-invalidated map to elect Republicans and succeeded in that aim: Republicans won 13 of 18 seats in three straight elections even though Pennsylvania's registered Democratic voters outnumber Republicans.

Republicans will argue in federal court that legislatures and governors, not courts, have the constitutional responsibility to draw congressional maps. But they appear to face an uphill battle since federal courts are normally reluctant to undo a state court decision, said Michael Morley, a constitutional law professor at Barry University in Florida.

"I think it will be a major obstacle and a major challenge to get around it," Morley said.

Grocery retailer Albertsons to buy drugstore chain Rite Aid

By The Associated Press

The privately held owner of Safeway, Vons and other grocery brands is plunging deeper into the pharmacy business with a deal to buy Rite Aid, the nation's third-largest drugstore chain.

Albertsons Companies is offering either a share of its stock and \$1.83 in cash or slightly more than a share for every 10 shares of Rite Aid. A deal value was not disclosed in a statement released Tuesday by the companies.

Shares of Rite Aid, which have shed more than half their value over the past year, surged 26 cents, or 12.2 percent, in premarket trading after the deal was announced.

Shareholders of Boise, Idaho-based Albertsons will own more than 70 percent of the combined company, which is expected to trade on the New York Stock Exchange. The companies say the deal should close in the second half of this year, but regulators and Rite Aid shareholders still have to approve it.

Rite Aid Chairman and CEO John Standley will lead the combined company as CEO, while Albertsons leader Bob Miller will serve as chairman. The companies say they will keep headquarters in both Boise and Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, which is where Rite Aid is based.

Albertsons said it will continue to run Rite Aid stand-alone stores, and most of the grocery operator's pharmacies will be rebranded as Rite Aid. Albertsons also runs Jewel-Osco, Shaw's and Acme stores.

Rite Aid Corp. said earlier this year that it runs around 4,400 stores. Larger rival Walgreens had tried unsuccessfully to buy the chain, but the company scuttled that push last year after encountering regulatory resistance. Last September, Walgreens agreed to buy nearly 2,000 Rite Aid locations and some distribution centers for about \$4.38 billion. Rite Aid said late last month that it had transferred about 625 stores to Walgreens.

Activists: 98 dead in assault on rebel-held Damascus suburb

By BASSEM MROUE, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Intense Syrian government shelling and airstrikes on rebel-held Damascus suburbs killed at least 98 people in what was the deadliest day in the area in three years, a monitoring group and paramedics said Tuesday.

A day after Monday's government barrage, retaliatory shells rained down on the capital Damascus, killing at least eight people on Tuesday. In the suburbs, opposition activists said that at least 15 more people were killed Tuesday.

The targeted suburbs — scattered across an area known as eastern Ghouta — have been subjected to weeks-long bombardment that has killed and wounded hundreds of people. Opposition activists say government forces have brought in more reinforcements in recent days, suggesting a major assault is imminent to recapture the area that is the last main rebel stronghold near Damascus.

Videos have surfaced from the eastern suburbs showing paramedics pulling out the injured from under the rubble while others are seen frantically digging through the debris in the dark, in search for survivors.

Monday's bombardment that killed nearly 100 people saw the use of warplanes, helicopter gunships,

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missiles as well as artillery, in a major escalation of violence near President Bashar Assad's seat of power. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was the deadliest days in eastern Ghouta since 2015, adding that 20 children and 15 women were among those killed.

The opposition-affiliated Syrian Civil Defense, also known as White Helmets, said the shelling and airstrikes killed 98 and that some people are still under the rubble. It said the dead included one of the rescue group's members, Firas Jomaa.

Both the Observatory and the White Helmets reported more airstrikes and shelling on Tuesday in eastern Ghouta as rebels pounded Damascus with mortar shells. The White Helmets reported 15 deaths on Tuesday while the Observatory said 23 people were killed.

Rebels retaliated by hitting some Damascus neighborhoods with mortar shells, killing eight persons, including three children, and wounding 15 people, according to the state news agency SANA. On Tuesday morning, Damascus residents reported shelling of areas in central Damascus.

"Shells are falling like rain. We are hiding in the corridor," a Damascus resident told The Associated Press, asking that her name not be mentioned for her own safety. She spoke while hiding in the corridor of an office building.

"It's a bloody day," said Abdelrahman Shahin, a 31-year-old resident of Damascus who was walking on the street when a shell landed on a nearby taxi, killing the driver and a passenger in front of his eyes.

"They both died," he said, visibly shaken. "The driver was out for his livelihood, his family will be waiting for him," he said.

Syrian state TV later reported live from the streets of Damascus to show what it called the people's "steadfastness" despite the shelling. The TV reporter said residents expressed hope that the Syrian army would retake eastern Ghouta.

The U.N. children's agency, UNICEF, issued a one-page statement of protest against the killings and carried a headline, saying: "Do those inflicting the suffering still have words to justify their barbaric acts?"

The headline was followed by a blank space underneath. UNICEF said it issued this blank statement because "we no longer have the words to describe children's suffering and our outrage."

The International Committee of the Red Cross also issued a statement saying that "this cannot go on." It added that "distressing reports" of dozens injured and killed every day in eastern Ghouta with "families trapped, with no safe place to hide from shelling. Dozens of mortars in Damascus cause civilian casualties and spread fear. We cannot let history repeat itself."

"The humanitarian situation of civilians in East Ghouta is spiraling out of control," said Panos Mourtzis, the U.N. regional humanitarian coordinator for the Syria crisis, in a statement late Monday.

"It's imperative to end this senseless human suffering now. Such targeting of innocent civilians and infrastructure must stop now," he said.

Associated Press writers Zeina Karam in Beirut and Albert Aji in Damascus, Syria contributed to this report.

Fighting gun violence after shooting gives teens purpose

By JASON DEAREN, Associated Press

PARKLAND, Fla. (AP) — Chris Grady was a theater kid counting down the days until he reported for duty in the U.S. Army this summer, when a gunman opened fire at his school. As he huddled in his classroom at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School last Wednesday listening to shots ring out nearby, what he felt wasn't fear, but anger.

"Full-on anger," the thin, curly haired 19-year-old said.

Grady's anger deepened the day after the shooting, when he heard news that the FBI had failed to follow up on a tip about the former student who police say gunned down 14 students and three staff members with an AR-15 styled rifle. News also emerged that Nikolas Cruz had legally purchased the gun despite a documented history of mental health issues.

The FBI received a tip last month that Cruz had a "desire to kill" and access to guns and could be plotting

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an attack, but agents failed to investigate, the agency acknowledged Friday. Others had received warnings as well: Records show the Florida Department of Children and Families investigated, but concluded Cruz wasn't a danger to himself or others.

On Friday, as gun-control debates raged anew on social media, one of Grady's close friends created a Twitter account, @NeverAgainMSD, to channel the students' anger and frustration.

"The Never Again movement started formulating, and we got to work," Grady said.

Grady and his friend are among about 100 Stoneman Douglas students who are heading to Florida's capital, Tallahassee, to push lawmakers to do something to stop gun violence. They also plan to maintain the momentum by attending what they hope will be a massive march on Washington next month.

The efforts have offered students a way to channel their anger and sadness into action. Grady's life was upended by the shooting. But now, as one of the organizers behind the students' call for stricter gun-control laws, he is laser-focused on planning and media interviews.

On Tuesday, he will ride a bus to Tallahassee. On Wednesday, he and a small group of Never Again organizers will fly back to Parkland for a televised Town Hall meeting about the shooting. Then their focus will turn to the planned March for Life on the nation's capital on March 24.

That doesn't leave a lot of time for school.

"If we've got to take some extra days off, that's fine to continue the movement," he said. "Academics have been put on the back burner."

Prior to the shooting, Chris' time was spent studying theater and working out to get his body in shape for the Army, where he wants to pursue a career in information technology. The second-oldest of four kids, he moved to Parkland from Massachusetts when he was 6. His mother is a property manager, and his step-father is an electrician.

Given his interest in a military career, Chris said he is not anti-gun and supports the Second Amendment. But he believes assault rifles such as the AR-15 styled rifle that authorities say Cruz used should be reserved for the military.

"They're weapons of war made to kill as many people as possible in as short a time as possible," he said.

Grady said he's ready to work as much as it takes to keep the gun-control movement's momentum going until he ships out.

"The kids in Newtown were too young to understand what happened and were too young to have their own voice," he said, referring to the 20 first-graders killed in the 2012 Connecticut school shooting. "We want to be the voice for those kids and thousands of others who have been affected by tragedies like this."

Follow Jason Dearen on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/JHDearen>

Trump endorses Romney's Senate bid _ and Romney accepts

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is endorsing Mitt Romney in Utah's Senate race, another sign that the two Republicans are burying the hatchet after a fraught relationship.

The GOP's presidential nominee in 2012, Romney announced last week he would seek the nomination to replace retiring Sen. Orrin Hatch. In a tweet Monday night, Trump wrote, "He will make a great Senator and worthy successor to @OrrinHatch, and has my full support and endorsement!" Romney quickly accepted the endorsement via Twitter.

Trump has not always been so positive about Romney the political candidate. In 2016 Trump said the former Massachusetts governor had "choked like a dog" during his failed 2012 bid against President Barack Obama.

For his part, Romney gave a scathing critique of then-candidate Trump during the GOP primary that year, calling him a "phony" who was unfit for office. More recently, Romney criticized Trump's response to last year's deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and last month called Trump's use of an obscenity to describe African countries as inconsistent with American history and values.

Members of both political parties have suggested that Romney, if elected to the Senate, would continue to call out Trump if he believed the president warranted criticism. However, Romney did not mention Trump or his scandal-plagued administration in his campaign announcement on Friday, focusing instead on how his adopted state of Utah could be a model for better government in Washington.

Asked Friday if he would seek or accept Trump's endorsement, Romney demurred but said they had talked on the phone two or three times in recent months and had a cordial and respectful relationship.

Within minutes of Trump's tweet Monday night, Romney sent one of his own: "Thank you Mr. President for the support. I hope that over the course of the campaign I also earn the support and endorsement of the people of Utah."

Funerals: Grieving teens, raw emotions after school shooting

By TERRY SPENCER, JENNIFER KAY and KELLI KENNEDY, Associated Press

PARKLAND, Fla. (AP) — Each funeral for the victims of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High massacre is different, yet the same: the mourning relatives, teens walking in clutches wearing black, politicians paying their respects, media cameras pointing at the entrance from across the parking lot.

And each service takes its toll on the young mourners, many of them attending more friends' funerals in a span of days than many middle-aged people have in their lifetimes. Services for 14 Stoneman Douglas students, the athletic director, a coach and a geography teacher began Friday, two days after the shooting, and will end in the next few days.

Erica Sparrow, a 17-year-old senior, said Monday that she went to her first funeral a couple of weeks ago, "now I have one every day." She and her friend, Lauren Kuperman, also 17, began ticking off names — Meadow Pollack from Friday, Joaquin Oliver from Saturday and Alaina Petty's on Monday. Three more Tuesday, another Wednesday. It's both difficult and cathartic, the girls said.

"It kind of helps but at the same time it makes me sad," Sparrow said.

Stoneman Douglas senior Lewis Mizen said Monday he had never attended a funeral for someone his own age before the weekend. He will attend another Tuesday. When an older family member dies, he said, it seems natural that their children and grandchildren speak about their loss, but seeing parents eulogize their child cuts deep emotionally.

"Seeing a father freak out, I hope I never have to see something like that again," Mizen said. "Right now, it all seems very surreal."

The funerals have taken place in churches and synagogues, funeral homes and conference centers, all packed, sometimes with crowds topping 2,000. The last-arriving mourners have often been forced outside into the Florida heat, where they stand respectfully for an hour, straining to hear a snippet of the service.

Monday's funeral for Petty, a 14-year-old freshman, was unique but also unfortunately too common in this grieving community. More than 1,500 mourners, most dressed in black, filed into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Coral Springs to remember the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps member. Family members spoke about how she enthusiastically joined other Mormon youth to help with cleanup efforts in September after Hurricane Irma, and of her love of dogs and her confidence and wit.

Her father Ryan Petty spoke about the support his family has received from their church, the community and from around the country and world.

"We could not get through this without the love, prayers and support offered," he said. "We may never know all of the acts of kindness that have been rendered on our behalf this past week. We have witnessed hundreds in just the past few days but we know that is a small fraction of the total."

Other fathers and mothers have said similar words in recent days, begging mourners to never forget their child and to treat each other with kindness.

The father of 18-year-old Meadow Pollack called out the 19-year-old gunman Nikolas Cruz, the former Stoneman Douglas student who has admitted Wednesday's killings, yelling, "You killed my daughter!" before calling him an obscenity. The mother of Alyssa Alhadeff, 14, called on politicians to enact laws that will prevent future school massacres.

Siblings also have bared their loss. Petty's older sister, Meghan Petty, talked about how Alaina will now be her guardian angel and that the shooting should not detract from the goodness that lives within the community.

"What happened to her is that it was a very, very ugly act that was committed by one person but as you look around at how many people who are here ... there are thousands more who are doing something really beautiful for my sister," Meghan Petty said.

Dr. Francisco Cruz, lead psychiatrist at Ketamine Health Centers, suggested some survivors may want to limit themselves to services for their close friends, but he said overexposure to news coverage and social media posts about the shooting may be more harmful than attending several funerals.

"Going through the funeral process and remembering your classmates and feeling support from friends and family and the community can be empowering," Cruz said. "It can help people to get through these tough times and help them be more resilient down the line."

Kay reported from Miami.

Follow the AP's complete coverage of the Florida school shooting here: <https://apnews.com/tag/Floraschoolshooting>

Pennsylvania's new congressional map could boost Democrats

By MARC LEVY, Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Pennsylvania's high court imposed a new congressional district map for the state's 2018 elections on Monday, potentially giving Democrats a boost in their quest to capture control of the U.S. House unless Republicans can stop it in federal court.

The map of Pennsylvania's 18 congressional districts is to be in effect for the May 15 primary and substantially overhauls a Republican-drawn congressional map widely viewed as among the nation's most gerrymandered. The map was approved in a 4-3 decision, with four Democratic justices backing it and one Democratic justice siding with two Republicans against it.

The divided court appears to have drawn its own map with the help of a Stanford University law professor, although some district designs are similar to proposals submitted to the court by Democrats.

Most significantly, the new map gives Democrats a better shot at winning a couple more seats, particularly in Philadelphia's heavily populated and moderate suburbs. There, Republicans have held seats in bizarrely contorted districts, including one labeled "Goofy Kicking Donald Duck."

Democrats cheered the new map, which could dramatically change the predominantly Republican, all-male delegation elected on a 6-year-old map. The new map repackages districts that had been stretched nearly halfway across Pennsylvania and reunifies Democratic-heavy cities that had been split by Republican map drawers.

"It remedies the outrageous gerrymander of 2011, and that's the important thing, that the gerrymander be over," said David Landau, the Democratic Party chairman of Delaware County, which was ground zero for the "Goofy Kicking Donald Duck" district. "All that zigging and zagging is all gone, and it makes Delaware County a competitive seat now."

Republican lawmakers said they will quickly challenge the map in federal court, arguing that legislatures and governors, not courts, have the constitutional responsibility to draw congressional maps.

Mark Harris, a Pittsburgh-based GOP campaign consultant, was one of many Republicans bashing the new product.

"It's a straight Democratic gerrymander by a Democratic Supreme Court to help Democrats," Harris said.

Independent analysts said the map should improve Democratic prospects while still favoring Republicans as a whole. An analysis conducted through PlanScore.org concluded the court's redrawn map eliminates "much of the partisan skew" favoring Republicans on the old Republican-drawn map, although not all of it.

University of Florida political science doctoral student Brian Amos said Democrat Hillary Clinton beat

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Republican Donald Trump in eight of 18 districts in the 2016 presidential election on the court's map. That compared with six of 18 districts Clinton won in 2016 under the invalidated map.

The Democratic-majority state Supreme Court ruled last month in a party line decision that the district boundaries unconstitutionally put partisan interests above neutral line-drawing criteria, such as keeping districts compact and eliminating municipal and county divisions.

It's the first time a state court threw out congressional boundaries in a partisan gerrymandering case, this one brought by registered Democratic voters and the League of Women Voters last June.

Republicans appear to face an uphill battle in federal court.

Michael Morley, a constitutional law professor at Barry University in Florida, said federal courts are normally reluctant to undo a state court decision.

"I think it will be a major obstacle and a major challenge to get around it," Morley said.

Pennsylvania's Republican delegation has provided a crucial pillar of support for Republican control of the U.S. House since 2010.

Republicans who controlled the Legislature and the governor's office after the 2010 census crafted the now-invalidated map to elect Republicans and succeeded in that aim: Republicans won 13 of 18 seats in three straight elections even though Pennsylvania's registered Democratic voters outnumber Republicans.

Meanwhile, sitting congressmen, dozens of would-be candidates and millions of voters were beginning to sort out which district they live in barely a month before the candidates' deadline to submit paperwork to run.

Some races are wide open: There are six incumbents elected in 2016 not running again, the most in four decades. The new map also has immediate implications for some incumbents.

Republican Rep. Ryan Costello, whose suburban Philadelphia district was narrowly won by Clinton in 2016, is in even more dire straits now that his district adds the heavily Democratic city of Reading.

The map also removes the heart of one district from Philadelphia, where a crowd of candidates had assembled to replace the retiring Democratic Rep. Bob Brady, and moves it to suburban Montgomery County.

The new map does not apply to the March 13 special congressional election in the 18th District to fill the remaining 10 months in the term of former Republican Rep. Tim Murphy, who resigned amid an abortion scandal. But the winner will have a short stay in the seat unless they move: the court's map puts both candidates' homes in districts with a Pittsburgh-area incumbent.

Ex-workers at Russian 'troll factory' trust US indictment

By NAIRA DAVLASHYAN and IRINA TITOVA, Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (AP) — While Russian officials scoff at a U.S. indictment charging 13 Russians with meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, several people who worked at the same St. Petersburg "troll factory" say they think the criminal charges are well-founded.

Marat Mindiyarov, a former commenter at the innocuously named Internet Research Agency, says the organization's Facebook department hired people with excellent English skills to sway U.S. public opinion through an elaborate social media campaign.

His own experience at the agency makes him trust the U.S. indictment, Mindiyarov told The Associated Press. "I believe that that's how it was and that it was them," he said.

The federal indictment issued Friday names a businessman linked to President Vladimir Putin and a dozen other Russians. It alleges that Yevgeny Prigozhin — a wealthy restaurateur dubbed "Putin's chef," paid for the internet operation that created fictitious social media accounts and used them to spread tendentious messages.

The aim of the factory's work was either to influence voters or to undermine their faith in the U.S. political system, the 37-page indictment states.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Monday that while the indictment focuses on "Russian nationals," it gives "no indication that the Russian government was involved in this in any way." Peskov reasserted that Moscow did not interfere in the U.S. election.

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Mindiyarov said he failed the language exam needed to get a job on the Internet Research Agency's Facebook desk, where the pay was double than the domestic side of the factory. The sleek operation produced content that looked as if it were written by native English speakers, he said.

"These were people with excellent language skills, interpreters, university graduates," he said, "It's very hard to tell it's a foreigner writing because they master the language wonderfully."

The English test he took asked for a writing sample about Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's chances of winning the U.S. presidential vote, Mindiyarov recalled.

"I wrote that her chances were high and she could become the first female president," he told the AP.

Mindiyarov said he took a job at the troll factory in late 2014 because he was unemployed and curious. At the time, about 400 people occupied four floors of an office building and worked 12-hour shifts, he said. Most of the operation focused on the separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine and Western sanctions against Russia, not political races in the West, he said.

The factory had video and photo departments, Mindiyarov said. The trolls received their wages in cash and operated in teams as they tried to foment public interest with fake discussions, he said.

"We worked in a group of three where one played the part of a scoundrel, the other one was a hero, and the third one kept a neutral position," he said. "For instance, one could write that Putin was bad, the other one would say it was not so, and the third would confirm the position of the second while inserting some picture."

After only a couple of months, Mindiyarov quit. He said he hated the work.

"The world in those comments was divided into black and white: America was bad, Putin was good," he said. "They praised whatever had to do with Putin and criticized anything related to America, 'gay' Europe, and so on. That was the principle of the work."

Another former worker at the St. Petersburg workshop, Lyudmila Savchuk, also described it as an efficient venture that churned out posts around the clock.

Like Mindiyarov, Savchuk was employed in the domestic department of the "troll farm," not the international division. Nevertheless, she said her experience there corresponds with what she knows of the allegations made by American authorities.

"The posts and comments are made to form the opinion of Russian citizens regarding certain issues, and as we see it works for other countries, too," Savchuk told the AP.

Paid trolls used carefully crafted fake identities that made them come across like real people, she said.

"The most important principle of the work is to have an account like a real person," Savchuk said. "They create real characters, choosing a gender, a name, a place of living and an occupation. Therefore, it's hard to tell that the account was made for the propaganda."

Prigozhin, aka "Putin's Chef," owned restaurants and catering businesses that hosted the Russian leader's dinners with foreign dignitaries. He used his relationship with Putin to expand his business to include services for the Russian military.

"I'm not at all upset that I'm on this list," Prigozhin said of the indictment in comments carried by Russia's state RIA Novosti news agency. "If they want to see the devil, let them see him."

Along with producing social media supporting Donald Trump's candidacy and disparaging Clinton, the Internet Research Agency purchased online advertisements using identities stolen from Americans and staged political rallies while posing as American political activists, the indictment alleges. The agency also paid people in the U.S. to promote or ridicule the candidates, the document states.

Analysts and journalists have found that some of the Russian-run accounts accrued national followings in the United States, while far-right Americans and several members of Trump's team retweeted posts created in St. Petersburg.

It reportedly used doctored videos to spread false reports about a supposed Islamic State attack on a chemical plant in Louisiana and a purported case of Ebola in the state of Georgia. Seeking to sow division and mistrust ahead of the U.S. election, the agency apparently whipped up a fake video of an African-American woman being shot dead by a white police officer in Atlanta.

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"All of the trolls knew that it's Prigozhin who stands behind this all," Mindiyarov, the ex-commenter who left the organization in early 2015, said. "But nobody had any evidence."

He said that the employees disliked Prigozhin, in part because he didn't set up a cafeteria or canteen in the troll factory building even though he owned a sprawling catering business.

"People had to bring food boxes from home," Mindiyarov said. "Prigozhin did not treat the trolls well. He could at least feed them."

While the U.S. indictment mentioned 13 people, many more must have been involved in the effort, according to Savchuk.

"Here they laugh about the news that 13 people could influence the elections in the U.S., but there were many more people doing that," she said. "These technologies are unbelievably effective."

She added that she learned how effective the troll farm's work was when she saw regular people sharing opinions and information that she knew were planted by trolls.

"They believed it was their own thoughts, but I saw that those thoughts were formed by the propagandists," she said.

The Internet Research Agency has reportedly changed locations, moving to another business center in the northern part of St. Petersburg. It's unclear whether it still goes by that name.

Andrey Zakharov, an investigative journalist with Russian RBC outlet who co-reported an investigation of the troll factory, said the list of indicted Russians looked "quite random" to him.

"They simply included in it all the names they could find," Zakharov told the AP. "According to our information, some of these people don't work at the factory now and did not even work there during the (U.S.) elections. This does not look like a result of a solid investigation."

Although the U.S. indictment is detailed, it makes assertions without providing evidence outright. Russian officials have seized on that, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who dismissed the charges as "just blabber."

Mstyslav Chernov in St. Petersburg, Iuliia Subbotovska, Nataliya Vasilyeva and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow and Raphael Satter in Paris contributed to this report.

Wardrobe issues causes Olympic stress for French skaters

By DAVE SKRETTA, AP Sports Writer

GANGNEUNG, South Korea (AP) — The first notes of Ed Sheeran's "Shape of You" had just played when Gabriella Papadakis suddenly became aware that people were about to see a whole lot more of her shape than she had planned.

The French ice dancer's glittering emerald costume at the Olympics had come unhooked at the neckline and later in the routine her left breast was exposed live on television.

When the clasp became unhooked, the 22-year-old Papadakis was more worried about holding up her outfit than making sure her twizzles and rhumba were in sync. Her swinging short program with partner Guillaume Cizeron at the Pyeongchang Olympics was threatening to go down in history alongside Janet Jackson's infamous wardrobe malfunction during her halftime performance at the Super Bowl.

"I felt it right away and I prayed," Papadakis said. "That's about what I could do."

Somehow, the French couple kept things together through most of their Latin program, producing a score of 81.93 points Monday that left them second behind Canadian stars Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir.

Not all the program, though.

It was during the final element, when Papadakis leaned back in Cizeron's arms, that her costume rode upward to reveal her breast. The performance was being shown live on international television, and people immediately began posting screen-grabs of the incident on social media.

"Our coverage of ice dancing was live tonight. Once a competitor's brief wardrobe issue became evident, we purposely used wider camera shots and carefully selected replays to keep the issue obscured," NBC said in a statement to The Associated Press. "We have edited the video for all television encores and

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online replays.”

It was the second wardrobe mishap during the skating program at the Pyeongchang Games. American-born ice dancer Yura Min, competing for South Korea, had the back of her costume come unclasped during her short program with partner Alex Gamelin in the team competition.

Papadakis and Cizeron, considered the biggest threat to Virtue and Moir for gold, still managed to gain level-four marks for all their elements save their final straight line lift. That left the French duo less than two points behind their Canadian training partners on a packed leaderboard.

It’s unclear whether the judges docked the couple for the wardrobe issue. The rules state losing any part of a costume, even a hair clip, can lead to a one-point deduction.

“It’s a little bit frustrating to know that it’s not because of something that we did,” Cizeron said. “It’s just a costume issue, something as stupid as that, so it’s a little bit disappointing.”

Papadakis was nearly in tears as she approached reporters after the routine, which is required of any Olympic competitor after competition. But she was in better spirits an hour later, when she no doubt realized that her chance of a gold medal was still intact.

“It was pretty distracting, kind of my worst nightmare happening at the Olympics,” Papadakis said. “I told myself, ‘I don’t have a choice. I have to keep going,’ and that’s what we did. I think we can be proud of ourselves being able to deliver a great performance with that happening.”

More AP Olympic coverage: <https://wintergames.ap.org>

Oxfam says staff intimidated witnesses in Haiti sex scandal

By **DANICA KIRKA**, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Oxfam workers suspected of sexual misconduct in Haiti intimidated and threatened a witness as the charity investigated the original claims, according to the organization’s report on the internal inquiry.

The findings were part of a previously confidential report released by Oxfam on Monday as the charity responds to newspaper stories suggesting it covered up allegations that seven employees used prostitutes on the charity’s property while working in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake that devastated the country.

“We are making this exceptional publication because we want to be as transparent as possible about the decisions we made during this particular investigation and in recognition of the breach of trust that has been caused,” the charity said in a statement. “We are also meeting with the government of Haiti to apologize for our mistakes and discuss what more we can do, including for the women affected by these events.”

Simon Ticehurst, Oxfam director for Latin America and the Caribbean, met Monday with Haiti’s external planning minister and other officials. Ticehurst said he had shared the report and expressed “our shame and apologies to the Haitian government and to the Haitian people.”

Publication of the report comes as Oxfam seeks to move past the scandal after the British government on Friday suspended new funding to Oxfam’s British affiliate. Oxfam Great Britain received 31.7 million pounds (\$43.8 million) from the government in the 12 months through March 31, 2017, or about 8 percent of its revenue.

Oxfam’s report shows the investigation was triggered by an email alleging that staff members in Haiti had violated the organization’s code of conduct by using prostitutes in Oxfam guesthouses and engaging in fraud, nepotism and negligence.

While the inquiry was still underway, the line manager of one of the suspects leaked a report to another member of staff.

“This resulted in 3 of the suspects ... physically threatening and intimidating one of the witnesses who had been referred to in the report,” according to the final report. “This incident led to further charges of bullying and intimidation against these 3 members of staff.”

Overall, Oxfam investigated allegations that seven members of staff used prostitutes on the charity’s

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property. Two of the seven were also investigated for "sexual exploitation and abuse of employees," and two allegedly viewed pornography on Oxfam computers.

The director of operations in the country admitted using sex workers in his charity-funded accommodation but was given a "phased and dignified exit" as long as he fully cooperated with the investigation, Oxfam said in the report.

In total, seven staff members either resigned or were dismissed as a result of the investigation.

While the report confirms Oxfam's previous statements that allegations of workers having sex with minors weren't substantiated, it goes on to say that "it cannot be ruled out that any of the prostitutes were under-aged."

The report also suggests that Oxfam failed to heed some of the findings of its own investigation. Recent news reports have criticized the charity for allowing some of those involved in the Haiti allegations to move on to jobs with other aid agencies, and the report highlighted this as area of concern.

In a section on lessons learned from the Haiti scandal, Oxfam agency said it needed to embed "women's rights at the heart of what we do," and implement better procedures to stop disgraced workers from moving on to new posts in the aid industry.

Former AP photographer Max Desfor dies at 104

By DOUGLASS K. DANIEL, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Associated Press photographer Max Desfor, whose photo of hundreds of Korean War refugees crawling across a damaged bridge in 1950 helped win him a Pulitzer Prize, died Monday. He was 104.

Desfor died at his apartment in Silver Spring, Maryland, where he'd been living in his retirement, said his son, Barry.

Desfor volunteered to cover the Korean War for the news service when the North invaded the South in June 1950. He parachuted into North Korea with U.S troops and retreated with them after forces from the North, joined by the Chinese, pushed south.

He was in a Jeep near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang when he spotted a bridge that had been hit by bombing along the Taedong River. Thousands of refugees were lined up on the north bank waiting their turn to cross the river.

"We came across this incredible sight," he recalled in 1997 for an AP oral history. "All of these people who are literally crawling through these broken-down girders of the bridge. They were in and out of it, on top, underneath, and just barely escaping the freezing water."

Desfor climbed a 50-foot-high section of the bridge to photograph the refugees as they fled for their lives.

"My hands got so cold I could barely trip the shutter on my camera," he remembered. "I couldn't even finish a full pack of film. It was just that cold."

The Pulitzer jury in 1951 determined that Desfor's photos from Korea the previous year had "all the qualities which make for distinguished news photography — imagination, disregard for personal safety, perception of human interest and the ability to make the camera tell the whole story." The Pulitzer board honored his overall coverage of the war, based on a portfolio of more than 50 photos, and cited the Taedong River bridge shot in particular.

A native of New York, Desfor was born in the Bronx on Nov. 8, 1913, and attended Brooklyn College. He joined the AP in 1933 as a messenger. After teaching himself the basics of photography and moonlighting as a baby photographer, he began shooting occasional assignments for the AP. He became a staff photographer in the Baltimore bureau in 1938 and moved to the Washington bureau a year later.

During World War II, Desfor photographed the crew of the Enola Gay after the B-29 landed in Saipan from its mission to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945. He was with the first wave of Marines at Tokyo Bay shortly after Japan's surrender that month and photographed the official surrender ceremony aboard the USS Missouri on Sept. 2, 1945.

Desfor worked for the AP in the Philippines and in India, where he photographed Mahatma Gandhi and

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later covered the assassinated leader's funeral in 1948. He also worked in the AP's Rome bureau and was set to return to the U.S. when war broke out in Korea.

After the war Desfor served as supervising editor of Wide World Photos, the AP's photo service, and returned to Asia in 1968 as photo chief for the region. He retired from the AP in 1978, then joined U.S. News & World Report as photo director.

Desfor and his wife, Clara, raised a son, Barry, of Wauconda, Illinois. She died in 2004.

In January 2012, when he was 98, Desfor and his longtime companion, Shirley Belasco, surprised guests at a party celebrating her 90th birthday by marrying in front of their guests. They had been friends since the 1980s when the Desfors and Ms. Belasco lived in the same Silver Spring apartment building and became a couple a few years after his wife's death. Ms. Belasco died in 2015.

A photo Desfor took during his long career that had particular meaning to him also came from the Korean War. Walking near a field he spotted two hands, blue from cold, sticking up in the snow and photographed them. The hands, which had been bound, belonged to one of several civilians taken prisoner and executed, their bodies left to be covered by snowfall.

"I labeled that picture, later on, 'Futility,' because it's always been — I've always felt that it's the civilians caught in the crossfire, the civilians, the innocent civilians, how futile it is for war," he said for the oral history. "That epitomized it to me."

MLB imposes stricter mound limits, defers on pitch clocks

By RONALD BLUM, AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Major League Baseball has imposed stricter limits on mound visits by players in an effort to speed games but decided against 20-second pitch clocks for 2018.

After more than a year of negotiations, the Major League Baseball Players Association refused to agree to the changes but also signed an agreement that it will not oppose the rules.

The amendments to the playing rules announced Monday include a general limit of six mound visits per nine-inning game without a pitching change, whether by a manager, coach or player.

"We'll have to just figure out a more non-verbal method of communication," Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "We're not going to be texting, I promise you that, even if we could."

Detroit catcher James McCann objected.

"Some people may say that a catcher visiting with the pitcher isn't a big deal," he said, "but what if you've already had five mound visits and you got your closer on the mound in the ninth inning, and you're facing the three and four hitters with guys on second and third, bases loaded? You can't go out and talk to him?"

To assuage players' concerns about sign stealing, MLB will install new telephone lines from dugouts to video replay rooms. MLB said the lines will be monitored, and a person familiar with the decision told The Associated Press all conversations on the lines will be recorded. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because that detail was not announced.

"If you're really like stealing signs from up top with the video and transmitting them somehow in that nanosecond you'd be more concerned," Maddon said. "Otherwise. It'll just be entertaining. You don't even have to do that, you could run up and down the tunnel."

MLB has the right to make playing rules changes absent an agreement with one year notice and made proposals during the 2016-17 offseason for a pitch clock and more restrictions on mound visits.

"My strong preference is to continue to have ongoing dialogue with players on this topic to find mutually acceptable solutions," Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement.

Union head Tony Clark noted the sides technically did not reach a deal.

"The focus on mound visits and/or the level of commitment on the other pieces simply didn't focus enough attention on the areas the players wanted to address — so no agreement was reached," he said in an email to the AP.

"While a number of pitchers will acknowledge that some mound visits are unnecessary, a limitation combined with what the experience has been of late in regard to technologically enhanced sign stealing means that there are concerns about how this will work ... or not work."

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Until now, the only restriction on mound visits was a second visit to the same pitcher during an inning by a manager or coach resulted in an automatic pitching change. The number of visits by catchers during games has increased in recent years, contributing to the average time of a nine-inning game stretching to a record 3 hours, 5 minutes last season, up from 2:46 in 2005.

Under the new rule, each team would get an additional mound visit without a pitching change for each extra inning. Trips will not count against the limit following an offensive substitution, to check on potential injuries or to clean spikes on wet fields. If a team is out of visits, the plate umpire may give permission for additional trips by the catcher in the event of a cross-up on pitch signals.

MLB is eliminating the rules guaranteeing eight warmup pitches before a half-inning in an effort to keep between-inning breaks to 2:05 for most games, 2:25 for regular-season games on national television and 2:55 for tiebreaker and postseason games. There are exceptions relating to injury and if the pitcher or catcher finishes the previous half inning on base, at bat or on deck.

Last year, a system of fines was not enforced until a player was 20 seconds over the inning-break limit. Players have been fined for pace violations in each of the last three seasons, but individual names have not been made public.

AP Baseball Writers Janie McCauley and Noah Trister contributed to this report.

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

Trump offers support for limited effort on background checks

By CATHERINE LUCEY and MARIA DANILOVA, Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — From the confines of his golf club, President Donald Trump offered support for a limited strengthening of federal background checks on gun purchases Monday while staying largely mum in the last few days about the victims of the Florida school massacre and the escalating debate about controls on weapons.

One side of that debate was represented outside the White House as dozens of teens spread their bodies across the pavement to symbolize the dead and call for stronger gun controls, a precursor to a march in Washington planned next month by survivors of the Parkland school shooting and supporters of their cause.

At his Florida club just 40 miles from a community ravaged by the shooting that left 17 dead last week, Trump gave a nod toward a specific policy action, with the White House saying he had spoken Friday to Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican, about a bipartisan bill designed to strengthen the FBI database of prohibited gun buyers.

Spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders qualified the support, stressing that talks continue and "revisions are being considered," but said "the president is supportive of efforts to improve the federal background check system."

The main action Trump has taken on guns in office has been to sign a resolution blocking an Obama-era rule designed to keep guns out of the hands of certain mentally disabled people. The president has voiced strong support for gun rights and the National Rifle Association.

The bipartisan background check legislation would be aimed at ensuring that federal agencies and states accurately report relevant criminal information to the FBI. It was introduced after the Air Force failed to report the criminal history of the gunman who slaughtered more than two dozen people at a Texas church.

The White House statement comes as shooting survivors and other young people press for more gun control in a rising chorus of grief and activism. Their "March for Our Lives" is planned March 24 in Washington.

Ella Fesler, 16-year-old high school student in Alexandria, Virginia, was among the students at the "lie-in" in front of the White House. She said it was time for change, adding: "Every day when I say 'bye' to my parents, I do acknowledge the fact that I could never see my parents again."

But previous gun tragedies have not produced action in Congress. After the Las Vegas massacre in the

fall, Republicans and Democrats in Congress talked about taking a rare step to tighten the nation's gun laws. Four months later, the only gun legislation that has moved in the House or Senate instead eases restrictions for gun owners.

Kristin Brown, co-president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, said the measure Trump discussed with Cornyn would help to enforce existing rules but would not close loopholes permitting loose private sales on the internet and at gun shows. She's pressing for a ban on assault-type weapons and for laws enabling family members, guardians or police to ask judges to strip gun rights temporarily from people who show warning signs of violence.

"We need a comprehensive system," Brown said. "One of these isn't enough."

Trump, who visited first responders and some victims Friday, has focused his comments on mental health, rather than guns. The White House says the president will host a "listening session" with students and teachers this week and will discuss school safety with state and local officials. But they have offered no further details on who will attend those sessions.

Trump spent most of his weekend at his private Palm Beach estate, Mar-a-Lago. White House aides advised against golfing too soon after the shooting. But on President's Day, the avid golfer headed to his nearby golf club. The White House did not immediately answer questions about whether he was playing golf.

President Barack Obama took heavy criticism in 2014 when he went golfing during a vacation just minutes after denouncing the militants who had beheaded an American journalist. He later regretted playing golf so soon after the killing.

Trump watched cable television news during the weekend and grouched to club members and advisers about the investigation of Russian election meddling.

In a marathon series of furious weekend tweets from Mar-a-Lago, Trump vented about Russia, raging at the FBI for what he perceived to be a fixation on the Russia investigation at the cost of failing to deter the attack.

Associated Press writer Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report.

Trump focus on mental health after school shooting denounced

By LINDSEY TANNER, AP Medical Writer

Frustration is mounting in the medical community as the Trump administration again points to mental illness in response to yet another mass shooting.

"The concept that mental illness is a precursor to violent behavior is nonsense," said Dr. Louis Kraus, forensic psychiatry chief at Chicago's Rush University Medical College. "The vast majority of gun violence is not attributable to mental illness."

Nikolas Cruz, the 19-year-old charged with killing 17 people on Valentine's Day at his former high school in Parkland, Florida has been described by students as a loner with troubling behavior who had been kicked out of school. His mother recently died and Cruz had been staying with family friends.

Since the shooting, his mental health has been the focus of President Donald Trump's comments. And on a Thursday call with reporters, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said the administration is committed to addressing serious mental illness and that his agency "will be laser-focused on this issue in the days, weeks, and months to come."

Mental health professionals welcome more resources and attention, but they say the administration is ignoring the real problem — easy access to guns, particularly the kind of high-powered highly lethal assault weapons used in many of the most recent mass shootings.

"Even for those who manage to survive gun violence involving these weapons, the severity and lasting impact of their wounds, disabilities and treatment leads to devastating consequences," American Medical Association President David Barbe wrote in an online column after the shooting.

"We are not talking about Second Amendment rights or restricting your ability to own a firearm. We are talking about a public health crisis that our Congress has failed to address. This must end," Barbe wrote.

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Better access to mental health care, including for those who might be prone to violence, is important, but "to blame this all just on mental illness is not sufficient," he said in an interview Friday.

The AMA has supported efforts to boost gun violence research, ban assault weapons and to restrict access to automatic weapons. Barbe wrote in his column that federally funded research is crucial to address an "urgent health crisis."

Under gun industry pressure, U.S. government research on firearm violence has been limited for decades.

The American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and four other medical associations issued a joint statement Friday urging comprehensive action by Trump and Congress, including labeling gun violence a national public health epidemic.

The groups' recommendations include limits on high-powered, rapid-fire weapons designed to kill and funding gun violence research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to the CDC, there were about 38,000 U.S. gun deaths in 2016, slightly more than the number of people who died in car crashes.

"The families of the victims in Parkland and all those whose lives have been impacted by daily acts of gun violence deserve more than our thoughts and prayers. They need action from the highest levels of our government to stop this epidemic of gun violence now," the groups said in a statement.

The American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Osteopathic Association contributed to the statement.

The president views gun owners as a key constituency that helped deliver him to the White House.

Before he was a candidate, Trump at one point favored some tighter gun regulations. But he embraced gun rights as a candidate, and the NRA spent \$30 million in support of his campaign.

His latest budget request would slash Medicaid, the major source of federal funding for treating mental health problems, and cut school safety programs by more than a third. Last year, he signed a resolution blocking an Obama-era rule designed to keep guns out of the hands of certain mentally disabled people.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement Sunday that Trump is working with senators on a bill designed to improve criminal background checks. "While discussions are ongoing and revisions are being considered, the President is supportive of efforts to improve the Federal background check system," she said.

Florida's Republican governor, Rick Scott, a Trump ally, said he had discussed with Trump and GOP leaders how to restrict gun access to the mentally ill.

Federal and state laws already attempt to do this, in many cases with a ban on gun ownership for people who have been treated in mental institutions.

"There's a great naivete to what the president and the governor are proposing," Kraus said. A history of violent behavior, alcohol and substance use, and previous criminal behavior are all more pertinent factors to consider.

Dr. Garen Wintemute, director of a violence prevention research program at the University of California, Davis, said gun violence restraining order laws in California and Washington are "a much more focused approach." The laws allow courts to keep guns out of the hands of people who pose threats to themselves or others.

"Florida has no such mechanism. Could have prevented this one; there was plenty of advance notice," Wintemute said.

AP Writer Catherine Lucey contributed to this story from West Palm Beach, Fla.

Follow AP Medical Writer Lindsey Tanner on Twitter at @LindseyTanner . Her work can be found here .

Preventive treatment for peanut allergies succeeds in study

By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE, AP Chief Medical Writer**

The first treatment to help prevent serious allergic reactions to peanuts may be on the way. A company said Tuesday that its daily capsules of peanut flour helped sensitize children to nuts in a major study.

Millions of children have peanut allergies, and some may have life-threatening reactions if accidentally exposed to them.

Doctors have been testing daily doses of peanut flour, contained in a capsule and sprinkled over food, as a way to prevent that.

California-based Aimmune (AIM-yoon) Therapeutics says that 67 percent of kids who had its treatment were able to tolerate about two peanuts at the end of the study, compared to only 4 percent of others given a dummy powder. Full results will be presented at a medical meeting next month.

US stocks are mostly lower as markets reopen after holiday

By **ALEX VEIGA, AP Business Writer**

U.S. stocks were mostly lower in the early going Tuesday as trading reopened after a long holiday weekend. Disappointing earnings from Walmart weighed on the market, which was coming off a six-day winning streak. Losses in consumer-focused stocks and other sectors outweighed gains in energy companies and banks.

KEEPING SCORE: The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 9 points, or 0.3 percent, to 2,722 as of 10:03 a.m. Eastern Time. The Dow Jones industrial average slid 168 points, or 0.7 percent, to 25,050. The Nasdaq gained 4 points, or 0.1 percent, to 7,244.

BIG-BOX BUMMER: Walmart shares slumped 9.1 percent after the retailer reported fourth-quarter results that missed Wall Street's expectations as its e-commerce sales in the U.S. slowed. The world's largest retailer also announced better-than-expected sales overall and higher customer counts as the company overhauls its stores and its online services. The stock was the biggest decliner in the S&P 500, shedding \$9.54 to \$95.24. Several big retailers also declined, including Target, which slid \$3.19, or 4.2 percent, to \$71.89.

FASHIONABLE EXIT: Gap gave up 4.2 percent after the clothing chain said the CEO of the Gap brand will leave the company. Jeff Kirwan has been with the company since 2004 and has led the namesake brand since the end of 2014. The stock slid \$1.39 to \$31.88.

HOUSING BOOST: Home Depot rose after its latest quarterly results beat analyst estimates. The home-improvement giant benefited from strong demand for its wares amid a robust housing market and ongoing hurricane recovery work in the Southeast and Puerto Rico. Its shares added 43 cents to \$187.40.

CHIPPER DEAL: NXP Semiconductor jumped 6.2 percent after Qualcomm raised its offer for the company to \$127.50 a share, or \$43.22 billion, from \$110 a share. The move comes as Broadcom is trying to buy Qualcomm. Shares in NXP added \$7.33 to \$125.83. Qualcomm lost \$2.71, or 4.2 percent, to \$62.14.

DRUGSTORE BUY: Rite Aid gained 1.9 percent after grocery store operator Albertsons agreed to buy more than 2,500 of its stores. Rite Aid agreed to sell almost 2,000 locations to Walgreens last year after a larger deal fell apart. Albertsons owns brands including Safeway. The deal will double the amount of drugstores it owns. Rite Aid's stock, which has shed more than half its value over the past year, rose 4 cents to \$2.17.

BOND YIELDS: Bond prices fell. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 2.90 percent from 2.88 percent late Friday.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude added 23 cents to \$61.91 per barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price international oils, was down 56 cents at \$65.11 a barrel.

CURRENCIES: The dollar rose to 107.13 yen from 106.30 yen on Friday. The euro weakened to \$1.2357 from \$1.2413.

MARKETS OVERSEAS: Germany's DAX rose 0.5 percent, while France's CAC 40 gained 0.5 percent. Britain's FTSE 100 slipped 0.2 percent. Earlier in Asia, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 lost 1 percent, while

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Australia's S&P/ASX 200 inched lower. South Korea's Kospi lost 1.1 percent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.8 percent. Stocks were mixed in Southeast Asia, while markets in mainland China were still closed for lunar new year holidays.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 20, the 51st day of 2018. There are 314 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 20, 1962, astronaut John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth as he flew aboard Project Mercury's Friendship 7 spacecraft, which circled the globe three times in a flight lasting 4 hours, 55 minutes and 23 seconds before splashing down safely in the Atlantic Ocean 800 miles southeast of Bermuda.

On this date:

In 1792, President George Washington signed an act creating the United States Post Office Department.

In 1816, the opera buffa "The Barber of Seville" by Gioachino Rossini premiered in Rome under its original title, "Almaviva, or the Useless Precaution."

In 1862, William Wallace Lincoln, the 11-year-old son of President Abraham Lincoln and first lady Mary Todd Lincoln, died at the White House, apparently of typhoid fever.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an immigration act which excluded "idiots, imbeciles, feebleminded persons, epileptics, insane persons" from being admitted to the United States.

In 1915, the Panama Pacific International Exposition opened in San Francisco (the fair lasted until December).

In 1938, Anthony Eden resigned as British foreign secretary following Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's decision to negotiate with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

In 1942, Lt. Edward "Butch" O'Hare became the U.S. Navy's first flying ace of World War II by shooting down five Japanese bombers while defending the aircraft carrier USS Lexington in the South Pacific.

In 1950, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. Rabinowitz*, ruled 5-3 that authorities making a lawful arrest did not need a warrant to search and seize evidence in an area that was in the "immediate and complete control" of the suspect.

In 1971, the National Emergency Warning Center in Colorado erroneously ordered U.S. radio and TV stations off the air; some stations heeded the alert, which was not lifted for about 40 minutes.

In 1987, a bomb left by Unabomber Ted Kaczynski exploded behind a computer store in Salt Lake City, seriously injuring store owner Gary Wright. Soviet authorities released Jewish activist Josef Begun.

In 1998, Tara Lipinski of the U.S. won the ladies' figure skating gold medal at the Nagano Olympics while fellow American Michelle Kwan won the silver; Chen Lu of China won the bronze.

In 2003, a fire sparked by pyrotechnics broke out during a concert by the group Great White at The Station nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island, killing 100 people and injuring about 200 others.

Ten years ago: A U.S. Navy cruiser blasted a disabled spy satellite with a pinpoint missile strike that achieved the main mission of exploding a tank of toxic fuel 130 miles above the Pacific Ocean. Space shuttle Atlantis and its crew returned to Earth after delivering a new European lab to the international space station.

Five years ago: The Obama administration announced a broad new effort to fight the growing theft of American trade secrets following fresh evidence linking cyberstealing to China's military. Former U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-Ill., entered a guilty plea in federal court to criminal charges that he'd engaged in a scheme to spend \$750,000 in campaign funds on personal items; his wife, Sandra Jackson, pleaded guilty to filing false joint federal income tax returns.

One year ago: President Donald Trump tapped Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster as his new national security adviser, replacing the ousted Michael Flynn. Thousands of demonstrators turned out across the U.S. to

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challenge Donald Trump in a Presidents Day protest dubbed Not My President's Day.

Today's Birthdays: Socialite Gloria Vanderbilt is 94. Actor Sidney Poitier is 91. Racing Hall of Famer Bobby Unser is 84. Actress Marj Dusay is 82. Jazz-soul singer Nancy Wilson is 81. Racing Hall of Famer Roger Penske is 81. Singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie is 77. Hockey Hall of Famer Phil Esposito is 76. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is 76. Movie director Mike Leigh is 75. Actress Brenda Blethyn is 72. Actress Sandy Duncan is 72. Actor Peter Strauss is 71. Rock musician Billy Zoom (X) is 70. Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is 67. Country singer Kathie Baillie is 67. Actor John Voldstad is 67. Newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst is 64. Actor Anthony Head is 64. Country singer Leland Martin is 61. Actor James Wilby is 60. Rock musician Sebastian Steinberg is 59. Comedian Joel Hodgson (HAHD'-suhn) is 58. Basketball Hall of Famer Charles Barkley is 55. Rock musician Ian Brown (Stone Roses) is 55. Actor Willie Garson is 54. Actor French Stewart is 54. Actor Ron Eldard is 53. Model Cindy Crawford is 52. Actor Andrew Shue is 51. Actress Lili Taylor is 51. Actress Andrea Savage is 45. Singer Brian Littrell is 43. Actress Lauren Ambrose is 40. Actor Jay Hernandez is 40. Actress Chelsea Peretti is 40. Country musician Coy Bowles is 39. Actress Majandra Delfino is 37. Singer-musician Chris Thile (THEE'-lee) is 37. Actress-singer Jessie Mueller is 35. Comedian Trevor Noah is 34. Actor Jake Richardson is 33. Actress Daniella Pineda is 31. Actor Miles Teller is 31. Singer Rihanna is 30. Actor Jack Falahee is 29.

Thought for Today: "I've always believed in the adage that the secret of eternal youth is arrested development." — Alice Roosevelt Longworth, former first daughter (born 1884, died this date in 1980).