

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 12, 2018 ~ Vol. 25 - No. 241 ~ 1 of 43

“COINCIDENCE IS
THE LANGUAGE OF
THE STARS. FOR
SOMETHING TO
HAPPEN, SO MANY
FORCES HAVE TO BE
PUT INTO ACTION.”

-PAULO COELHO

Chicken Soup
for the Soul



605.290.1535

custom homes | remodels | additions

Henry Township Review Board Notice

Henry Township Equalization Meeting Notice:
Notice is hereby given that the governing body section will serve as review board of Henry Township, Brown County. They will be meeting at 7 p.m. Monday, March 19, 2018, at Doug Abeln Seed Company office for the purpose of reviewing and correcting of the assessment set of the tax districts for the year 2018. All persons considering disputing their assessments are requested to notify the clerk of the board no later than March 15, 2018. Hearings are by appointment only.

Darlene Sass
13120 403 Ave, Groton
Henry Township Clerk

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Today

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

The Groton Community Historical Society will hold its first fundraiser Monday, March 12, at the Groton Dairy Queen, from 5 to 9 pm. Owners Dale and Joyce Grenz offered to donate a percentage of sales during that time to the roofing fund for Groton's Historic Trinity Church.

Members of the Historical Society will be on hand to display information and answer questions about the church during the fundraiser. A booklet about the church and its need for a new roof is available for review at City Hall or online at <http://www.city.grotonsd.gov/forms/Booklet.pdf>

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

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



Glimpse From Greenfield

Brock Greenfield
State Senator
District 2

Numerous issues were resolved in the final days of Session that left many interested parties extremely satisfied, given the outlook just a few short weeks ago. In the end, we passed a budget and individual bills that provided funding for the State Veterans' Cemetery, the Prediwin Ag facility on the campus of SDSU, and locked in increased funding both in the base and over-and-above what was outlined in the

Governor's Budget Address in December. Education will receive a 1% increase in ongoing funding and .7% in one-time funding. State employees will receive both cost-of-living increases and health insurance increases. Community-based service providers, nursing homes, and hospitals will receive .5%-2% increases on a tiered basis based upon a scale. Also, two years ago, we set out on a three-year plan to get those adjustment training centers who are reimbursed at lesser rates up to a certain threshold of reimbursement. This budget accomplished that.

On the drug-watch front, we passed a series of bills that strengthen penalties for those who distribute methamphetamines and opioids and opiates. Anybody who has followed recent comments coming from Washington, D.C., knows that the President's administration is taking very seriously the drug epidemic, and they are pushing for enhanced sanctions for those who prey upon society by getting people hooked on these highly addictive drugs. The prevalence of overdose associated with these drugs is astounding, and we have attempted to put more teeth into our statutes and have also put a mechanism in-place that will encourage dealers to identify those higher up the chain in the hopes of bringing down drug kingpins.

With Tuesday being the final day for bills to be disposed of in the second chamber, I had a very busy day. I was the Senate prime sponsor on three House bills we took up that day, plus I spoke on a number of other bills I was involved with throughout session. HB 1297 would recognize that when we passed the education funding formula rewrite in 2016 that some schools were adversely affected in terms of their capital outlay funds. This bill would hold harmless any schools that had embarked on plans that sought to utilize capital outlay for certain building projects. I indicated on the floor that some 61 schools from across the state would benefit from passage of 1297. This bill was embraced by most legislators, although it was opposed by the Department of Education. The bill, as amended in Senate Education Committee, prevailed 33-1 on the Senate floor before heading back to the House where they concurred in Senate amendments 67-0.

HB 1172 would establish a statewide policy that at all public meetings, including those conducted via teleconference, members of the public must be afforded a time for public input. The only opposition in either committee came from the Associated School Boards of SD and the School Administrators of SD. They said that this is not a problem, as ASBSD provides model policy for schools to adopt and they all do so. However, Representative Liz May countered that such has not always been the case, and she provided evidence of her own personal experience. The bill extends to all units of government, though, from counties and municipalities to townships and schools, etc.

On its face, it appears to be good, common sense legislation that allows the public to have more confidence in the fact that their voices will be heard. The bill also stipulates that this only applies to those proceedings that are deemed public and does not in any way affect executive sessions or special meetings. The bill passed the Senate 24-9 before the House concurred in a Senate amendment, 56-11.

As the Senate prime on HB 1286, I had been involved with this bill early on, but the House had amended

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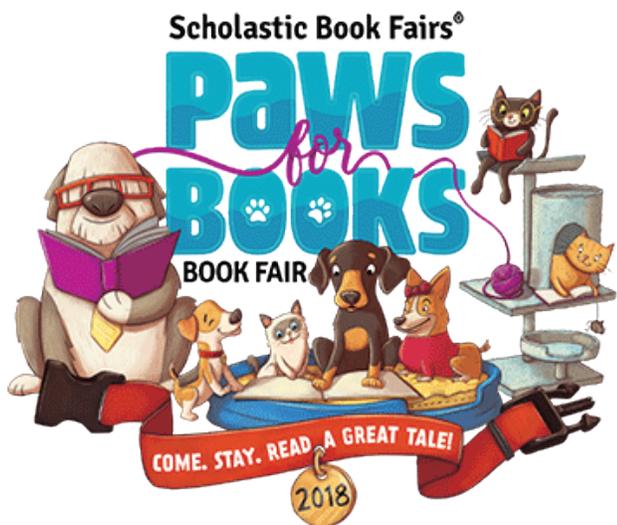
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the bill substantially. Ultimately, this bill was brought on behalf of the Secretary of State's Office to address a court order from a federal judge that said we had to fix some of our election laws. As it was drafted, the bill essentially addressed the four areas identified by the judge. When it got amended on the House side, it substantially changed the bill, and some folks who were following the bill suggested at best it only addressed on or two of the judges four orders. We amended the bill on the Senate side, but I asked the House to not concur with our Senate version of the bill so we could take it to a conference committee where we would have a little more time to iron out the wrinkles. In the end, we restored the bill to its original version and then made some stylistic changes and included one new section, thus making the bill much better. The final version of the bill was adopted by the Senate, 32-0 and the House, 59-5. We remain optimistic that this will be upheld by the courts and will moot any further litigation.

That is a broad lookback at the final week of session. The days were long, but productive. Over the next couple weeks, the Governor will decide whether to sign or veto the bills that have recently passed the legislature. We will return to Pierre on Monday, March 26, to consider any vetoes and to adjourn session sine die.

I would like to thank you, once again, for the trust you have placed in me to work for you. These past two years have afforded me the opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity that was very humbling. I am eternally grateful to you and to my fellow Senators for electing me to these positions. God bless you and yours!

Brock



Scholastic Book Fairs®
Paws for Books
BOOK FAIR
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2018

"Paws for Books"
Scholastic Book Fair
When: Tuesday, March 13, 2018
3:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Where: Groton Area Elementary
School Library

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



GROTON
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER
1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton

Wolves Advance to Sweet Sixteen Round, After Comeback Win over Huskies

Maryville, Mo. – Despite trailing for over 35 minutes of play, the No.6 Northern State University men's basketball team pulled out a 68-61 victory of St. Cloud State in the NCAA Central Region Tournament semifinals. The Wolves improve to 33-3 overall, advancing to the sweet sixteen round and the regional final.

The Wolves trailed 32-30 at the half and battled bringing things as close as 2-points on two occasions in the second before grabbing their first lead of the contest. Darin Peterka knocked down his first 3-pointer of the game at the 4:46 mark in the second, giving NSU the 56-55 lead. The Wolves then went on a 12-6 run in the final four minutes of regulation, as Peterka drained a second from beyond the arc and NSU knocked down nine from the foul line.

Northern shot 46.8 percent from the floor, 30.0 percent from the 3-point line, and 75 percent from the free-throw line in the win. The Huskies shot 41.4 percent from the floor, 28.6 percent from the arc, and 63.6 percent from the foul line. NSU also out-rebounded SCSU 34-32 in the game, notching a combined seven assists, two blocks, and one steal. As a team, the Wolves tallied 30 points in the paint, 19 points off the bench, 15 second chance points, and six points off turnovers.

Logan Doyle led the team in the game and off the bench with 14 points, shooting 55.6 percent from the floor. The senior notched a team second best six rebounds as well as on block. DJ Pollard was second on the team with 12 points, shooting 50.0 percent from the floor. Pollard went a perfect 6-for-6 at the foul line, and recorded one rebound and one assist.

Carter Evans and Gabe King tallied 11 and ten points respectively. Evans shot 50.0 percent from the floor, adding three rebounds and one block, while King hit 3-of-5 from the field and tallied five rebounds and one steal.

Ian Smith and Darin Peterka rounded out the starters with nine and seven points respectively. Peterka tallied two of the team's three long range buckets, and added a team second best six rebounds and two assists. Smith led the team with seven rebounds and four assists. Bo Fries added the final five team points for the Wolves, notching one made 3-pointer and three rebounds.

Northern will play the winner of the Minnesota State and Southwest Minnesota State game on Tuesday at 7 p.m. from Bearcat Arena. The winner will head to the Sanford Pentagon and the NCAA Elite Eight, scheduled for March 20-22-24.

Weekly Vikings Roundup By Jordan Wright

The Minnesota Vikings have plenty of cap space available this offseason. The NFL set the 2018 salary cap at \$177.2 million (per team), and teams are able to carry over any unused cap space from last season, so in total the Vikings have nearly \$191 million available (according to Sportrac.com). After all the current contracts are paid, the Vikings should have about \$47 million left over which is 9th highest in the league. So with all that available money, what will the Vikings do with it?

The first thing the Vikings need to do is figure out the quarterback position. The biggest rumor floating around the media is that the Vikings are the front-runners to sign Kirk Cousins, who will likely command a contract in the realm of \$27 million - \$31 million per year. Obviously, that would eat up a big chunk of the team's cap space. In this scenario, the Vikings would be out of the running for any other "big name" free agents and would be focused on simply combing through the second and third tier free agents to find some bargains. If that scenario is too cost prohibitive for the Vikings, the team can elect to re-sign either Case Keenum (projected \$21 million per year according to Sportrac) or Teddy Bridgewater (\$11 million per year projection). Signing one of these two would give the Vikings the ability to bring in a top tier free agent offensive lineman or defensive tackle free – two positions that clearly need upgrading this offseason.

The Vikings have one of the best cap managers in the NFL in Rob Brzezinski. One of the reasons he is so good is because he doesn't just look at this season, but also at the cap situation in the years to come. Because of that, it's hard to believe the team is willing to commit such a large chunk of their cap space to a quarterback of Cousins' caliber. The team knows they have a lot of young, up-and-coming free agents (Stefon Diggs, Anthony Barr, Danielle Hunter, Trae Waynes) who will need to be re-signed in the next year or two, and committing around \$30 million to Cousins would certainly make that hard to do.

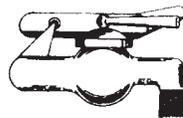
Don't get me wrong, Kirk Cousins is a good quarterback. But I don't believe he will bring much more to the team than Keenum provided last season, but he will cost considerably more money.

If the Vikings do bring in Cousins, they would be able to free up some cap space in a few different ways. First, Sharrif Floyd is still on the books for \$6.757 million this season, and if he is unable to get healthy, he could be cut. Anthony Barr is entering the fifth year of his rookie contract, which will pay him over \$12 million in 2018. If the Vikings were to sign him to an extension this offseason (which I believe will happen), they could drop his cap hit this year which would free up additional funds. Running back Latavius Murray, who signed a three-year deal last offseason, could also be cut which would free up \$5.15 million. Murray is a good back who provided the Vikings with some good games last season, but the Vikings have Dalvin Cook coming back from injury and therefor won't need Latavius as much in 2018.

At the end of the day, it all comes down to the quarterback position. Once the team figures that out, they will then be able to fill out the rest of the roster. The good news is that we won't have to wait long before we find out what the Vikings plan to do, since free agency officially begins this Wednesday, March 14 at 4 pm ET. Make sure to check out next week's article, which will break down the Vikings free agency start. Skoll!

BDM RURAL WATER SYSTEM, INC.

38th Annual Meeting



Monday, March 26, 2018
6:00 p.m.

BDM Building, Britton, SD

Lunch after the meeting • Door Prizes

- **Board and Management Report**
- **Election of Directors**

Please attend your water system's annual meeting!

A little sunshine on government is a good thing

By David Bordewyk

South Dakota Newspaper Association

A bill in the South Dakota Legislature that would require all official meetings of government boards and commissions to include time on their agendas for public comment is headed to Gov. Dennis Daugaard's desk. Legislators already OK'd it.

House Bill 1172 appears straightforward and may beg the question: why is it even necessary?

A fair question to ask during this week, which is Sunshine Week, a national observance to shine a light on the public's right to know about government and what government does.

A survey of newspaper editors and reporters across the state shows that while many government boards already include time on their meeting agendas for public comment, others do not. Often when the meeting topic or agenda item is controversial and there is a room full of people, the inclination may be to not allow public debate out of concern that the meeting will get out of hand.

Civic engagement. That is what citizens are doing when they step to the mic during a public meeting to voice an opinion or ask a question. Civic engagement is fundamental to good government. Citizens participating in their government.

It all begins with government being transparent and open. Without that, citizens' participation in the democratic process is hampered. Without access to information about what government is doing, a vacuum is created and citizens are left to wonder.

Over the years South Dakota has made government more open and transparent. Gov. Daugaard has initiated several measures that help citizens gain access to government information easier and quicker. The Legislature has passed various open government bills as well in recent years.

But more work remains to be done in our state.

During this legislative session lawmakers shot down proposals to make public the official correspondence -- including emails -- of government officials, something that is commonplace in most every other state in the country.

Legislators also defeated a bill to make government settlement agreements a public record, despite high-profile examples of problems related to secret settlements around the state. While some legislators supported the concept that settlements involving taxpayer dollars should be public, they were not comfortable with making victims' names public.

Lurching ahead in fits and starts. Such is open government in South Dakota. There is no finish line or end game. Bolstering the public's right to know is an ongoing, never-ending challenge that requires persistence and work by everyone.

We all have a stake in supporting good government. And good government begins with strong laws that favor openness and transparency.

Those laws generally fall into three categories: public records laws, open meetings laws and public notices laws.

Public records laws define what government records and documents are available to the public and what records are confidential. Open meetings laws guide government boards and commissions on how to notify the public about their meetings and how to conduct those meetings in public. Public notices laws dictate that certain government information such as meeting minutes or bid notices be made available to the public, typically through publication in a newspaper.

This is an election year. South Dakotans will vote for a governor, various constitutional officers and 105 legislators this fall. We must urge all candidates for public office to commit to making our open government laws better and stronger in South Dakota. Good government depends on it.

Besides, a little sunshine on government is always a good thing.

David Bordewyk is executive director for South Dakota Newspaper Association, which represents the state's 125 week and daily newspapers. Bordewyk has lobbied on behalf of SDNA for 23 years.

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Today in Weather History

March 12, 1995: Rapid snowmelt, due to warm temperatures, caused widespread flooding of streams, low areas, and farmland. Many roads were covered with water, and some were washed out. Some utility poles and lines were damaged. High water levels damaged some schools, houses, and other buildings. Day County was especially stricken, with damage to roads alone estimated at \$75,000. Ice jams exacerbated the flooding on some culverts and streams.

1888 - A blizzard paralyzed southeastern New York State and western New England. The storm produced 58 inches of snow at Saratoga NY, and 50 inches at Middletown CT. The blizzard was followed by record cold temperatures, and the cold and snow claimed 400 lives. New York City received 20.9 inches of snow, Albany NY reported 46.7 inches. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1928: The St. Frances dam near Santa Paula, California burst before midnight, sending 138,000 acres of water rushing down the San Francisquito Canyon, killing 450 people. The dam was designed and built between 1924 and 1926 by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, then named the Bureau of Water Works and Supply.

1954 - A blizzard raged from eastern Wyoming into the Black Hills of western South Dakota, while a severe ice storm was in progress from northeastern Nebraska to central Iowa. The ice storm isolated 153 towns in Iowa. Dust from the Great Plains caused brown snow, and hail and muddy rain over parts of Wisconsin and Michigan. (11th-13th) (The Weather Channel)

1967 - A tremendous four day storm raged across California. Winds of 90 mph closed mountain passes, heavy rains flooded the lowlands, and in sixty hours Squaw Valley CA was buried under 96 inches (eight feet) of snow. (David Ludlum)

1976: A large tornado outbreak spawned tornadoes in the Great Lakes and Midwest, including 9 in northern Indiana and extreme southern Michigan. A tornado missed President Ford's motorcade by a quarter mile near O'Hare. The next morning, he got out of his vehicle to view the damage.

1987 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., with gale force winds along the Middle Atlantic Coast. A storm in the Pacific Northwest produced rain and gale force winds. Crescent City CA received 2.27 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A powerful storm produced high winds and heavy snow in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Winds gusting to 70 mph produced snow drifts six feet high in Minnesota, and sent twelve foot waves on Lake Superior over the breakwalls of the ship canal at Duluth MN. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: An incredible blizzard known as "The Superstorm" struck the eastern United States on this date through the 15th. The storm was described as the most costly non-tropical storm ever to hit the U.S. doing an estimated \$6 billion in damage. The storm was as strong as a hurricane regarding winds and low pressure. The pressure dropped to an incredible 28.35 inches of mercury or 960 millibars when then the storm was located over the Chesapeake Bay. Boston, Massachusetts recorded a wind gust to 81 mph, the most substantial wind they had recorded since Hurricane Edna in 1954. Also, as the storm was intensifying over the Gulf of Mexico, a wind gust to 99 mph was recorded by an offshore oil rig. It dumped incredible amounts of snow from Alabama to New England. The snow amounts were significant everywhere, but for places like Birmingham, Alabama the 17 inches recorded brought the city to a standstill for three days. Mount Leconte, North Carolina recorded 60 inches of snow. Practically every weather station in West Virginia established a new 24-hour snowfall record during the event. Syracuse, New York was buried under 43 inches of snow. 270 people were killed during the storm and another 48 lost at sea. The storm also brought a 12-foot storm surge and 15 tornadoes to Florida, where 51 people were killed. Air travel was brought to a halt as every major airport from Atlanta north was closed during the height of the storm. During the late evening into the early morning hours of the 13th, a vicious squall line swept through Florida and spawned 11 tornadoes resulting in five fatalities. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 110 mph at Alligator Point and 109 mph at Dry Tortugas. Exceptionally high tides occurred along the western Florida coast. A 13-foot storm surge occurred in Taylor County, Florida, resulting in 10 deaths with 57 residences destroyed. A 5 to 8-foot storm surge moved ashore in Dixie County. Over 500 homes were destroyed with major damage to another 700 structures.

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Mon Mar 12	Tue Mar 13	Wed Mar 14	Thu Mar 15	Fri Mar 16	Sat Mar 17	Sun Mar 18
						
31°F	30°F	38°F	42°F	41°F	40°F	35°F
8°F	14°F	23°F	28°F	24°F	32°F	27°F
NNW 9 MPH	N 5 MPH	S 9 MPH	E 9 MPH	SE 10 MPH Precip 20%	N 9 MPH	N 21 MPH



Today
Mostly Sunny
30-40°

3 Day Outlook

TUE	WED	THU
		
30-45°	35-55°	35-50°

Aberdeen, SD
www.weather.gov/abr
Updated: 3/12/2018 5:07 AM Central

Published on: 03/12/2018 at 5:11AM

Mostly sunny skies, dry conditions and light winds can be expected today. Warmer temperatures to come this week!

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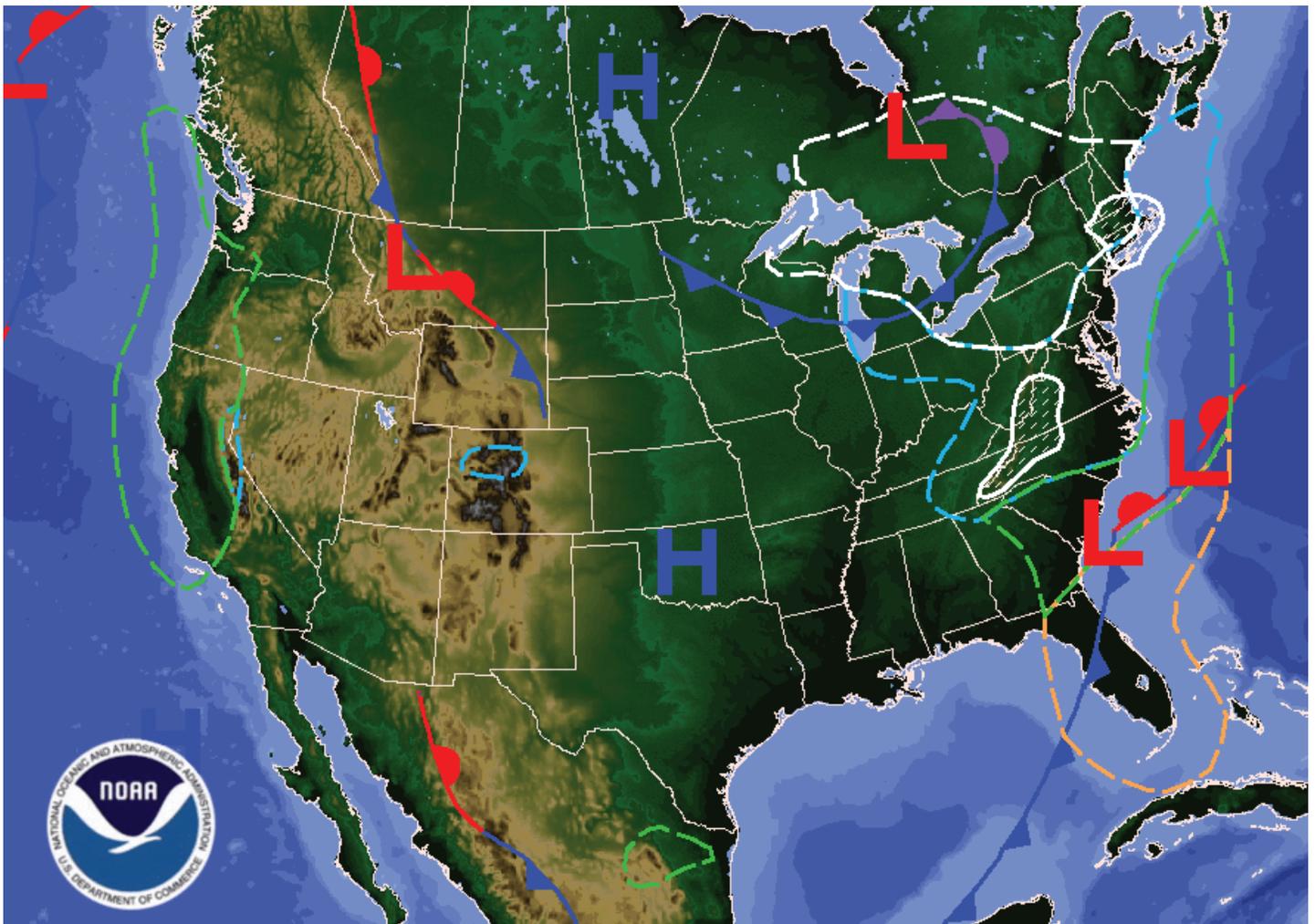
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 29.7 F at 4:34 PM
Low Outside Temp: 17.7 F at 11:28 PM
Wind Chill:
High Gust: 17.0 Mph at 4:13 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 72° in 1934
Record Low: -20° in 1897
Average High: 38°F
Average Low: 18°F
Average Precip in March: 0.36
Precip to date in March: 0.94
Average Precip to date: 1.38
Precip Year to Date: 1.35
Sunset Tonight: 7:35 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:49 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Mon, Mar 12, 2018, issued 4:43 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain	Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)
Rain and T'Storms	Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)
Rain and Snow	Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)
Snow	Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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SHOWING HIS SALVATION

"Brother," said St. Francis of Assisi to a young monk who had just entered the monastery, "let's go to town and preach." They left the monastery and walked to the town and did not say a word to each other or the people they passed in the marketplace. After several hours they retraced their steps and returned to the monastery.

The young monk wondered what was going on and after waiting for what seemed like an eternity he finally broke his silence and asked, "I thought we were going to town to preach. When are we going to preach?"

"We have been preaching," replied St. Francis. "As we walked, we were observed: people watched our manners, our faces, our behavior, and our clothes, what people thought we stood for. We have been preaching."

All of us preach all of the time. Our behavior is our message and our places of interest our pulpits. Our lives become lectures and our pursuits are examples of our priorities. People watch us even as we watch them. And each time we pass from view and our words can no longer be heard our sermon ends and a decision about the value and importance we place on being like Christ in all we do and whatever we say is made.

The problem we face today is not the quantity of Christians but the quality. And if we want to win more, we must be more. How different would the world be if when we "declared God's glory," we also lived God's glory. How we live is more important than words.

Prayer: Give us courage and strength Lord, to live as we ought to live and show the world Your glory and love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 96:2b Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.

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)
- 5/27/2018 Historic Trinity Church Pump Organ Concert.
- 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

National Cowboy Museum awards film by South Dakota director

By STEPHEN LEE, The Capital Journal

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The film, "Floating Horses: The Life of Casey Tibbs," produced and directed by Midland, South Dakota native Justin Koehler about the rodeo legend born northwest of Fort Pierre, will be named the Best Documentary Film by the National Cowboy Museum at its Western Heritage Awards night on April 14 in Oklahoma City.

"It's a huge feather in his cap," said Cindy Bahe on Feb. 28. She is director of the Casey Tibbs Rodeo Center in Fort Pierre. "I just hope it's going to bring more awareness to Casey and his history."

It also should provide Koehler with some new possible backers to help him finance the film's distribution, she said.

The prestigious award will put Koehler in the same field of dreams as legendary filmmaker John Ford, and Western movie legends John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Clint Eastwood, Jimmy Stewart, Tom Selleck and Kevin Costner, and cowboy poet, singer and actor Red Steagall, who have received the Western Heritage awards.

The emcees at the Western Heritage Awards on April 14, in fact, include a famous old flame of Casey Tibbs: actress Katherine Ross, who will make the presentations along with her longtime husband, Sam Elliott, who also has been honored by the Cowboy Museum.

"He will probably make some joke about it," Bahe said of Elliott's possible stance on Casey Tibbs having dated Ross long ago.

Koehler, who lives in Colorado, called Bahe to tell her the news.

"The Western Heritage Award is like the Academy Award of the Western genre," Koehler said in a news release from Bahe. "It's a very prestigious award for anyone producing films, literature or music honoring the American West and the men and women who shaped it."

Koehler premiered the film last spring in Rapid City and has shown it across the nation and Canada, hitting California, Texas, New York and Georgia, he said.

Bahe said more than 1,000 attended two showings last year in Pierre in the Riggs High School theater, The Capital Journal reported.

Koehler also has shown it at film festivals.

The film includes interviews from about 30 people, including local friends and family members from South Dakota as well as celebrity friends of Casey's, such as Charlie Daniels and Steve Ford. It also includes rare footage of many bronc rides by Casey which haven't been seen in decades, if ever, Koehler said.

The Tibbs Center in Fort Pierre, Casey's hometown, has supported Koehler's project, with lots of hours of research and other help and by footing the \$3,000 bill for turning historic film footage of Tibbs on old reel-to-reel formats into digital formats which Koehler could use in his new film, Bahe said.

"We have been honored to work with him over the last four years," she said. "Justin has worked feverishly on a cheap beer budget and crafted a top-shelf whiskey creation."

Rodeo champion Cole Elshere of Faith, South Dakota, played Casey in the film in several rodeo ride scenes. The outfit he wore is on display in the rodeo center in Fort Pierre, Bahe said.

She plans to be at the awards banquet in Oklahoma City, Bahe said.

Koehler still is seeking financial support to finish paying movie interests for the rights to commercially show the rare footage he has of Tibbs' many rides, Bahe said.

The attention from the Western Heritage award can only help, she said.

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

Insurer approves special radiation for teacher's rare cancer

By MEGAN RAPOSA, Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Katie Blunck faced one rejection after another after she was diagnosed with a rare brain cancer in January.

But at 11:45 a.m. on Feb. 27, her luck changed with one phone call.

Blunck, a 32-year-old Sioux Falls music teacher, learned her insurance company was going to cover the special type of focused radiation recommended by her doctor, the Argus Leader reported. That decision came after two rejection letters where Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield called the radiation "not medically necessary."

A letter confirming the approval from the insurance company read: "In this instance, for you and your specific condition, the treatment would be appropriate."

"I'm relieved, for one, to finally get the answer I've been working towards," Blunck said.

She's already had her first round of chemotherapy, and she was scheduled to begin what's called "pencil-beam proton radiation therapy" on Feb. 28.

Blunck attributed the insurance company's change of heart to her Mayo Clinic doctor, Andrea Arnett, and her attorney, Mark Haigh of Evans, Haigh & Hinton, LLP in Sioux Falls.

Haigh reached out to Blunck after seeing an Argus Leader story about her situation and how she was twice denied coverage for proton radiation by her insurance company.

Blunck's battle with the insurance company started shortly after she was diagnosed January with Anaplastic Pleomorphic Xanthro Astrocytoma Grade 3 (out of 5).

Her doctor, Arnett, advocated for the proton beam therapy because it's a more targeted treatment that would minimize exposing healthy brain cells to radiation.

She's won the battle with the insurance company, but she still has a long road ahead. Blunck is at the start of six weeks of a combination of chemotherapy and proton radiation treatment, which will be followed by four weeks of recovery and six more months of chemotherapy.

Starting with a win gives her the momentum she needs to get through the rest, though, Blunck said.

"I just have faith that this is going to get me all fixed up," she told Argus Leader.

The end goal is to return to teaching her orchestra students, Blunck said, and music is playing a big role in the healing process.

"Mayo Clinic has grand pianos all throughout the buildings for anyone to play on at any time... part of my healing process will be to go there and play music with my identical twin sister, friends, and anyone who wants to join me whenever I can," she said.

Another part of the healing process is spending time with her cat, Turbo, who is in Rochester, Minnesota with Blunck as she goes through treatment.

Blunck said she's grateful for the support she's seen from her attorney to letters from her students to the more than \$20,000 raised on her GoFundMe page, and she hopes to someday pay it forward to other cancer patients like her in the future.

"It's been a difficult journey," Blunck said. "With the appeals and the denials and the appeals and the denials. It's exhausting work, but worth it."

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

Life support policy may change for Sioux Falls firefighters

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls Fire Rescue is preparing a new approach to emergency response by permitting trained firefighters to administer advanced life support when ambulances are tied up.

Firefighters are certified emergency medical technicians (EMT) and can administer basic life support. But only Paramedics Plus can currently administer advanced life support, such as breathing tubes, IV fluid therapy or other critical care medications.

Sioux Falls Fire Rescue Chief Brad Goodroad told the Argus Leader that the department is working to

create new protocols to allow firefighters trained as paramedics to administer the same life-saving measures as Paramedics Plus staff. It's a change to a policy that currently leaves some patients stuck waiting for emergency medical care.

"This is a huge step so our (SFFR) paramedics don't have to stand there and watch someone die waiting for an ambulance to come," Councilman Pat Starr said. "It's an incredible move and it's time."

Goodroad said that in communities that use this approach, firefighter medics and the private transport agency train together and understand each other's operation. He said that's how he envisions it working in Sioux Falls.

This approach may affect the budget, as it would require equipping trucks and fire houses with advanced life support equipment. It could also lead to a new wage scale or rank for firefighter paramedics. Goodroad said more planning and preparation is needed before adopting the approach.

He said it makes sense to coordinate the initiative with next year's contract agreement with Sioux Falls Firefighters Association, the union representing Sioux Falls Fire Rescue employees.

"This is the time to really pursue it and understand what it is," Goodroad said. "We've vetted it to the point where we're at least approved to explore the rest of this."

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

South Dakota museum gets grant to preserve mining history

LEAD, S.D. (AP) — A museum in western South Dakota is receiving a federal grant to help preserve the mining history of the Black Hills.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has awarded a \$7,800 grant to the Black Hills Mining Museum in Lead. The museum opened in 1986 and has been dedicated to both the mining history in the Black Hills and to telling the stories of the people who the area their home, the Black Hills Pioneer reported .

Officials said the grant will go far in helping the museum continue its work. But two experts sent by the institute to conduct an inspection of the facility said there's still a lot of work to be done, including the museum's parking lot that engineers deemed structurally unsound.

"It's an older building, and it was built as an old grocery store," said Bob Phillips, secretary for the museum's Board of Directors.

Experts with the institute also wanted to inspect the museum's collection itself.

"Everything you see here hanging on the walls are original," said Todd Duex, president of the board. "And that's not ideal."

Phillips said that most museums make photocopies of the pictures and documents they wished to display in order to preserve archives.

"Our problem is, where are we going to put them?" he asked.

Duex also said the museum has never had a full-time director on staff and that securing funding to hire one is paramount to the museum's success.

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

3 killed in car-semi crash in southeast South Dakota

PARKSTON, S.D. (AP) — Three people are dead after a car driven by a teenager collided with a semi-truck on an icy highway in southeastern South Dakota.

The Highway Patrol says the Chevrolet Impala was northbound on South Dakota 37 when the 16-year-old boy lost control on the ice-covered road south of Parkston on Saturday morning. The car went across the center line and collided with the semi.

The boy and his two passengers, a 49-year-old man and a 48-year-old woman, died at the scene. All three were wearing seat belts. The names of the victims were not immediately released.

The 77-year-old man driving the truck was not hurt. He also was wearing a seat belt.

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The patrol is investigating.

Missouri River reservoirs ready for spring runoff

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — More snowfall over the past month prompted officials to increase the forecast for runoff in the Missouri River this spring.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is now predicting the amount of water that will flow into the river will be about 115 percent of normal this year.

But nearly all the space reserved for floodwaters in the seven reservoirs along the river is free at this point of the year.

The river forecast could still change this spring. The mountain snowpack in the region usually peaks in mid-April.

The navigation season is expected to open in mid-March, and there should be enough water in the river to allow full service navigation through at least the first half of the year.

Passenger plane crashes, catches fire at Kathmandu airport

By **BINAJ GURUBACHARYA, Associated Press**

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — A passenger plane carrying 71 people from Bangladesh crashed and burst into flames as it landed Monday in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, killing dozens of people with others rushed to area hospitals, officials said.

The death toll remained unclear amid the chaos of the crash and the rush of badly injured victims to nearby hospitals. Brig. Gen. Gokul Bhandari, the Nepal army spokesman, said 50 people had died and the fate of the others was unknown. But a police official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media, said at least 38 people had died, 23 had been injured and 10 were unaccounted for.

An AP journalist who arrived at the scene soon after the crash saw the US-Bangla Airlines twin-propeller plane broken into several large pieces, with dozens of firefighters and rescue workers clustered around the wreckage in a grassy field near the runway. Hundreds of people stood on a nearby hill, staring down at what remained of the Bombardier Dash 8.

The plane swerved repeatedly as it prepared to land in Kathmandu, said Amanda Summers, an American working in Nepal. The crowded city sits in a valley in the Himalayan foothills.

"It was flying so low I thought it was going to run into the mountains," said Summers, who watched the crash from the terrace of her home office, not far from the airport. "All of a sudden there was a blast and then another blast."

Fire crews put out the flames quickly, perhaps within a minute, she said, though for a time clouds of thick, dark smoke rose into the sky above the city.

The plane had circled the airport twice as it waited for clearance to land, Mohammed Selim, the airline's manager in Kathmandu, told Dhaka-based Somoy TV station by telephone.

US-Bangla Airlines operates Boeing 737-800 and smaller Bombardier Dash 8 Q-400 planes.

The airline, part of US-Bangla Group, is based in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, and flies to several domestic and international destinations. The parent company is involved in a number of industries, including real estate, education and agriculture.

Kathmandu's airport has been the site of several deadly crashes. In September 2012, a Sita Air turboprop plane carrying trekkers to Mount Everest hit a bird and crashed shortly after takeoff, killing all 19 on board.

Xi Jinping's rise shatters hopes for democracy in China

By **YANAN WANG, Associated Press**

BEIJING (AP) — Orville Schell, a longtime China expert, has vivid memories of his first trip to the country back in 1975. Mao Zedong was leading China through the tumultuous Cultural Revolution, and Chinese were being shamed, beaten and even killed for perceived political mistakes.

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Things were vastly different when he returned four years later. Mao was dead, and the country was pulling itself together under reformist Deng Xiaoping. So radical was the transformation that some Chinese felt emboldened enough to plaster posters on a wall in central Beijing criticizing past excesses and advocating democracy.

"China had suddenly gone from being this implacable enemy that was closed to any contact to being quite open and receptive to interacting," recalled Schell, now the director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the New York-based Asia Society.

That opening and Deng's subsequent market-style economic reforms fueled speculation that China was destined to become a democracy.

The rise of President Xi Jinping, who is now poised to rule indefinitely after China's rubber-stamp legislature voted Sunday to eliminate presidential term limits, has changed all that, a growing number of Western analysts say.

"In the past, both sides presumed China was trying to become more democratic," Schell said. "What Xi marks so clearly is that there is no longer the pretension ... that China is becoming more democratic and open."

Under Deng, the ruling Communist Party began to allow small-scale free enterprise and eased social controls.

To ensure the party's survival, leaders embarked on a bold experiment in the 1990s to create a formal system of succession. The Chinese public still had no voice in picking their government, but leaders would share power and step down after fixed terms.

Even that has been swept aside under Xi, who is poised to rule for as long as he wants as China's most powerful leader since Mao. The move to scrap presidential limits revives the specter of one-man rule that Deng tried to ward off when he abolished lifetime tenure in 1982.

"The control of public opinion in China right now is much looser than it was in Mao's day, but it's much tighter than it was under Deng Xiaoping," said Sidney Rittenberg, 96, one of the few Americans to have personally known Mao.

Still, he predicted China would never return to earlier periods of isolation, citing the economy's dependence on openness to the world, Beijing's rising global status and greater awareness among Chinese citizens.

"It's not so easy to turn the clock back just by changing the constitution," he said.

According to Rittenberg, becoming China's ruler resulted in a "very clear" change in Mao's personality. He endured the shift, painfully, when he was accused of being part of a foreign spy ring. He spent 16 years in prison, much of it in solitary confinement.

It is precisely a repetition of that history that some still fear.

"My generation has lived through Mao," said Li Datong, a former editor for the state-run China Youth Daily. "That era is over. How can we possibly go back to that?"

Even if today's China remains far removed from the chaos of Mao's time, it is likewise distant from the massive student-led protests of 1989, when the country had its closest brush with a shift to greater democracy.

The demonstrations, centered on Beijing's Tiananmen Square, gave voice to pent-up frustrations about corruption and a stifling political system. Deng ordered a violent crackdown that killed hundreds, and possibly thousands, of people.

But even after the crackdown, the party eased controls on travel and the economy began to pick up speed. Reformists remained optimistic that political liberalization might follow.

Hopes rose ahead of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, cast by the party as a coming-out for a confident, modern China.

"One of the things people hoped for in the run-up to the Olympics was that the exposure to the outside would help to convince more Chinese people and lawmakers that the way things are done outside China isn't necessarily scary or dangerous," said Jeremiah Jenne, a writer and Chinese history teacher in Beijing.

But the global financial crisis that year prompted the leadership to "rethink the extent to which China should be open to the world," Jenne said.

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Foreign advocates of democracy had hoped the internet, cellphones and other emerging technologies would erode party control. Instead, Chinese leaders invested heavily in developing web filters and using the internet and video surveillance networks to strengthen their ability to keep tabs on the public.

Since assuming the party leadership in 2012, Xi has overseen a further diminishment of civil society, jailing or otherwise silencing writers, activists and human rights lawyers. Online discussion of the elimination of term limits has been heavily censored.

Beijing has long argued that Western-style democracy is not appropriate for China. It cites political and bureaucratic logjams in Washington and elsewhere as evidence of the superiority of its Marxist-Leninist rule.

"Some key parts of the Western value system are collapsing," said an editorial in the Global Times, a Communist Party newspaper. "Democracy, which has been explored and practiced by Western societies for hundreds of years, is ulcerating."

Many Western analysts have likewise ceased envisioning a democratic China.

"We see now that history is not ineluctably moving toward democracy," said Schell, the American China expert. "History is just moving where it moves."

Follow Yanan Wang on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/yananw>

NYPD confirms 5 passengers in NYC helicopter crash are dead

By JENNIFER PELTZ, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A helicopter crashed into New York City's East River Sunday night and flipped upside down in the water, killing all five passengers aboard, officials said.

A spokesman for the NYPD confirmed the deaths to The Associated Press early Monday.

Video taken by a bystander and posted on Twitter shows the red helicopter land hard in the water and then capsize, its rotors slapping at the water.

The helicopter, a private charter hired for a photo shoot, went down near Gracie Mansion, the mayoral residence. One person, the pilot, freed himself and was rescued by a tugboat, officials said.

The passengers were recovered by police and fire department divers, who had to remove them from tight harnesses while they were upside down, Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said.

"It took awhile for the drivers to get these people out. They worked very quickly as fast as they could," Nigro said. "It was a great tragedy that we had here."

Witnesses on a waterfront esplanade near where the aircraft went down said the helicopter was flying noisily, then suddenly dropped into the water and quickly submerged. But the pilot appeared on the surface, holding onto a flotation device as a tugboat and then police boats approached.

"It's cold water. It was sinking really fast," Mary Lee, 66, told the New York Post. "By the time we got out here, we couldn't see it. It was underwater."

Celia Skyvaril, 23, told the Daily News that she could see a person on what looked like a yellow raft or float screaming and yelling for help.

News footage showed one victim being loaded into an ambulance while emergency workers gave him chest compressions.

A bystander, Susan Larkin, told The Associated Press that she went down to see rescue boats in the river and a police helicopter circling overhead, hovering low over the water.

"You could clearly see they were searching," she said.

A Federal Aviation Administration spokeswoman said the Eurocopter AS350 went down just after 7 p.m. The aircraft was owned by Liberty Helicopters, a company that offers both private charters and sightseeing tours popular with tourists. A phone message left with the company was not immediately returned.

The skies over New York constantly buzz with helicopters carrying tourists, businesspeople, traffic reporters, medical teams and others. Crashes are not unheard of.

In 2009, a sightseeing helicopter of the same model and operated by the same company as the one in Sunday's wreck collided with a small, private plane over the Hudson River, killing nine people, including a

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group of Italian tourists.

A crash in October 2011 in the East River killed a British woman visiting the city for her 40th birthday. Three other passengers were injured.

A helicopter on a sightseeing tour of Manhattan crashed into the Hudson River in July 2007, shaking up the eight people aboard but injuring no one. In June 2005, two helicopters crashed into the East River in the same week. One injured eight people including some banking executives. The other hit the water shortly after takeoff on a sightseeing flight, injuring six tourists and the pilot.

Nigro and Police Commissioner James O'Neill said the rescue operation Sunday took place in a 4 mph current in water about 50 feet (15 meters) deep, under challenging conditions.

The cause of the crash is unknown. The FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board are investigating.

Officials did not immediately release the names of the pilot or passengers or say how the two passengers died.

The helicopter was recovered in the rescue operation and towed to a pier.

APNewsBreak: Trump Jr. partners with donor who pitched gov't

By JAKE PEARSON, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump Jr. has a previously undisclosed business relationship with a longtime hunting buddy who helped raise millions of dollars for his father's 2016 presidential campaign and has had special access to top government officials since the election, records obtained by The Associated Press show.

The president's eldest son and Texas hedge fund manager Gentry Beach have been involved in business deals together dating back to the mid-2000s and recently formed a company — Future Venture LLC — despite past claims by both men that they were just friends, according to previously unreported court records and other documents obtained by AP.

Beach last year met with top National Security Council officials to push a plan that would curb U.S. sanctions in Venezuela and open up business for U.S. companies in the oil-rich nation.

Ethics experts said their financial entanglements raised questions about whether Beach's access to government officials and advocacy for policy changes were made possible by the president's son's influence — and could also benefit the Trump family's bottom line.

"This feeds into the same concerns that we've had all along: The really fuzzy line between the presidency and the Trumps' companies," said Noah Bookbinder, who leads Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a public policy group. "Donald Trump Jr. sort of straddles that line all the time."

Last February, just as Trump Sr. was settling into office, Beach and an Iraqi-American businessman met with top officials at the National Security Council to present their plan for lightening U.S. sanctions in Venezuela in exchange for opening business opportunities for U.S. companies, according to a former U.S. official with direct knowledge of the proposal.

Career foreign policy experts were instructed to take the meetings, first reported last April by the website Mic.com, at the direction of the West Wing because Beach and the businessman were friends of Trump Jr., the official said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive government work, said that inside the NSC lawyers raised red flags about the appropriateness of the meeting.

The U.S. didn't act on the pitch, which would have gone against the president's hard-line stance on the South American nation and its president, Nicolas Maduro.

Seven months after the Venezuela meetings, Beach attended a private lunch in Dallas between Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republican donors, including businessmen with petroleum interests, according to a copy of Zinke's schedule.

The Interior Department didn't respond to a request for comment about the meetings. A White House official said Trump Jr. didn't arrange Beach's visit to the NSC and his proposal was dismissed.

In a statement, the Trump Organization said Trump Jr. has never played a role arranging meetings "with

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anyone at the White House or any other government agency.”

Alan Garten, the Trump Organization’s general counsel, acknowledged that Trump Jr. had invested with Beach in the past, but referred AP to a statement released by the company in April, which said their relationship was “strictly personal.”

In a statement provided by a friend, Beach said it was “absolutely not true” that he’d ever “used my longtime personal friendship with Donald Trump Jr.” to influence government decision making.

According to his friends, Beach, who has known Trump Jr. since they attended the University of Pennsylvania together in the late 1990s, developed his own relationships during the campaign and inauguration and doesn’t need Trump Jr. to broker introductions.

Beach was an avid fundraiser and campaigner for President Trump, particularly in Texas, where Trump Jr. told donors last March that Beach and another longtime hunting pal, Tom Hicks Jr., raised millions for his father’s campaign, according to the Dallas Morning News.

After the election, Beach served as a finance vice chairman for the inaugural committee and faced scrutiny after a nonprofit he started at the time advertised hunting and fishing trips with Trump Jr. and his brother, Eric, to million-dollar donors.

Last October, Beach incorporated a business called Future Venture LLC in Delaware without listing any Trump connection, signing himself as the entity’s agent.

But a disclosure report filed with New York City officials and obtained by AP via a public records request shows Trump Jr. is named as the president, secretary and treasurer of the company.

The purpose of the limited liability company could not be determined from the filings. The Trump Organization said it was set up to pursue technology investments.

Previously unreported court documents show that the two men, each a godfather to one of the other’s sons, did business together well before they formed Future Venture.

In a 2010 deposition, Trump Jr. testified that he had twice made investments in ventures that Beach had an interest in: \$200,000 in a dry Texas oil well managed by Beach’s father and an undisclosed amount in a failed mining stock affiliated with Beach’s uncle.

In August 2008, while the two men were golfing together in New York, Beach suggested Trump Jr. sell his shares in the tanking stock “if you need the tax loss,” according to a copy of his testimony filed in a long running civil lawsuit between Beach and a former employer, hedge funder Paul Touradji.

Beach’s father, Gary Beach, was convicted last month of federal bankruptcy fraud after a seven-day trial in Dallas.

Trump Jr. testified that he had other business discussions with Beach — but not all of them came to fruition, including a plan to buy a hunting preserve in Mexico with Beach.

Trump Jr. also referred Beach to someone he knew from Saudi Arabia when Beach was working on a potential oil purchase and invested \$50,000 along with his sister Ivanka in an Argentine resort developed by one of Beach’s friends, he testified.

Trump Jr. estimated he exchanged roughly 500 emails with Beach at the time of his 2010 deposition.

Pressed for details about the oil well deal in his deposition, Trump Jr. indicated he wasn’t well versed in the oil-and-gas business.

“You know, I put some money with a friend,” he testified.

Despite heated rhetoric, little change on US-Mexico border

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press

CALEXICO, Calif. (AP) — The daily commute from Mexico to California farms is the same as it was before Donald Trump became president. Hundreds of Mexicans cross the border and line the sidewalks of Calexico’s tiny downtown by 4 a.m., napping on cardboard sheets and blankets or sipping coffee from a 24-hour doughnut shop until buses leave for the fields.

For decades, cross-border commuters have picked lettuce, carrots, broccoli, onions, cauliflower and other vegetables that make California’s Imperial Valley “America’s Salad Bowl” from December through March.

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As Trump visits the border Tuesday, the harvest is a reminder of how little has changed despite heated rhetoric in Washington.

Trump will inspect eight prototypes for a future 30-foot border wall that were built in San Diego last fall. He made "a big, beautiful wall" a centerpiece of his campaign and said Mexico would pay for it.

But border barriers extend the same 654 miles (1,046 kilometers) they did under President Barack Obama and so far Trump hasn't gotten Mexico or Congress to pay for a new wall.

Trump also pledged to expand the Border Patrol by 5,000 agents, but staffing fell during his first year in office farther below a congressional mandate because the government has been unable to keep pace with attrition and retirements. There were 19,437 agents at the end of September, down from 19,828 a year earlier.

In Tijuana, tens of thousands of commuters still line up weekday mornings for San Diego at the nation's busiest border crossing, some for jobs in landscaping, housekeeping, hotel maids and shipyard maintenance. The vast majority are U.S. citizens and legal residents or holders of "border crossing cards" that are given to millions of Mexicans in border areas for short visits. The border crossing cards do not include work authorization but some break the rules.

Even concern about Trump's threat to end the North American Free Trade Agreement is tempered by awareness that border economies have been integrated for decades. Mexican "maquiladora" plants, which assemble duty-free raw materials for export to the U.S., have made televisions, medical supplies and other goods since the 1960s.

"How do you separate twins that are joined at the hip?" said Paola Avila, chairwoman of the Border Trade Alliance, a group that includes local governments and business chambers. "Our business relationships will continue to grow regardless of what happens with NAFTA."

Workers in the Mexicali area rise about 1 a.m., carpool to the border crossing and wait about an hour to reach Calexico's portico-covered sidewalks by 4 a.m. Some beat the border bottleneck by crossing at midnight to sleep in their cars in Calexico, a city of 40,000 about 120 miles (192 kilometers) east of San Diego.

Fewer workers make the trek now than 20 and 30 years ago. But not because of Trump.

Steve Scaroni, one of Imperial Valley's largest labor contractors, blames the drop on lack of interest among younger Mexicans, which has forced him to rely increasingly on short-term farmworker visas known as H-2As.

"We have a saying that no one is raising their kids to be farmworkers," said Scaroni, 55, a third-generation grower and one of Imperial Valley's largest labor contractors. Last week, he had two or three buses of workers leaving Calexico before dawn, compared to 15 to 20 buses during the 1980s and 1990s.

Crop pickers at Scaroni's Fresh Harvest Inc. make \$13.18 an hour but H-2As bring his cost to \$20 to \$30 an hour because he must pay for round-trip transportation, sometimes to southern Mexico, and housing. The daily border commuters from Mexicali cost only \$16 to \$18 after overhead.

Scaroni's main objective is to expand the H-2A visa program, which covered about 165,000 workers in 2016. On his annual visit to Washington in February to meet members of Congress and other officials, he decided within two hours that nothing changed under Trump.

"Washington is not going to fix anything," he said. "You've got too many people - lobbyists, politicians, attorneys - who make money off the dysfunction. They make money off of not solving problems. They just keep talking about it."

Jose Angel Valenzuela, who owns a house in Mexicali and is working his second harvest in Imperial Valley, earns more picking cabbage in an hour than he did in a day at a factory in Mexico. He doesn't pay much attention to news and isn't following developments on the border wall.

"We're doing very well," he said as workers passed around beef tacos during a break. "We haven't seen any noticeable change."

Jack Vessey, whose family farms about 10,000 acres in Imperial Valley, relies on border commuters for about half of his workforce. Imperial has only 175,000 people and Mexicali has about 1 million, making

Mexico an obvious labor pool.

Vessey, 42, said he has seen no change on the border and doesn't expect much. He figures 10 percent of Congress embraces open immigration policies, another 10 percent oppose them and the other 80 percent don't want to touch it because their voters are too divided.

"It's like banging your head against the wall," he said.

5 killed in helicopter crash into New York City's East River

By JENNIFER PELTZ, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — All five passengers aboard a helicopter that crashed into New York City's East River were confirmed dead early Monday morning by a NYPD spokesman.

The pilot was able to escape the Sunday night crash after the aircraft flipped upside down in the water, officials said. He was rescued by a tugboat.

The helicopter, a private charter hired for a photo shoot, went down near Gracie Mansion, the mayoral residence.

Video taken by a bystander and posted on Twitter shows the red helicopter land hard in the water and then capsize, its rotors slapping at the water.

The passengers were recovered by police and fire department divers, who had to remove them from tight harnesses while they were upside down, Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said.

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Witnesses on a waterfront esplanade near where the aircraft went down said the helicopter was flying noisily, then suddenly dropped into the water and quickly submerged. But the pilot appeared on the surface, holding onto a flotation device as a tugboat and then police boats approached.

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Nigro and Police Commissioner James O'Neill said the rescue operation Sunday took place in a 4 mph current in water about 50 feet (15 meters) deep, under challenging conditions.

The cause of the crash is unknown. The FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board are investi-

gating.

Officials did not immediately release the names of the pilot or passengers. The helicopter was recovered in the rescue operation and towed to a pier.

Calm before the storm? North Korea still mum on Trump summit

By ERIC TALMADGE, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — News of the planned summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un sent shockwaves around the globe. But in North Korea — as of Monday, several days after the announcement — not a word about it had been reported by the state-run media.

Pyongyang has been surprisingly quiet on the slew of momentous, and possibly even historic, events that have come in quick succession over the past few months.

It has essentially barred foreign media from visiting the country for more than a month and, while trumpeting the need for better inter-Korean relations, clung to the same anti-U.S., pro-nuclear weapons tone it struck at the height of its missile-testing frenzy last year.

Officials in Seoul say Pyongyang is keeping them in the dark as well.

“Regarding the North Korea-U.S. summit meeting, there hasn’t been an official response by the North Korean government. So we think North Korea is having a cautious approach on the issue as it needs time to organize its stance,” Unification Ministry spokesman Baik Tae-hyun said Monday.

It’s not unusual for the North Korean media to take their time in getting out the news.

Because they are state-run, all newspapers, radio and television broadcasters and the official news agency are without fail on message. As Baik suggested, sometimes it takes a while to figure out what that message should be.

The North Korean government might have also been holding off because it’s concerned the summit proposal could fall through, which could be hard to explain to their own public.

But as of Monday, the only official word of the North’s offer of a summit with Trump in exchange for a moratorium on missile and nuclear tests had come from South Korea. The North’s main newspaper, the Rodong Sinmun, which is run by the ruling party, had only put out a few paragraphs about a visit by senior South Korean officials last week.

It made no mention of any summit plans, let alone any conditions or statements on whether Kim is seriously mulling abandoning his nuclear weapons.

Though it warranted just a brief in the North’s main newspaper, last week’s meeting in Pyongyang was a big one.

It led to an agreement for Kim to have a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in next month. The same officials then carried to Washington a verbal message of Kim’s willingness to meet Trump, which the U.S. president is said to have immediately accepted. The Trump-Kim summit is supposed to take place by May.

The lack of confirmation from Pyongyang has generated skepticism about how accurately Seoul and Washington are depicting Kim’s intentions.

The silence on the summits was even more glaring because of how the North had played up the Olympic diplomacy that started it all off.

Kim used his nationally televised New Year’s address to launch the first salvo of his new charm offensive, wishing for the success of the Pyeongchang Olympics and vowing 2018 would be a historic year for Koreans on both sides of the Demilitarized Zone. The annual address is a major news event and Kim’s biggest regular platform for making important policy announcements.

The North then grabbed the spotlight for several days at the Olympics by dispatching a made-for-the-camera delegation of female cheerleaders, pop singers and even Kim’s own younger sister, who managed to upstage a visit at the same time by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence. Photos of her with Moon were front-page news in the North.

Not a single story was written or broadcast about the performance of the North’s athletes, however.

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Their best finish was 13th, in pairs figure skating.

Trump backs off push for raising assault rifle purchase age

By JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House unveiled a new plan to prevent school shootings that backs off President Donald Trump's support for increasing the minimum age for purchasing assault weapons to 21. Instead, a new federal commission on school safety will examine the age issue as part of a package the White House announced Sunday in response to the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, last month that left 17 dead.

The administration also pledged to help states pay for firearms training for teachers and reiterated its call to improve the background check and mental health systems.

In a call with reporters Sunday evening, administration officials described the plan as a fulfillment of Trump's call for action in the wake of the Parkland shooting.

"Today we are announcing meaningful actions, steps that can be taken right away to help protect students," said Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who will chair the commission.

DeVos said that "far too often, the focus" after such tragedies "has been only on the most contentious fights, the things that have divided people and sent them into their entrenched corners." She described the plan as "pragmatic."

The plan was immediately panned by gun control advocates, including the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. "Americans expecting real leadership to prevent gun violence will be disappointed and troubled by President Trump's dangerous retreat from his promise," said Avery Gardiner, the group's co-president.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York described it as "tiny baby steps designed not to upset the NRA, when the gun violence epidemic in this country demands that giant steps be taken."

Trump was deeply moved by the February shooting and convened a series of listening sessions in the weeks after the massacre. In televised meetings with lawmakers, survivors of recent school shootings and the families of victims, Trump made a strong case for arming teachers, but also increasing the age for purchasing long guns.

"I mean, so they buy a revolver — a handgun — they buy at the age of 21. And yet, these other weapons that we talk about ... they're allowed to buy them at 18. So how does that make sense?" he told school officials last month. "We're going to work on getting the age up to 21 instead of 18."

But Trump has also spoken repeatedly in recent weeks with the heads of the powerful National Rifle Association, which considers increasing the age of purchase to be an assault on the Second Amendment. The NRA on Friday sued Florida over a new gun law signed by Republican Gov. Rick Scott that bans the purchase of firearms by anyone under the age of 21.

Instead, the issue will be one of a list of topics to be studied by the DeVos commission, which will then provide recommendations to the president. Administration officials said they had not set a deadline for the commission's recommendations, but expected they'd made in under a year.

During the meetings, Trump also advocated arming certain teachers and school staffers, arguing that gun-free schools are "like an invitation for these very sick people" to commit murder.

As part plan, the White House has directed the Justice Department to help states partner with local law enforcement to provide "rigorous firearms training to specifically qualified volunteer school personnel," said Andrew Bremberg, director of the president's Domestic Policy Council. The White House did not immediately say how much money would be made available.

Trump also called on states to pass temporary, court-issued Risk Protection Orders, which allow law enforcement to confiscate guns from individuals who pose risks to themselves and others, and temporarily prevent them from buying firearms. And he called for the reform and expansion of mental health programs, as well as a full audit and review of the FBI tip line. The bureau has been criticized for not following up on warnings about the suspect in the Parkland school shooting.

The White House is also calling on Congress to two pieces of legislation. One would improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check system by penalizing federal agencies that don't properly report

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required records and reward states that comply by providing them with federal grant preferences.

The other would create a federal grant program to train students, teachers and school officials how to identify signs of potential violence and intervene early.

Follow Colvin on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/colvinj>

Tim McGraw collapses on stage during Ireland performance

DUBLIN (AP) — Country music star Tim McGraw collapsed on stage during a performance in Ireland. Rolling Stone magazine reports McGraw collapsed while performing Sunday night in Dublin.

McGraw's wife, singer Faith Hill, can be seen in a video on a fan's Instagram page saying, "He's been super dehydrated. I apologize, but I made the decision that he cannot come back out on stage."

A representative for McGraw issued a statement saying McGraw was attended to by local medical staff on-site and will be fine.

McGraw, who was performing as part of the Country to Country festival in the U.K., had performed Friday night in London and Saturday night in Glasgow as part of C2C, a three-day, three-city country-music festival.

The duo is scheduled to begin their 29-city Soul2Soul tour in the U.S. on May 31 in Richmond, Virginia.

Business as usual? Not really in this year's NCAA Tournament

By EDDIE PELLIS, AP National Writer

The coaches, players and TV announcers waited breathlessly for the reveal, then broke down the snubs, seedings and matchups with the same glee as kids unwrapping gifts under the Christmas tree. In all, the unveiling of the NCAA Tournament bracket felt pretty much like business as usual.

That's really not the case this season.

March Madness will provide a three-week break from the troubling headlines that have consumed college basketball. All four of the tournament's No. 1 seeds — Virginia, Villanova, Kansas, Xavier — have been caught up in allegations of rule-breaking that have come up through an FBI investigation and resulting news coverage detailing potential NCAA violations.

They aren't alone.

No fewer than a dozen of the 68 programs who kick off the tournament this week have had their names mentioned in these reports. There's an undeniable chance the team cutting down the nets in San Antonio on April 2 could be forced to forfeit its title a few years down the road, after the NCAA sorts through the damage.

But in considering who was in and out, the selection committee only looked at who was eligible, not who was being investigated. It made for a bracket that looks fairly typical — defending champion North Carolina and runner-up Gonzaga are in, and a few blast-from-the-past underdogs such as Davidson and Butler are playing that role again this year — even if the underpinnings of college basketball may be out of whack.

"March Madness and the Final Four, it's supposed to be one of the best times to be a sports fan," Michael L. Buckner, a Florida-based attorney who has worked on infractions cases, said last week. "Now it's going to have this cloud hanging over it, so that's why I say it's a little surreal."

For now, though, the games go on.

Those filling out brackets in office pools that will amass more than \$10 billion in action, most of the \$10 and \$20 entry-fee variety, were handed their palette Sunday during a bracket-unveiling show on TBS.

Some highlights:

—The Midwest Region stands out as the toughest, headlined by Kansas, Duke and Michigan State, all of which were ranked in the top 4 in the AP preseason poll. Michigan State will go into Friday's game against Bucknell not having played a game in two weeks because of the Big Ten's early conference tournament. "It's a concern. But with what this team has gone through this year, who cares?" coach Tom Izzo said. It was a nod to the sex-abuse scandal that has rocked Michigan State's athletic program, along with an

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NCAA eligibility issue involving Miles Bridges.

—Teams that didn't make it included St. Mary's (weak schedule), Notre Dame (not enough quality wins), Oklahoma State (Dick Vitale went on a rant) and Louisville (its 39 rating in the RPI is the best to miss the tournament). It was yet another blow to a Cardinals program that has lost its coach (Rick Pitino), athletic director (Tom Jurich) and even its latest national title (2013) due to a string of scandals that have played out over the past several years.

—Teams that squeaked in included Oklahoma, which means the nation's most electric player, Trae Young, will be on the court for at least one game, on Thursday against Rhode Island. The Sooners (18-13) went 2-8 down the stretch, but NCAA selection chair Bruce Rasmussen said games in November and December weighed just as heavily as those in February and March. Arizona State also made it off the bubble. And Syracuse, snubbed last year, was the last team in, Rasmussen said.

—Some of the first week's best action could be in Boise, Idaho, which features a possible second-round South matchup between No. 5 Kentucky and No. 4 Arizona, each of which won their conference tournaments. "I had to ask my guys, 'How many of you know what state Boise is in?'" coach John Calipari said, as part of an entertaining riff during an ESPN interview about the long trip his team faces.

It's that sort of back and forth about brackets, matchups and slights — both real and perceived — that have turned March Madness into the party it has become over the last few decades.

In a way, nothing changed Sunday.

Only this time, when the party ends, it will do so with a thud.

An NCAA commission led by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is expected to deliver recommendations shortly after the Final Four about what reforms are needed to save college basketball. At stake: A three-week extravaganza worth nearly \$20 billion in TV money alone. In other words, the lifeblood of the NCAA.

John Tauer, the championship-winning coach at Division III St. Thomas in Minnesota, said there's too much on the line for the NCAA to stand pat.

"There are enough competing pressures and enough legs to this story, that I'd be shocked if, over the next couple years, things don't change somewhat markedly," Tauer said.

AP Sports Writers Aaron Beard and Larry Lage contributed to this report.

More AP college basketball: <http://collegebasketball.ap.org> and http://www.twitter.com/AP_Top25

In tight House race, Republican leans on Trump and his base

By **BILL BARROW** and **MARC LEVY**, Associated Press

TRAFFORD, Pa. (AP) — Barbara DeFelice spent a bright but chilly afternoon preparing her garden for spring, not hand-wringing over a congressional special election two days away. She decided months ago to back Republican Rick Saccone for one reason: opposition to abortion rights.

"He shares my values," the 64-year-old retiree said Sunday. "I just don't understand that people say we shouldn't put lobsters into hot, boiling water ... but we can kill babies."

Nearby in this upper-middle-class enclave outside Pittsburgh, engineer Carol Heinecke, 57, offered another absolute reason for supporting Saccone: President Donald Trump. "Rick's going to support everything he's doing," she said.

Such attitudes will be the difference should Saccone emerge victorious Tuesday in his surprisingly tight matchup against Democrat Conor Lamb.

The 60-year-old state lawmaker has struggled unexpectedly with an electorate that favored Trump by 20 percentage points just 16 months ago. He needs the residents of Pennsylvania's 18th Congressional District to nationalize their choice and make him a proxy for what they already think about Washington, the president and the issues that define their party affiliation.

The outcome Tuesday will reverberate nationally. Democrats must flip 24 GOP-held seats to claim a House

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majority, and an upset will embolden them as they look to win in places where the party has lost ground in recent decades. Republicans, meanwhile, would be spooked about their prospects in this tempestuous era of Trump, who has twice visited the district on Saccone's behalf, most recently Saturday night.

Saccone has tried at times to make the race about experience, touting his four decades in the public and private sector, from an Air Force career and stint in North Korea to his current job as a college professor. He sometimes mocks his 33-year-old opponent as having "no record at all."

But that, by itself, hasn't given Saccone much traction against Lamb, a Marine veteran and former federal prosecutor. Lamb hails from an established Allegheny County political family and pitches himself as independent-minded.

Lamb keeps to party orthodoxy on unions. He blasts the new Republican tax law as a gift to the wealthy and a threat to Social Security and Medicare. "People have paid into these programs over the course of a lifetime," Lamb told more than 300 retired coal miners and Democratic activists Sunday in Waynesburg, 40 miles south of Pittsburgh. "I do not believe, as (Republican House Speaker) Paul Ryan does, that these are entitlements or another form of welfare."

At the same time, Lamb opposes sweeping gun restrictions, endorses Trump's new steel tariffs, avoids attacking the president, and tells voters he wouldn't back Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of California for speaker if Democrats won a House majority.

Boasting a more than 3-to-1 fundraising advantage over Saccone, he's plastered his message on Pittsburgh television and animated Democrats who haven't had recent reason to care.

The party didn't even run opponents against the previous congressman, Republican Tim Murphy, in 2014 and 2016. Murphy resigned in October amid a sex scandal.

Asked why Lamb could win the district when Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton couldn't, Bill Kortz, a former steel worker and a Democratic state lawmaker from Allegheny County, said it came down to Lamb's opposition to more gun control. "He's a Marine," Kortz said. "He's good with guns. He's good with the Second Amendment."

So Saccone and Republican forces have answered with their national arguments. Outside GOP groups have spent more than \$10 million, much of it to paint Lamb as a Pelosi lackey. On Sunday, with Saccone holding no previously announced public events, Republican volunteers distributed handbills that urged voters to "Stop Nancy Pelosi" and "Stop Hillary Clinton."

Besides Trump's visits, the White House has jumped in with one by adviser Kellyanne Conway and a stop planned Monday by Donald Trump Jr.

Speakers at the Trump-Saccone rally Saturday repeatedly hammered Lamb, with one even holding up a Democrat, anti-abortion former Gov. Bob Casey, as a politician who actually would fight his own party.

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's conservative editorial board added its own interpretation Sunday. The editorialists complimented Lamb as "an impressive young man," but warned that he could become part of a Democratic majority that would try to impeach Trump. Neither Lamb nor Saccone has made the ongoing Russia investigation bedeviling Trump part of his pitch, but the paper insisted the country must not "dive into so great a distraction."

The Republican argument is enough for voters like 54-year-old Jeffrey Snelling. "I don't know much about Rick Saccone," he acknowledged, adding that he remains skeptical about Trump. His bottom line, though: "I'm not voting for any liberal who's going to advance the Democratic Party agenda."

But Lamb is apparently having enough success to worry Saccone's most high-profile backer.

"The people of Pittsburgh," Trump declared last weekend, "cannot be conned by this guy Lamb."

Levy reported from Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. Follow Barrow and Levy on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BillBarrowAP> and <https://twitter.com/timelywriter>.

Officials tight-lipped in attack on California veterans home
Associated Press

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YOUNTVILLE, Calif. (AP) — Authorities in Northern California have so far been tight-lipped about why a former Army rifleman may have killed three women after a daylong siege at a veterans home in Napa County wine country.

Albert Wong, 36, slipped into a going-away party for two employees of The Pathway Home on the campus of the Yountville veterans home campus about 50 miles (85 kilometers) north of San Francisco on Friday, then let some people leave, but kept the three women.

Wong, whose military records show he served in Afghanistan from April 2011 to March 2012, was enrolled in The Pathway Home's veteran treatment program until he was recently expelled, according to a relative of one of the women.

Law enforcement officials did not respond to questions throughout the weekend about what led to Wong being dismissed from the program or whether officials had alerted police or others to any concerns about his mental health after he was removed from the program. Records also show a state-issued security permit Wong had for a 9mm firearm was canceled in October, but state officials could not immediately say why.

Executive Director Christine Loeber, 48; Clinical Director Jennifer Golick, 42; and Jennifer Gonzales Shushereba, 32, a clinical psychologist with the San Francisco Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare System were remembered as immensely talented women who cared deeply about veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress.

Gonzales Shushereba was seven months pregnant. She was married a year ago and was supposed to travel to Washington, D.C., with her husband this weekend to celebrate their anniversary.

"Jennifer and her colleagues died doing the work they were so passionate about — helping those in critical need," her husband, T.J. Shushereba said in a statement.

Directors of the veterans program are beginning an exhaustive review of security protocols, said The Pathway Home spokesman Larry Kamer. It may never reopen, he said.

The six residents have been moved to other facilities while officials discuss the future of the program, Kamer tells the San Francisco Chronicle.

The facility's board members are scrutinizing building security, emergency protocols and what kind of screenings are in place for incoming patients.

Cissy Sherr, of Milbrae, said in an interview with The Associated Press that she and her husband became Wong's guardians after his father died and his mother developed health problems. When Wong became a teenager and Sherr and her husband worked full-time, they decided to put him in foster care.

"He always had a great smile on his face," she said. "He didn't have a traditional upbringing but still he just became a fine young man. I can't imagine what happened. It doesn't make any sense to me."

Lots of talk, little action on curbing health care costs

By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It started as a bipartisan attempt to curb soaring health care premiums.

But Congress' effort to stabilize the nation's insurance markets is faltering amid escalating demands by each party and erratic positions by President Donald Trump. Democrats want bigger federal subsidies for consumers under President Barack Obama's health care law while Republicans, still fighting that statute, aim to relax its coverage requirements and win abortion restrictions.

The bickering could collapse the whole effort, with each side blaming the other when next year's expected higher insurance rates are announced — just weeks before Election Day, on Nov. 6.

Last week, Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, a lead Democratic negotiator, called GOP demands on abortion limitations "a complete nonstarter." A spokeswoman for Rep. Ryan Costello, R-Pa., sponsor of the House GOP package, said if Democrats want to oppose the effort "by playing abortion politics, then shame on them."

Some Democrats think they'd reap political gains if the talks collapse since polls show the health care statute is widely popular and the public would largely fault Republicans if consumer costs spiral skyward.

"Either Republicans help stabilize the market or they own these premium and deductible increases," said

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Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore. "And I'd be glad to help crucify them if they don't want to do something very reasonable."

The effort forces Republicans to choose between trying to avert bad news about premiums shortly before elections or standing by their opposition to anything that could be viewed as propping up "Obamacare."

Trump hasn't clarified things for his party. In a single day last October, he bounced from praising one bipartisan plan as "a very good solution" to labeling it "bailouts to insurance companies."

Signs indicate insurance prices will likely continue upward. Without federal action, premiums are expected to rise in every state by up to 32 percent next year and by a cumulative 90 percent or more through 2021, according to a report released last week by Covered California, the state agency overseeing California's health care exchange.

Ominously for the GOP, the study found that 14 of the 17 states that risk potentially "catastrophic" three-year rate increases of 90 percent or more backed Trump in the 2016 elections.

To try containing those increases, lawmakers crafted two bipartisan bills last year.

One by Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Bill Nelson, D-Fla., would provide billions to states for reinsurance. The funds would help insurers afford covering some of the sickest, costliest customers.

Another by Murray and Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., would revive federal payments to carriers to subsidize discounts they give lower-earning consumers for costs like deductibles and copayments. Trump halted the subsidies in October as part of his effort to upend Obama's law after federal courts said Congress hadn't properly approved the money.

Obama's statute requires insurers to provide those cost reductions, which last year cost the government \$7 billion to help around 6 million people. Insurers boosted premiums to make up the difference.

Complicating what Congress might do, Trump's halt of those subsidies to insurers has had an unanticipated, positive impact for low-income consumers.

Because of how most state regulators let carriers raise premiums, federal tax credits that help lower-income customers buy coverage grew so robustly that many were better off than before. Reviving the subsidies could actually increase out-of-pocket costs for at least 1.6 million people, the liberal Center on Budget and Policy Priorities says.

In other changes since last fall, the new GOP tax law has erased the tax penalties enforcing the "Obamacare" individual mandate, which requires most people to buy coverage. Trump has also proposed making it easier for insurers to sell policies that last less than a year and have fewer consumer protections than Obama's statute imposes, like required coverage for people with pre-existing conditions.

Citing those blows to Obama's law, Democrats say the tax credits that help millions pay premiums need to be more generous and cover more people. They want to restore spending that's used to encourage people to buy coverage and block Trump from allowing the sale of low-cost, low-coverage plans.

Republicans have their own demands.

A White House memo says any effort to strengthen markets must have language that "ensures all federal dollars are life-protected" — a reference to restrictions on using the programs to finance abortions.

AshLee Strong, spokeswoman for House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said last week that the effort to stabilize insurance markets must heed the GOP's long-imposed legal bar against using federal funds for nearly all abortions.

"That is not negotiable for House Republicans," Strong said.

The White House memo also demanded that insurers be allowed to charge older customers higher premiums than Obama's law permits and get more leeway to renew short-term, low-coverage policies.

An agreement would likely be included in a government-wide spending bill Congress wants to finish by March 23. It's probably the year's last must-pass measure, so proposals left behind will face difficulties becoming law.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Shooter had sought healing from California vets center

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, Associated Press

When Albert Wong returned from an Army deployment in Afghanistan in 2013, he knew it had affected him. He had trouble adjusting to regular life, couldn't sleep at night and was hyper-vigilant about his surroundings.

But when he found a treatment program for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who suffer from post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injuries, he saw it as a way to get help and readjust to civilian life, said Cissy Sherr, who was his legal guardian and raised him for several years as a child. Until he was recently expelled.

On Friday, police said Wong slipped into a going-away party at the program, The Pathway Home, and took three employees hostage. After an hours-long standoff, Wong and the three female workers, one of whom was pregnant, were all found dead.

As a child, Wong had always dreamed of joining the Army, said Sherr, who began caring for him when he was 6 after his father died and his mother developed medical issues.

"He had a lot of role models in the Army," Sherr said Saturday in an interview with The Associated Press. "He was patriotic and he wanted to do that forever."

Sherr and her husband raised Wong for several years, enrolled him in Catholic school and signed him up for baseball, basketball and track teams. Together, they traveled to Florida, Hawaii and Boston, where he experienced snow for the first time.

"He was a pretty happy-go-lucky kid," Sherr said. "He always had a smile on his face."

When Wong became a teenager and Sherr and her husband worked full-time, they decided to put him in foster care. He stayed with a foster father in San Francisco who had other teenage boys and he attended high school near San Francisco.

An older adopted brother, Tyrone Lampkin, recalled playing hockey and going fishing with Wong when they were kids. They also got into fights. Wong's outbursts at times forced him to live elsewhere for stints, including the time as a teenager he pushed another brother down the stairs, breaking his leg, Lampkin told the Santa Rosa Press-Democrat in a story published Sunday.

Wong served in the Army Reserve from 1998 until 2002, enlisted for active duty in May 2010 and was deployed to Afghanistan in April 2011, according to military records.

He was a decorated soldier and was awarded the Expert Marksmanship Badge. But that also meant Wong was tasked with dangerous assignments, where he saw "really horrible things" that affected his mental well-being, Sherr said. He sometimes called her before he'd go on a mission, when Army officials told the soldiers to call their families.

"I had the impression he was kind of put in harm's way, knowing that he didn't have a family," she said. "He didn't seem the least bit resentful."

Sherr said after Wong was honorably discharged from the Army in 2013, he planned to enroll in school and earn a degree in computer programming and business.

"He loved computers and he liked music. He was thoughtful and independent," Sherr said. "He didn't have a traditional upbringing but still he became a fine young man."

Wong, who had a passion for working out at the gym, would often bring his ailing mother her favorite foods and spent a lot of time with her before she died last year, Sherr said.

But post-traumatic stress affected his ability to adjust to everyday life, Sherr said. He had trouble sleeping and was always wary of his surroundings.

"I think he realized that it started to catch up with him," she said. "A couple of years ago, he told us if a door opens unexpectedly, I ask, 'What is that?'"

Lampkin said Wong was never the same after getting out of the military, often becoming fixated on petty grievances such as people owing him money or not pulling their weight.

Wong told Sherr he had found a program at the veterans home in Yountville, California, and had met people who helped him enroll in a treatment program. He was also receiving assistance at a veterans

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hospital in San Francisco, she said.

He told Sherr: "I think I'm going to get a lot of help from this program," she said, seeing the program as a possible path to recovery with other veterans in a similar position.

Officials have declined to provide additional information about why Wong was thrown out of the group.

But they say the former Army rifleman went to the center about 50 miles (85 kilometers) north of San Francisco Friday morning before exchanging gunfire with police and holding the women hostage in a room inside the center.

Lampkin said Wong confided to another brother that he was angry at the veterans' program staff after he'd been dismissed from The Pathway Home.

"Albert was a good person, he really was a good person," said Lampkin, who kept in touch with Wong by phone but hadn't seen him for years. "I heard he stopped taking his meds and started drinking a lot ... He never told me, he never told me."

The victims were identified as Executive Director Christine Loeber, 48; Clinical Director Jennifer Golick, 42; and Jennifer Gonzales Shushereba, 32, a clinical psychologist with the San Francisco Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare System who was also seven months pregnant.

After the shooting, John Dunbar, the mayor of Yountville and a member of The Pathway Home's board of directors, said Wong was "one of our heroes who clearly had demons."

The shooting has left Sherr with more questions than answers. Chief among them: Why did it happen and could more have been done to help Wong?

"In less than a year — less than half a year — things started to unravel," she said. "He may have been without any resources to support him."

Associated Press writer Christopher Weber in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

NCAA on the bubble: Virginia gets top billing for March

By EDDIE PELLIS, AP National Writer

From the top seed in the NCAA Tournament — Virginia — to those that barely made it into the bracket — Arizona State and Syracuse — it feels as though everyone involved in March Madness is on the bubble this year.

College basketball is in trouble.

The brackets came out Sunday, replete with the usual fanfare that accompanies America's biggest office pool. Villanova, Kansas and Xavier joined Virginia as No. 1 seeds, but they, along with the other 64 contenders, will play against the backdrop of an investigation-riddled season in which bribes and payoffs made bigger headlines than 3s and layups.

The tournament begins Tuesday with opening-round games featuring a matchup of bubble teams UCLA and St. Bonaventure, then kicks into full swing Thursday and Friday at eight sites around the country.

The Final Four is March 31 and April 2 in San Antonio. Shortly after that, a commission led by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is expected to deliver recommendations from an investigation triggered by an FBI probe that led to charges last fall against assistant coaches, agents, employees of apparel companies and others.

No fewer than a dozen teams in the tournament have been named either in the FBI investigation or in media reports that allege coaches and others have directed payments and improper benefits to recruits and players — thus, breaking rules that go to the core of the amateur-sports code that defines both the NCAA and the "student-athletes" who make this billion-dollar business run.

They range from teams that made it into the tournament off the so-called bubble — Alabama — to one of the best teams in the country. Arizona, a No. 4 seed in the South, has been roiled by a report that wiretaps caught coach Sean Miller discussing a \$100,000 payment to freshman Deandre Ayton. Miller has strongly denied the accusation, though the story line figures to follow the Wildcats through what could be a long run in the tournament.

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The chairman of the NCAA selection committee, Bruce Rasmussen, has said the investigations played no part of the bracket-filling process.

And yet, it's hard to imagine there weren't some sighs of relief in the NCAA offices when some bubble teams' names were left out of the field. For instance, Louisville has lost its coach (Rick Pitino), athletic director (Tom Jurich) and latest national title (2013) in the culmination of scandals that have slammed that program for the better part of this decade.

Given the widespread nature of this corruption, there's at least a chance that whoever cuts down the nets in San Antonio could eventually suffer the same fate as the Cardinals.

More certain is that once this party is over, change of some sort will be coming.

"I don't think it's just going to be a little blip on the radar," said John Tauer, the championship-winning coach at Division III St. Thomas in Minnesota, who doubles as a social psychology professor. "I think this runs deep enough and involves enough people in programs that something's got to change."

For now, though, hoops — and there was plenty to discuss after the Big Reveal:

—The region to watch is the Midwest, which is top heavy with Kansas, Duke and Michigan State, who were ranked in the top 4 in the AP preseason poll. It also features arguably the nation's most electric player in Trae Young, who led Oklahoma in as a No. 10 seed despite going 2-8 down the stretch. Questioned by Charles Barkley during the selection show about the Sooners, Rasmussen said: "Games in November and December count the same as games in February and March."

—Snubbed: St. Mary's missed despite a 28-5 record. It's only big win this season: at Gonzaga in January. ... Louisville, with an RPI of 39, became the highest-rated team in that index to miss the tournament, backing the concept that the selection committee would look more heavily at other factors. ... Notre Dame got no love either for its deep run into the ACC tournament or the return of its best player, Bonzie Colson.

—Place to be: Try Boise. It features a possible second-round South matchup between No. 5 Kentucky and No. 4 Arizona, each of which won their conference tournaments. "I had to ask my guys, 'How many of you know what state Boise is in?'" coach John Calipari said of the long trip his team faces. Also in Idaho are defending national runner-up Gonzaga, which would have a home-court advantage of sorts in a second-round matchup against either Ohio State or South Dakota State.

—The ACC led the way with nine teams in the tournament, matching a record the ever-expanding conference set last year. The SEC sent eight teams and the Big 12 sent seven. The Big Ten only sent four and the Pac-12 only had three in down years for both marquee conferences.

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

Trump backs off call for raising minimum age to buy gun

By JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Sunday pledged to help states pay for firearms training for teachers and reiterated its call to improve the background check system as part of a new plan to prevent school shootings.

But in a move sure to please the gun lobby, the plan does not include a push to increase the minimum age for purchasing assault weapons to 21, which President Donald Trump had repeatedly championed.

Instead, a new federal commission on school safety will examine the age issue, as well as a long list of others topics, as part of a longer-term look at school safety and violence.

The plan forgoes an endorsement of comprehensive background checks for gun purchases, which the president, at times, seemed to embrace.

In a call with reporters Sunday evening, administration officials described the plan as a fulfillment of Trump's call for action in the wake of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, last month that left 17 dead.

"Today we are announcing meaningful actions, steps that can be taken right away to help protect students," said Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who will chair the commission.

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DeVos said that "far too often, the focus" after such tragedies "has been only on the most contentious fights, the things that have divided people and sent them into their entrenched corners." She described the plan as "pragmatic."

The plan was immediately panned by gun control advocates, including the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. "Americans expecting real leadership to prevent gun violence will be disappointed and troubled by President Trump's dangerous retreat from his promise," said Avery Gardiner, the group's co-president.

Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., called the plan "weak on security and an insult to the victims of gun violence." In a statement, he added, "When it comes to keeping our families safe, it's clear that President Trump and Congressional Republicans are all talk and no action."

The plan is less ambitious than the changes Trump advocated in a series of listening sessions in the weeks after the massacre. In televised meetings with lawmakers, survivors of recent school shootings and the families of victims, Trump made a strong case for arming teachers, but also increasing the age for purchasing long guns.

"I mean, so they buy a revolver — a handgun — they buy at the age of 21. And yet, these other weapons that we talk about ... they're allowed to buy them at 18. So how does that make sense?" he told school officials last month. "We're going to work on getting the age up to 21 instead of 18."

White House spokesman Raj Shah had said earlier Sunday in an interview with ABC's "This Week" that "the president has been clear that he does support raising the age to 21" and that that would be a "component" of the announcement.

But Trump has also spoken repeatedly in recent weeks with the heads of the powerful National Rifle Association, which considers increasing the age of purchase to be an assault on the Second Amendment. The NRA on Friday sued Florida over a new gun law signed by Republican Gov. Rick Scott that bans the purchase of firearms by anyone under the age of 21.

Instead, the issue will be one of a list of topics to be studied by the DeVos commission, which will then provide recommendations to the president. Administration officials said they had not set a deadline for the commission's recommendations, but expected they'd made in under a year.

Trump's embrace of another commission appears at odds with comments he made Saturday night mocking their use, at least when it comes to fighting drug addiction.

During the meetings, Trump also advocated arming certain teachers and school staffers, arguing that gun-free schools are "like an invitation for these very sick people" to commit murder.

"If you had a teacher who was adept at firearms, they could end the attack very quickly," he has said.

As part plan, the White House has directed the Justice Department to help states partner with local law enforcement to provide "rigorous firearms training to specifically qualified volunteer school personnel," said Andrew Bremberg, director of the president's Domestic Policy Council. The White House did not immediately say how much money would be made available.

Trump also called on states to pass temporary, court-issued Risk Protection Orders, which allow law enforcement to confiscate guns from individuals who pose risks to themselves and others, and temporarily prevent them from buying firearms. And he called for the reform and expansion of mental health programs, as well as a full audit and review of the FBI tip line. The bureau has been criticized for not following up on warnings about the suspect in the Parkland school shooting.

During the often free-wheeling conversations, Trump also seemed to voice support for "universal" background checks, which would apply to private gun sales and those at gun shows, instead of just from licensed dealers. He also raised eyebrows by suggesting that law enforcement officials should be able to confiscate guns from those they deem a safety risk even before a court has weighed in.

"Take the guns first, go through due process second," Trump said.

Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary, later walked back both suggestions, saying "Universal means something different to a lot of people." She said the president wanted to expedite the court process, not circumvent it.

Instead, the White House reiterated its support for improvements to the National Instant Criminal Background Check through the "Fix NICS" bill, which would penalize federal agencies that don't properly

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report required records and reward states that comply by providing them with federal grant preferences.

The White House called on Congress to pass a second bill that would create a federal grant program to train students, teachers and school officials how to identify signs of potential violence and intervene early. The Republican-controlled House is expected to vote on the STOP School Violence Act next week.

Follow Colvin on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/colvinj>

China's Xi Jinping gets expanded mandate, may rule for life

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Xi Jinping, already China's most powerful leader in more than a generation, received a vastly expanded mandate as lawmakers Sunday abolished presidential term limits that had been in place for more than 35 years and wrote his political philosophy into the country's constitution.

In one swift vote, the rubber-stamp legislature opened up the possibility of Xi being president for life, returning China to the one-man-rule system that prevailed during the era of Mao Zedong and the emperors who preceded him.

The package of constitutional amendments passed the nearly 3,000-member National People's Congress almost unanimously, with just two opposing votes and three abstentions. The vote further underscored the total domination of Chinese politics by the 64-year-old Xi, who is simultaneously the head of state, leader of the ruling Communist Party and commander of the 1 million-member armed forces.

The move upends a system enacted by former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1982 to prevent a return to the bloody excesses of a lifelong dictatorship typified by Mao's chaotic 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution.

"This marks the biggest regression in China's legal system since the reform and opening-up era of the 1980s," said Zhang Lifan, an independent Beijing-based political commentator.

"I'm afraid that this will all be written into our history in the future," Zhang said.

The change is widely seen as the culmination of Xi's efforts since being appointed leader of the party in 2012 to concentrate power in his own hands and defy norms of collective leadership practiced over the past two decades. Xi has appointed himself to head bodies that oversee national security, finance, economic reform and other major initiatives, effectively sidelining the Communist Party's No. 2 figure, Premier Li Keqiang.

In addition to scrapping the limitation that presidents can serve only two consecutive terms, the amendments also inserted Xi's personal political philosophy into the preamble of the constitution, along with phrasing that emphasizes the party's leadership.

"It is rare nowadays to see a country with a constitution that emphasizes the constitutional position of any one political party," Zhang said.

The legislature's hand-picked delegates began voting in the midafternoon, with Xi leading the seven members of the party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee in casting their ballots on a stage inside a cavernous hall. He placed his orange ballot paper in a red box bearing the official seal of state.

Rank-and-file deputies then rose to vote on the floor of the hall as jaunty instrumental music played. The process ended in 10 minutes, and delegates returned to their seats while the votes were counted.

Shortly after 3:50 p.m., the results were read over the public-address system and flashed briefly on a screen in the hall.

"The constitutional amendment item has passed," the announcer declared to polite applause.

Xi showed little emotion and remained seated to listen to a report on the work of the congress delivered by its outgoing chairman.

The slide toward one-man rule under Xi has fueled concern that Beijing is eroding efforts to guard against the excesses of autocratic leadership.

The head of the legislature's legal affairs committee, Shen Chunyao, dismissed those worries as "speculation that is ungrounded and without basis."

Shen told reporters that the party's 90-year history has led to a system of orderly succession to "maintain

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the vitality and long-term stability of the party and the people.”

“We believe in the future that we will continue with this path and discover an even brighter future,” Shen said.

In a sign of the issue’s sensitivity, government censors have aggressively scrubbed social media of expressions ranging from “I disagree” to “Xi Zedong.” A number of prominent Chinese figures have publicly protested the move, despite the risk of retaliation.

Officials have said the elimination of presidential term limits is aimed only at bringing the office of the president in line with Xi’s other positions atop the Communist Party and the Central Military Commission, which do not impose term limits.

While some scholars questioned the wisdom of the move, others said they saw value in sending the message that Xi would be setting policy for many years to come.

“In fact, the more Xi Jinping’s position is consolidated and the longer his governing time is to last, the more secure it is for the continuity of the policies,” said Liu Jiangyong, a professor at Renmin University’s School of International Relations.

The move has crushed faint hopes for political reforms among China’s embattled liberal scholars and activists, who now fear even greater repression. China allows no political opposition in any form and has relentlessly persecuted independent groups seeking greater civic participation. Leading Chinese officials have repeatedly rejected any chance of adopting Western-style separation of powers or multiparty democracy.

Nevertheless, Xi’s confident, populist leadership style and tough attitude toward corruption have won him significant popular support.

Zhao Minglin, 32, a vice president of a Beijing investment firm, said it would be easier for Xi to carry out his ambitious vision of raising living standards if more power were concentrated in his hands.

“I will definitely support this constitutional amendment and this government. This is a powerful and strong government,” Zhao said. He added, however, that he was concerned that the public discourse lacked a space for dissenting voices.

Associated Press researchers Fu Ting and Shanshan Wang contributed to this report.

‘Fake news’ smear takes hold among politicians at all levels

By RYAN J. FOLEY, Associated Press

An Idaho state lawmaker urges her constituents to submit entries for her “fake news awards.” The Kentucky governor tweets #FAKENEWS to dismiss questions about his purchase of a home from a supporter. An aide to the Texas land commissioner uses the phrase to downplay the significance of his boss receiving donations from employees of a company that landed a multimillion-dollar contract.

President Donald Trump’s campaign to discredit the news media has spread to officials at all levels of government, who are echoing his use of the term “fake news” as a weapon against unflattering stories.

It’s become ubiquitous as a signal to a politician’s supporters to ignore legitimate reporting and hard questions, as a smear of the beleaguered and dwindling local press corps, and as a way for conservatives to push back against what they call biased stories.

“When Trump announced he was going to do his fake news awards, a group of us conservative legislators said, ‘We need to do that, too,’” said Idaho state Rep. Priscilla Giddings, who has urged supporters to send examples of “biased, misleading and fake news” and plans to announce her awards March 18. “We need people to wake up to the fact that just because it’s on the front page of the Boise newspaper doesn’t mean it’s 100 percent true.”

The winners of the contest, it turns out, will be announced at the end of Sunshine Week, an annual focus by the nation’s news media on government transparency and the importance of a free press.

Rhonda Prast, editor of the Idaho Statesman in Boise, said it was ridiculous for anyone to assert that it would publish a story it knew contained falsehoods.

“The Statesman has a longstanding reputation as a reliable paper of record — going back 154 years —

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and our standards for accuracy and fairness have never changed," she said in a statement. "The allegations of 'fake news' are unjust attacks on a free press."

Giddings used the term herself last year to dismiss a report from another newspaper suggesting she may have been unqualified to run for office because she was claiming a homeowner's exemption outside of her district. She said she's submitting paperwork to prove the break was legitimate.

Experts on the press and democracy say the cries of "fake news" could do long-term damage by sowing confusion and contempt for journalists and by undermining the media's role as a watchdog on government and politicians. They say it's already exacerbated the lack of trust in media by conservatives and contributed to hostility that sometimes turns violent.

In the last year, at least three political figures have been implicated in physical assaults on reporters asking questions, while journalists have been attacked in dozens of other incidents by protesters, according to the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker.

"I worry about the ongoing attack on the legitimacy of the media by President Trump and some of his supporters. The press is hardly perfect, of course, but it is also an important mechanism of accountability for people in power," said Brendan Nyhan, a professor of government at Dartmouth College. "This kind of rhetoric is potentially corrosive to trust in the media and to people's willingness to accept information that is critical of politicians they support."

Nyhan was among the authors of a recent study for the Poynter Institute that found partisan divisions in the public's attitudes toward the press. More Democrats now have more faith in the press, while Republicans have far more negative views and are "more likely to endorse extreme claims about media fabrication, to describe journalists as an enemy of the people, and to support restrictions on press freedom," the study found.

The routine labeling of factual reporting as "fake news" comes as actual fake news proliferates on the internet.

Media researcher Craig Silverman helped popularize the term in 2014 as a label for completely fabricated stories written and spread by individuals seeking profit. Now the news media editor at BuzzFeed, he wrote recently that he cringes when he hears anyone use the term, which he said became a partisan weapon after Trump's election in 2016.

Silverman wrote that political figures are manipulating social media to "literally brand real things as fake" and manufacture reality for their followers.

Politicians who have used the term in recent months in response to news reporting include the governor of Maine, a New Mexico congressional candidate, the Georgia secretary of state and the vice chairman of Trump's now-disbanded voter fraud commission. A California school board president repeatedly used the term to attack a journalist investigating the area's high rate of teenage pregnancy and its sex education policies.

The cries of "fake news" create a quandary for reporters, who want to defend their stories while also not giving credence to the charge.

"Our members, many of whom work for small news outlets, are bearing the brunt of these unwarranted attacks, and it's completely unfair. These are people who are serving the community," said Rebecca Baker, president of the Society of Professional Journalists. "Some are just ignoring it, and some are fighting back."

Baker suggests that journalists respond to the attacks by showing their work as much as possible — by sharing the audio, video and documents that back up their stories. She wonders whether the term is starting to lose its clout from overuse, but also worries that whichever party controls the White House, Congress and state governments in the future will continue to use the tactic.

"This is part and parcel of the polarization of our politics right now," she said.

Follow Foley on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/rjfoley>

Le Pen wants French far-right party renamed National Rally

By ELAINE GANLEY and CHRIS DEN HOND

LILLE, France (AP) — French far-right leader Marine Le Pen proposed renaming the National Front party co-founded by her father 46 years ago to National Rally, opening a new era after her resounding defeat in last year's presidential race.

Le Pen's proposal culminated her closing speech at the party's two-day congress in Lille, the capital of the National Front's northern heartland.

The name National Rally must be approved by party members in a mail vote and it's not clear whether they will accept the change.

In another decisive change, the party severed the final ties to firebrand founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, 89, by eliminating his title of honorary president-for-life. He was barred from attending the congress.

The moves were part of a makeover designed to revive the nationalist party's fortunes after Marine Le Pen's resounding loss in last year's presidential election to Emmanuel Macron.

After her defeat, Le Pen had promised a "re-foundation" of the party. New faces appeared within the leadership and new bylaws were voted on. But the party's foundation, notably its anti-immigration agenda, remained intact.

However, Le Pen's party reset had an immediate setback when a young official who was appointed last fall as an "ambassador for the re-foundation" was suspended for allegedly using racial slurs.

Davy Rodriguez, also deputy director of the party's youth wing, tweeted Sunday that he "formally denies racist remarks ascribed to me."

Party spokesman Sebastien Chenu said on CNews that Rodriguez was being suspended "so light can be shed and he gives us his explanation."

A video on social networks showed an agitated man identified as Rodriguez making a racial slur and being calmed. In another video, a black man recounts racial insults he said were proffered.

Since taking over in 2011, Le Pen has worked to remove the stigma of racism and anti-Semitism attached to the National Front under her father's leadership. The party, she said, has moved from a protest movement to opposition. Now, she wants it to create alliances and be seen as a party that can govern.

However, she also had to assure members who fear the party is moving away from its core. She defended the French identity and what she painted as the dark forces that threaten it.

"Globalization and Islamization are two ideologies that want to dominate the world," she said to cheers.

Le Pen hammered away at Macron, an upstart centrist and former investment banker, in her 80-minute speech as the incarnation of globalization that her party is battling.

"The model of Mr. Macron, doesn't lead to liberation but to alienation," she said, "an individual attached to nothing."

The party leader touched the chord that has resonated with sympathizers for decades, protecting France's secular values that she claimed are being destroyed by immigration, notably by Muslims.

"In France, when you're a foreigner, you respect our laws ... When you're a foreigner and a delinquent, you must get on a plane," she said, drawing cries of "On est chez nous" (We are in our land).

The National Front of the past has been a political force for decades, a kingmaker in numerous elections and a key player in others under Le Pen, notably for the European Parliament, where it won more seats than any French party.

But Marine Le Pen herself may have credibility issues. Her conservative niece popular with traditional Catholics, Marion Marechal-Le Pen — voted most popular at the previous congress — was heaped with praise by special guest Steve Bannon, U.S. President Donald Trump's former top strategist, during a surprise appearance Saturday.

Marine Le Pen said recently that she is not opposed to ceding her leadership but wants to stay on for at least three more years.

In a nod to the apparently large contingent of members opposed to a name change, Le Pen noted that the National Front name, which the party has had since its founding in 1972, is linked to a "glorious" past. However, she said it serves as a psychological barrier for potential new members and voters, notably the

word “front,” which connotes opposition.

Despite her troubles, Marine Le Pen was re-elected to a new term as party president at the congress — the only candidate for the post.

Ganley reported from Paris.

Student walkout over guns poses balancing act for schools

By DENISE LAVOIE, Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — As schools around the country brace for student walkouts following the deadly shooting in Parkland, Florida, principals and superintendents are scrambling to perform a delicate balancing act: How to let thousands of students exercise their First Amendment rights while not disrupting school and not pulling administrators into the raging debate over gun control.

Some have taken a hard line, promising to suspend students who walk out, while others are using a softer approach, working with students to set up places on campus where they can remember the victims of the Florida shooting and express their views about school safety and gun control.

Since the Feb. 14 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, demonstrations have sprung up on school campuses around the country. But the first large-scale, coordinated national demonstration is planned for Wednesday when organizers of the Women’s March have called for a 17-minute walkout, one minute for each of the 17 students and staff members killed in Florida.

National demonstrations are also planned for March 24, with a march on Washington, D.C.; and on April 20, the 19th anniversary of the Columbine High School massacre in Colorado.

No matter how schools decide to deal with the demonstrations, students have been reassured by Harvard, Yale, MIT, the University of Connecticut, UCLA and dozens of other colleges and universities that their participation won’t affect their chances of getting admitted.

But for middle-school and high-school administrators, figuring out how to allow the demonstrations during school hours has proven challenging. In some cases, it hasn’t gone smoothly.

In Needville, Texas, near Houston, Superintendent Curtis Rhodes was castigated on social media after he warned that students who leave class would be suspended for three days, even if they get parental permission.

“SHAME, SHAME, SHAME ON YOU,” wrote one woman.

In Garretson, South Dakota, administrators canceled a student walkout planned for April 20 after a Facebook posting about the plan drew more than 300 negative comments from adults.

And in Arizona, dozens of students at Ingleside Middle School, near Phoenix, were given one-day suspensions after they left campus on Feb. 27.

Layla Defibaugh, an eighth-grade student at Ingleside, said she wanted to participate in the walkout, but didn’t because of the threatened suspensions. She does plan to join the Wednesday walkout, even if it means getting suspended.

“It’s important for me to speak my mind on this topic,” she said. “At the end of the day, they shouldn’t be able to punish us for exercising our First Amendment rights.”

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, has fielded dozens of calls and emails from school administrators asking for advice, while the American Civil Liberties Union has received hundreds of inquiries from students about what their rights are and if they can be disciplined for participating in the protests.

The answer depends on each school’s code of conduct and disciplinary policies. Generally, the ACLU has been advising students that because they are required to go to school by law, administrators can discipline them for unexcused absences. But the ACLU also told students in an online training video that administrators can’t punish them more harshly because of the political nature of their demonstrations.

The superintendents association — which is supporting the April 20 walkout— has drafted a list of suggestions for school administrators, including holding a teach-in, a school-led walkout to a spot on campus, or a session on bullying.

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"There are ways to engage and harness the students in civic engagement without compromising policies in place on attendance, participation and student safety," said Noelle Ellerson Ng, associate director for policy and advocacy.

Some schools have embraced the walkouts.

In Mooresville, Indiana, administrators met with 10 high-school student leaders to work out a plan. Mooresville High School Principal Brian Disney said the students plan to use the school's public address system to read short statements about mental illness, the importance of kindness and standing up against all school violence before inviting all students to gather in a school hallway for 17 minutes of silence.

In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, administrators are still talking with students about how they can participate without violating school rules.

"I think we all realize that for folks who are teenagers right now, this could well be a defining moment in their lives. We want to very much encourage and empower student voices. That said, it has to be done in ways that are safe and appropriate," said spokesman Bob Mosier.

Some schools are taking a middle ground, neither encouraging nor discouraging students from participating. In Henrico County, Virginia, near Richmond, administrators sent an email to parents saying they are not sanctioning the Wednesday walkout, but feel obligated to manage the event because of its heavy promotion on social media. Middle-school principals asked parents to sign a Google document stating whether they give their children permission to participate. Schools plan to provide campus locations for the walkout.

In Somerville, Massachusetts, students say they won't stop after a single walkout. They've started a weekly movement they hope will keep public attention focused on school safety and put pressure on lawmakers to pass stricter gun control laws. The walkouts will be held every Wednesday, said Anika Nayak, 16, a student organizer.

"We're really just fed up with the lack of action that's been taken in our country," Nayak said.

"We don't think enough people are listening."

Putin's Russia: From basket case to resurgent superpower

By ANGELA CHARLTON and NAIRA DAVLASHYAN, Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Vladimir Putin and his Russia look more invincible today than at any other time in his 18 years in power.

Since Putin last faced an election in 2012, Russians have invaded Ukraine, annexed Crimea, blanket-bombed Syria, been accused of meddling in the U.S. presidential election and claimed to have a scary new nuclear arsenal.

"No one listened to us. You listen to us now," he said earlier this month, boasting about those weapons.

Putin will overwhelmingly win re-election as president on March 18, again. So why bother holding a vote at all?

He disdains democracy as messy and dangerous — yet he craves the legitimacy conferred by an election. He needs tangible evidence that Russians need him and his great-power vision more than they worry about the freedoms he has muffled, the endemic corruption he has failed to eradicate, the sanctions he invited by his actions in Crimea and Ukraine.

"Any autocrat wants love," said analyst Andrei Kolesnikov of the Carnegie Moscow Center, and Putin gets that love "from high support in elections."

Expected to win as much as 80 percent of the vote, Putin will further cement his authority over Russia, a czar-like figure with a democratic veneer.

During his 14 years as president and four years as prime minister of the world's largest country, Putin has transformed Russia's global image, consolidated power over its politics and economy and imprisoned opponents. He has offered asylum to Edward Snowden, quieted extremism in long-restive Chechnya, hosted phenomenally expensive Olympic Games and won the right to stage this year's World Cup.

Now 65-years-old, he's not planning to leave anytime soon.

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For 19-year-old art history student Maria Pogodina, "Putin is all of my conscious life, and so it's clear I have a lot to say thank you for."

Yet Pogodina worries about some of his policies as she prepares to vote and hopes to see a gradual transformation.

"I am not talking about revolution, no way," the teenager said, summing up the stance of many Russians of all ages. "I hope and believe it won't happen and that we can avoid civil conflict."

The election will confirm Putin's argument that to improve life in Russia, the country needs continuity more than it needs drastic change, independent media, political opposition, environmental activism or rights for homosexuals and other minorities.

Russia will remain disproportionately dependent on oil prices, and its 144 million people will stay poorer than they should be — and many will remain convinced that the world is out to get them.

Putin's most important mission in the next six years will be working out a plan for what happens when his next term expires in 2024: Will he anoint a friendly successor or invent a scheme that allows him to keep holding the reins?

Today's all-powerful Putin bears little resemblance to the man who took his tentative first steps as president on the eve of the new millennium.

Catapulted to power on Boris Yeltsin's surprise resignation as president, Putin walked into his new office Dec. 31, 1999, in a suit that seemed too big for his shoulders. His low-level KGB background made him seem shifty, and many Russians regarded him as little more than a puppet of the oligarchs then pulling the Kremlin's strings.

Russia was still emerging from a tumultuous post-Soviet hangover. Contract killings dominated headlines, its army couldn't afford socks for its soldiers, and its budget was still dependent on foreign loans.

Eighteen years later, Putin's friends run the economy and Russia's military is resurgent.

An entire generation has never known a Russia without Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin in charge. And an increasing number of other leaders — President Donald Trump among them — are emulating his nationalist, besieged fortress mentality.

The once-feisty Russian media has fallen silent. Kremlin propaganda now has a global audience, via far-reaching networks RT and Sputnik.

Yet while Putin looks invulnerable on the surface, he has reason to worry.

The Kremlin is lashing out at opposition leader Alexei Navalny's recent investigations of corruption, fearing they could spur public uproar. And the battle for succession threatens to cause damaging splits within Putin's inner circle.

Meanwhile, Russia's disillusioned youth could turn against him. Some have joined Navalny's protests; others just won't bother to vote, quietly sapping his power.

As Putin faces challenges at home, expect more Russian chest-thumping abroad.

"The international environment is an instrument for him in managing those domestic challenges first and foremost," said Matthew Rojansky, director of the Kennan Institute in Washington. "He can declare something like a Syria intervention or something in the post-Soviet space."

And a newly elected Putin is likely to continue the Cold War-like relationship with Trump's United States.

Russia sees the investigation into alleged meddling in the U.S. election as concocted — but also as a sign that Russia is important again, and that Americans are obsessed with weakening Russia at all costs.

"Does the U.S. treat Russia equally? Does it take Russia seriously? That's an enormously important benchmark" for Russians, Rojansky said. "They are not benchmarking themselves against China."

Ever since a leading U.S. diplomat was recorded giving instructions to Ukrainian opposition figures, Russians have been convinced that Washington caused the Ukraine conflict by messing in Russia's backyard, and that America bears responsibility for the ensuing fighting. It has killed thousands and remains unresolved.

Russia's annexation of Crimea prompted U.S. and European Union sanctions, sending Putin's popularity skyrocketing.

Crimea is framed as Russia's biggest victory in the Putin era, a restoration of might and righting of his-

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torical wrongs. To drive the message home, the March 18 election is being held on the fourth anniversary of the takeover.

The last time Putin faced voters, he also was guaranteed victory but was on shakier ground. A movement led by Navalny had brought masses to the streets of Moscow and other cities, as the educated middle class chafed at Putin's backward-looking vision.

Since then, Navalny has been arrested repeatedly and is barred from running for president for criminal convictions that are seen as politically driven. Other opposition figures also have been sidelined, such as onetime billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who spent 10 years in prison for tax fraud charges seen as punishment for political ambitions. He now lives abroad.

Meanwhile, Russia's problems persist.

Putin has barely bothered with campaigning. When he does, he promises a brighter future, implicitly acknowledging a lackluster present.

With around 20 million Russians currently living below the official poverty line of about \$180 a month, he pledges higher wages and pensions. He wants better health care to boost life expectancy from 73, several years below European levels. Recent space launch failures have drawn attention to troubles with the struggling aerospace industry, once a pillar of Soviet pride, and he wants Russia to catch up on robotic technologies and artificial intelligence.

"To put it mildly, Putin will have plenty to do in his next term," Kolesnikov said.

Notably, he must ensure that his country can outlast him.

Political scientist Dmitry Oreshkin asked, "sooner or later there will be no Putin, and at that point, what will we do with Russia?"

Charlton reported from Paris. Francesca Ebel in Moscow also contributed.

'Black Panther,' 4 weeks in, tops 'A Wrinkle in Time'

By LINDSEY BAHR, AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — T'Challa still rules the box office four weeks in, even with the fresh rivalry of another Walt Disney Studios release in "A Wrinkle in Time."

"Black Panther" took the No. 1 spot at the North American box office with \$41.1 million according to studio estimates Sunday, leaving another newcomer in its wake. The Marvel and Disney phenomenon crossed the \$1 billion mark worldwide this weekend and became the 7th highest grossing domestic release with \$562 million. Not accounting for inflation, it's now passed "The Dark Knight."

With a marketplace still dominated by "Black Panther," Disney faced some stiff competition from its own studio in launching Ava DuVernay's adaption of "A Wrinkle in Time," which opened in second place with \$33.3 million from 3,980 locations. The PG-rated film, which cost around \$103 million to produce and stars Oprah Winfrey and Reese Witherspoon, received mixed reviews from critics (it's currently at a "rotten" 44 percent on RottenTomatoes) and audiences who gave it a B CinemaScore.

In gauging "A Wrinkle in Time's" long-term prospects, a somewhat similar comparison could be Disney's "Tomorrowland," a PG-rated sci-fi pic with middling reviews and a B CinemaScore which opened to \$33 million in the early summer of 2015 and went on to gross \$93 million domestically. "Tomorrowland," however, notably cost nearly twice as much to make as "A Wrinkle in Time."

But the "Black Panther" effect is the x-factor here. For Disney, it's a "win all around."

"When you think about having two films at the top of the box office, it's definitely a win all around," says Disney's worldwide theatrical distribution president Dave Hollis. "We're feeling good about this start ... We're feeling good about what, for us, is a little family competition between now and (the Easter holiday)."

Hollis says he doesn't think the studio would have done anything differently regarding "Wrinkle's" release had they known the scope and longevity of "Black Panther's" prospects.

"There's always going to be competition in the marketplace," he says. "With a tentpole strategy like ours,

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four weeks of separation is about what we can expect.”

Still, “Black Panther” has devoured the marketplace for a month straight now, leaving all other newcomers in the dust.

The new horror film “The Strangers: Prey At Night,” with Christina Hendricks, took third place with \$10.5 million. The Jennifer Lawrence thriller “Red Sparrow” landed in fourth in its second weekend with \$8.2 million and the comedy “Game Night” placed fifth with \$7.9 million in weekend three.

Hardly any of the new releases, which also included the thriller “The Hurricane Heist” (8th place, \$3.2 million) and the dark action comedy “Gringo,” (11th place, \$2.6 million) were well-reviewed going into the weekend, save for the limited release independents like “Thoroughbreds,” which made \$1.2 million from 549 locations, and Armando Iannucci’s “The Death of Stalin,” which opened in four theaters to \$181,000.

It also left room for the Academy Award best picture winner “The Shape of Water,” which is also available on home video, to capitalize on its post-Oscars stature. The Fox Searchlight film added 720 theaters and took in in \$2.4 million from 1,552 locations, bringing its domestic total to \$61 million.

But even though “Black Panther” has helped boost the year to date box office significantly, it’s also proving to be a continued challenge for any other wide release hoping for a piece of the market.

“Every movie that has opened in the wake of ‘Black Panther’ has had its work cut out for it,” says comScore senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian. “We keep underestimating this film and it just shows no sign of slowing down.”

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to comScore. Where available, the latest international numbers for Friday through Sunday are also included. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. “Black Panther,” \$41.1 million (\$100 million international).
2. “A Wrinkle in Time,” \$33.3 million (\$6.3 million international).
3. “The Strangers: Prey At Night,” \$10.5 million (\$140,000 international).
4. “Red Sparrow,” \$8.2 million (\$15.7 million international).
5. “Game Night,” \$7.9 million (\$5.4 million international).
6. “Peter Rabbit,” \$6.8 million (\$4.8 million international).
7. “Death Wish,” \$6.6 million (\$3 million international).
8. “The Hurricane Heist,” \$3.2 million (\$1.9 million international).
9. “Annihilation,” \$3.2 million.
10. “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle,” \$2.8 million.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at international theaters (excluding the U.S. and Canada), according to comScore:

1. “Black Panther,” \$100 million.
2. “Operation Red Sea,” \$23.8 million.
3. “Red Sparrow,” \$15.7 million.
4. “Tomb Raider,” \$14.1 million.
5. “The Shape of Water,” \$11.3 million.
6. “Detective Chinatown 2,” \$11.2 million.
7. “Une Jolie Ch’tite Famille,” \$8.8 million.
8. “Amazing China,” \$8.1 million.
9. “Bajrangi Bhaijaan,” \$8 million.
10. “A Wrinkle in Time,” \$6.3 million.

Universal and Focus are owned by NBC Universal, a unit of Comcast Corp.; Sony, Columbia, Sony Screen Gems and Sony Pictures Classics are units of Sony Corp.; Paramount is owned by Viacom Inc.; Disney, Pixar and Marvel are owned by The Walt Disney Co.; Miramax is owned by Filmyard Holdings LLC; 20th Century Fox and Fox Searchlight are owned by 21st Century Fox; Warner Bros. and New Line are units of

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Time Warner Inc.; MGM is owned by a group of former creditors including Highland Capital, Anchorage Advisors and Carl Icahn; Lionsgate is owned by Lions Gate Entertainment Corp.; IFC is owned by AMC Networks Inc.; Rogue is owned by Relativity Media LLC.

Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/ldbahr>

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Monday, March 12, the 71st day of 2018. There are 294 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On March 12, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson won the New Hampshire Democratic primary, with Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota placing a strong second. The African island of Mauritius became independent of British rule (on this date in 1992, Mauritius became a republic).

On this date:

In 1622, Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, and Francis Xavier were canonized by Pope Gregory XV along with Teresa of Avila, Philip Neri and Isidore the Laborer.

In 1864, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant assumed command as General-in-Chief of the Union armies in the Civil War.

In 1912, the Girl Scouts of the USA had its beginnings as Juliette Gordon Low of Savannah, Georgia, founded the first American troop of the Girl Guides.

In 1925, Chinese revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen died in Beijing.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered the first of his 30 radio addresses that came to be known as "fireside chats," telling Americans what was being done to deal with the nation's economic crisis.

In 1938, the Anschluss merging Austria with Nazi Germany took place as German forces crossed the border between the two countries.

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman announced what became known as the "Truman Doctrine" to help Greece and Turkey resist Communism.

In 1951, "Dennis the Menace," created by cartoonist Hank Ketcham, made its syndicated debut in 16 newspapers.

In 1971, Hafez Assad was confirmed as president of Syria in a referendum.

In 1980, a Chicago jury found John Wayne Gacy Jr. guilty of the murders of 33 men and boys. (The next day, Gacy was sentenced to death; he was executed in May 1994.)

In 1993, Janet Reno was sworn in as the first female U.S. attorney general. A three-day blizzard that came to be known as "The Storm of the Century" began inundating the eastern third of the U.S. A series of bombings in Mumbai, India, killed 257 people (the explosions were allegedly masterminded by India's most wanted man, Dawood Ibrahim).

In 2003, Elizabeth Smart, the 15-year-old girl who vanished from her bedroom nine months earlier, was found alive in a Salt Lake City suburb with two drifters, Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee, who are serving prison terms for kidnapping her.

Ten years ago: New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer resigned two days after reports had surfaced that he was a client of a prostitution ring (Spitzer was succeeded as governor by fellow Democrat David Paterson). Former Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, a liberal Ohio Democrat who challenged big business, died near Fort Lauderdale, Florida, at age 90. Space shuttle Endeavour docked with the international space station, kicking off almost two weeks of demanding construction work. Lance Mackey won his second consecutive Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, completing the 1,100-mile journey in just under 9½ days.

Five years ago: Black smoke poured from the Sistine Chapel chimney, signaling that cardinals had failed on their first vote of the papal conclave to choose a new leader of the Catholic Church to succeed Benedict XVI. Mitch Seavey, a 53-year-old former champion, won the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in nine days, 7

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hours and 39 minutes to become the oldest winner of Alaska's grueling test of endurance.

One year ago: A bus plowed into people taking part in an early morning street festival in Haiti, killing at least 34 of them. Authorities in Mexico recovered New England quarterback Tom Brady's Super Bowl jersey more than a month after it had gone missing from the Patriots' locker room following the game; a Mexican media executive is suspected of stealing the garment.

Today's Birthdays: Politician, diplomat and civil rights activist Andrew Young is 86. Actress Barbara Feldon is 85. Broadcast journalist Lloyd Dobyns is 82. Actress-singer Liza Minnelli is 72. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney is 71. Singer-songwriter James Taylor is 70. Former Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., is 70. Rock singer-musician Bill Payne (Little Feat) is 69. Actor Jon Provost (TV: "Lassie") is 68. Author Carl Hiaasen (HY'-ah-sihn) is 65. Rock musician Steve Harris (Iron Maiden) is 62. Actress Lesley Manville is 62. Actor Jerry Levine is 61. Singer Marlon Jackson (The Jackson Five) is 61. Actor Jason Beghe is 58. Actor Courtney B. Vance is 58. Actor Titus Welliver is 56. Former MLB All-Star Darryl Strawberry is 56. Actress Julia Campbell is 55. Actor Jake Weber is 55. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., is 50. Actor Aaron Eckhart is 50. CNN reporter Jake Tapper is 49. Rock musician Graham Coxon is 49. Country musician Tommy Bales (Flynnville Train) is 45. Actor Rhys Coiro is 39. Country singer Holly Williams is 37. Actor Samm (cq) Levine is 36. Actress Jaimie Alexander is 34. Actor Tyler Patrick Jones is 24. Actress Kendall Applegate is 19.

Thought for Today: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." — John Quincy Adams, American president (1767-1848).