

Groton Daily Independent

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Chicken Soup
for the Soul

"I believe that
tomorrow is
another day
and I believe in
miracles."
-Audrey Hepburn



Put our
experienced
team to work
for you!



GROTON
Ford
GROTONFORD.COM 605-397-2311

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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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**

Family and friends say their final goodbyes to pilot Kelle Hein



LAREDO, Texas (KGNS) - Family and friends of pilot and Pastor Kelle Hein, 56, helped lay him to rest on Monday in a home and sanctuary all too familiar.

Many community members gathered at the Family Baptist Church to say their final goodbyes to Hein, who passed during a tragic plane crash last Thursday.

The accident happened after the engine started smoking and Hein, along with 19-year-old Robert Christopher Marshall attempted to land the plane, but the plane nosedived into the runway and caught fire.

Hein was a pilot for many years and he worked with several people including Congressman Henry Cuellar, who he flew for over 15 years.

Cuellar says, "He would always say when he would meet somebody, no matter what the mood of the circumstance is, he would always say top of the morning to you and he was just a very jolly person. He was always in a good mood and always trying to find a way that he can help people."

Hein is a 1979 graduate of Groton High School. He graduated from Augustana College in Sioux Falls in 1981. He and his wife, Tammy Waldrop, were missionaries in Nuevo Laredo and Laredo for the past 32 years. He had been a flight instructor and commercial pilot since 1985.

Hein is survived by his wife Tammy Hein and his five children. Hein is the son of Darlene Fisher, formerly of Groton.

The National Transportation Safety Board is still investigating the actual cause of the crash.

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The boys' basketball awards banquet was held Monday evening at the Olive Grove Golf Course. Several players were recognized at the event and are shown in the photos on this and the next page.



NEC All-Conference- Brodyn DeHoet. (Photo by Tricia Keith)



Tiger Commitment Award- Never missed a practice or game-Anthony Sippel. (Photo by Tricia Keith)

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

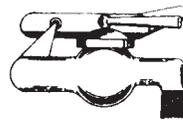


GROTON
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER

1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton

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!

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Team Awards

Most Improved- Treyton Diegel
Offensive Player of the Year- Seric Shabazz
Hustler Award- Brandon Keith
Player of the Year- Brodyn DeHoet
Defensive Player of the Year- Jonathan Doeden
Scout Team Player of the Year- Kaden Kurtz

(Photo by Tricia Keith)



Academic All-State: Anthony Sippel, Brandon Keith and Marshall Lane (not pictured) (Photo by

Tricia Keith)



Northeast Area All-Stars- Seric Shabazz and Brandon Keith. (Photo by Tricia Keith)

No. 6 Northern State Men Roll Past Minnesota State en Route to Elite Eight Appearance

Maryville, Mo. – The No. 6 Northern State University men's basketball team will be making their first NCAA Elite 8 appearance in 20 years next week, after a 90-83 victory over Minnesota State in the Central Region Championship. With the win, the Wolves improve to 34-3 overall and will head to Sioux Falls and the Sanford Pentagon.

The 34 season wins ties the single season school record, which was set back in the 1992-93 season when the Wolves went 34-2, under the direction of former Head Coach and Director of Athletics Bob Olson. Current Head Coach, Paul Sather, was a junior on the 1992-93 squad appearing in all 36 games for NSU. Northern adds to their storied season, now holding the NSIC Overall and North Division Titles, NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament Title, and NCAA Central Region Tournament Title.

The two teams battled with a total of seven lead changes and neither team holding a double figure lead through the first 20 minutes of action. Northern lead by as much as eight between the 11:12 and 9:12 minute marks, however MSU rallied back cutting the lead to one at the halftime break, as the scoreboard read 43-42 in the Wolves favor.

The Wolves out-scored the Mavericks 47-41 in the final 20 minutes of regulation, however it was until final minutes of play that the Wolves broke things open. NSU led, 78-74, with 2:57 left in the game when MSU resorted to the game plan of sending the Wolves to the line. DJ Pollard knocked down both foul shots at the 1:17 mark, and Northern went 10-of-12 from the line in the final minute of play, sealing the 7-point victory.

Northern shot 58.8 percent from the field, 50.0 percent from the 3-point line, and 71.9 percent from the foul line in the game. Defensively, the held the Mavericks who entered the game shooting 42.8 percent from the arc to a 35.3 3-point field goal percentage in the game.

The Wolves added 42 points in the paint, 25 points off the bench, 14 points off turnovers, eight second chance points, and two fast break points. Minnesota State just edged out the Wolves on the glass with 34 rebounds to Northern's 30. As a team, NSU combined for 12 assists, seven made 3-pointers, five blocks and four steals.

Ian Smith led five Wolves in double figures with 22 points, hitting 7-of-14 from the floor and 4-of-6 from the 3-point line. The junior added two rebounds, two assists, two steals, and one block for the Wolves. Logan Doyle was second on the team, and led the Wolves off the bench, with 21 points. The forward shot 77.8 percent from the floor, while adding two assists and one block, as well as a team high seven rebounds.

DJ Pollard grabbed 19 points of his own, hitting 4-of-6 from the field and 11-of-12 from the foul line. The recent CoSIDA Academic All-American® added four rebounds and one block to the team total. Darin Peterka and Carter Evans were the final Wolves in double figures notching 12 and ten points respectively. Peterka shot 50.0 percent from the floor and 60.0 percent from the arc, adding a team high six assists, as well as five rebounds and two steals. Evans knocked down 5-of-7 from the floor, and recorded three rebounds, one assist, and one block.

Gabe King, Bo Fries, and Andrew Kallman grabbed the final six team points, knocking down a basketball apiece. King tallied two rebounds, while Fries notched three rebounds, one assist, and one block, and Kallman added one rebound.

The Wolves landed two on the NCAA Central Region All-Tournament team in senior Logan Doyle and junior Ian Smith. Smith was named the tournament's MVP after averaging 12.0 points, 5.0 rebounds, and 4.3 assists in the Wolves three wins.

Northern earned the No. 3 seed in the tournament and will face No. 6 seed East Stroudsburg, out of the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference, on Tuesday, March 20 from Sioux Falls and the Sanford Pentagon. Family and friends say their final goodbyes to pilot Kelle Hein

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Groton Coffee Cup League

March 12 Team Standings: James Valley 26, Ten Pins 21, Kens 17, Jungle Lanes 16

High Games: Vicki Walter 213, Vickie Kramp 174, Sam Bahr 173

High Series: Vicki Walter 515, Vickie Kramp 481, Joyce Walter 452

Conde National League

March 12 Team Standings: Pirates 24, Mets 22, Braves 17, Cubs 16, Colts 16, Giants 13

Men's High Games: Lance Frohling 223, 194, 191; Russ Bethke 189; Troy Linberg 184

Men's High Series: Lance Frohling 608, Russ Bethke 510, Troy Lindberg 502

Women's High Games: Nancy Radke 182, Vickie Kramp 169, Joyce Walter 164, Michelle Johnson 164

Women's High Series: Nancy Radke 473, Michelle Johnson 463, Joyce Walter 442

Poetry and Essay Contest Winners

Here are the winners of this year's poetry & essay contest sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary. The only grades that participated this year were 3rd, 4th, and 5th. The Groton Auxiliary did not participate this year either. Judging and prizes were awarded by the Columbia Legion Auxiliary. Cara Dennert is pictured with the award winners.



3rd Grade Poetry - Carlee Johnson - 1st place, Emerlee Jones - 2nd place



5th Grade Poetry - Christian Ehresmann - 1st place

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5th Grade Poetry - Alicia Davis - 2nd place.



4th Grade Essay - Carly Gilbert - 1st place, Jaedyn Penning - 2nd place; 4th Grade Poetry - Talli Wright - 1st place, Grace Hatfield - 2nd place

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Today in Weather History

March 14, 1989: A fast-moving winter storm produced freezing rain and heavy snow across most of South Dakota. Visibility was reduced to 100 ft within areas of blowing snow. Driving conditions became treacherous, resulting in abandoned vehicles, several accidents, and the temporary closing of I-29 from Sioux Falls to the North Dakota border.

March 14, 1990: Heavy Snow fell across parts of the southwest, central, and north central South Dakota from the late afternoon on the 13th into the morning hours of the 14th. Highest accumulations were recorded in the north-central part of the state, including 9 inches at Gettysburg, 8 inches at Pollock, and 5 inches at Pine Ridge.

March 14, 2002: Heavy snow of 6 to 16 inches fell across parts of central and northeast South Dakota from the early morning to the evening hours. Some freezing rain fell across parts of the area before changing over to snow. Also, the winds increased from the north resulting in blowing snow and reduced visibilities. The combination of ice, heavy snow and blowing snow resulted in challenging travel conditions. There were several accidents across the area along with many vehicles sliding off the road. Schools either started late or were closed. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Blunt, 7 inches at Murdo, 8 inches at Stephan and Clark, 9 inches at Gann Valley and Miller, and 11 inches at Highmore and Wattertown. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included, 12 inches at Hayti and Milbank, 14 inches at Castlewood and Presho, 15 inches at Clear Lake, and 16 inches at Kennebec.

1870 - The term blizzard was first applied to a storm which produced heavy snow and high winds in Minnesota and Iowa. (David Ludlum)

1933: A deadly tornado outbreak affected the Middle Tennessee region, including Nashville on this day. The outbreak, which produced five or more tornadoes, killed 44 people and injured at least 461 others. The strongest tornado, F3, cut a path through the center of Nashville. About 1,400 homes were damaged or destroyed. Windows were blown out of the State Capitol Building.

1935: Suffocating dust storms frequently occurred in southeast Colorado between the 12th and the 25th of the month. Six people died, and many livestock starved or suffocated. Up to six feet of dust covered the ground. Schools were closed, and tenants deserted many rural homes.

1944 - A single storm brought a record 21.6 inches of snow to Salt Lake City UT. (The Weather Channel)

1960 - Northern Georgia was between snowstorms. Gainesville GA received 17 inches of snow during the month, and reported at least a trace of snow on the ground 22 days in March. Snow was on roofs in Hartwell GA from the 2nd to the 29th. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A powerful storm in the western U.S. produced 15 inches of snow in the Lake Tahoe Basin of Nevada, and wind gusts to 50 mph at Las Vegas NV. Thunderstorms in the Sacramento Valley of California spawned a tornado which hit a turkey farm near Corning. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Squalls in the Great Lakes Region continued to produce heavy snow in northwest Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, and produced up to 14 inches of snow in northeast Ohio. Poplar WI reported 27 inches of snow in two days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - High winds in Colorado and Wyoming gusted above 120 mph at Horsetooth Heights CO. High winds in the Central Plains sharply reduced visibilities in blowing dust as far east as Kansas City MO. Winds gusting to 72 mph at Hill City KS reduced the visibility to a city block in blowing dust. Soil erosion in northwest Kansas damaged nearly five million acres of wheat. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Fifty-three cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s and 80s from the Gulf coast to the Great Lakes Region. Charleston WV was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 89 degrees. It was the fourth of five consecutive days with record warm temperatures for many cities in the eastern U.S. There were 283 daily record highs reported in the central and eastern U.S. during between the 11th and the 15th of March. (The National Weather Summary)

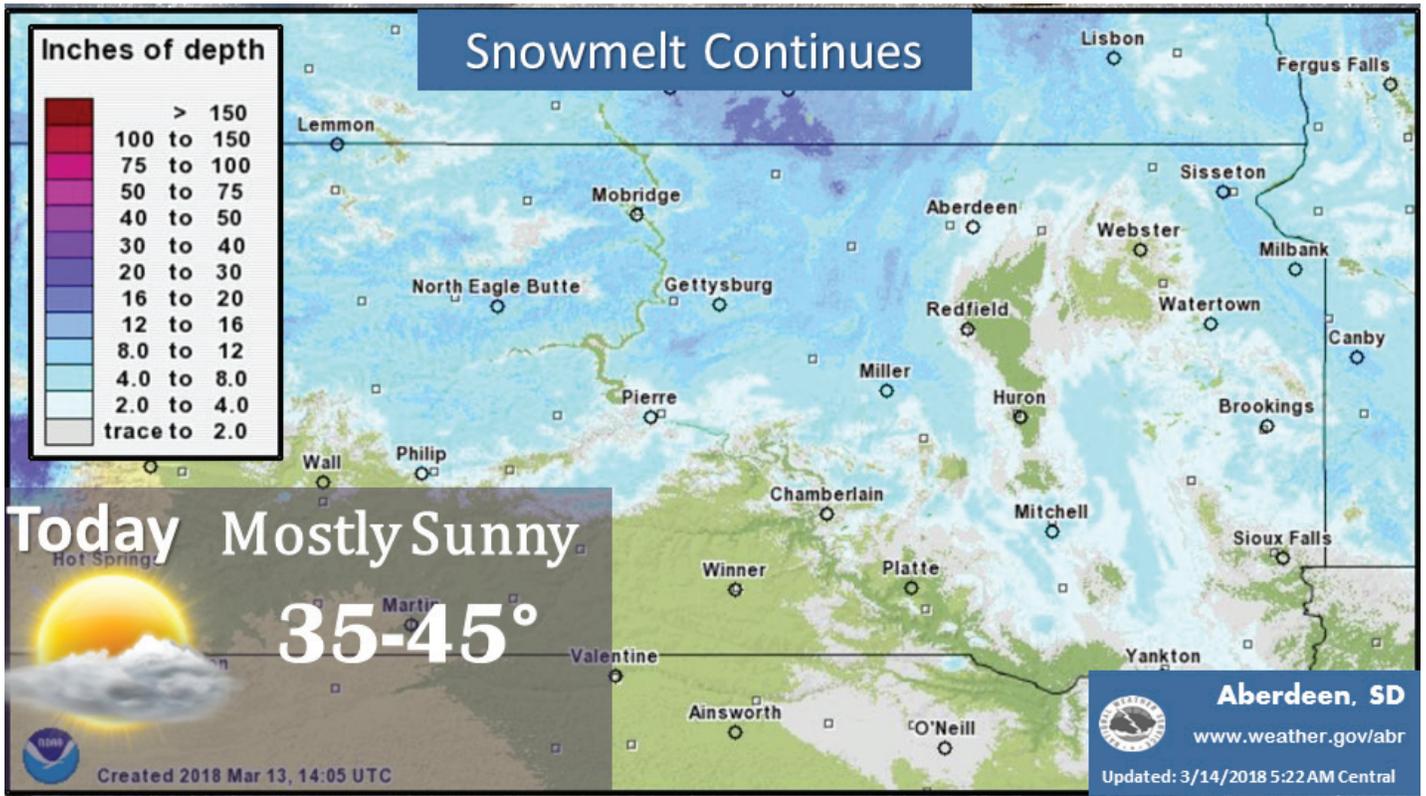
2007 - The temperature in Concord, NH, reaches a record high of 74 degrees less than one week after a record low temperature of 7 degrees below zero on March 8, an 81 degree temperature swing in six days.

2008: An EF2 tornado moved through downtown Atlanta, Georgia shortly before 10 pm damaging the Georgia Dome where the SEC men's basketball tournament was underway.

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Wed Mar 14	Thu Mar 15	Fri Mar 16	Sat Mar 17	Sun Mar 18	Mon Mar 19	Tue Mar 20
35°F	34°F	33°F	37°F	39°F	35°F	35°F
16°F	17°F	16°F	21°F	23°F	19°F	28°F
SSW 8 MPH	ENE 11 MPH	E 15 MPH Precip 30%	SSE 6 MPH	SE 9 MPH	NE 14 MPH Precip 40%	NNW 8 MPH



Published on: 03/14/2018 at 5:24AM

Mostly sunny skies and dry conditions will continue today. High temperatures will range from the mid-30s, to the mid-40s. The warmest temperatures will occur over limited snow cover areas.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 36.9 F at 5:12 PM

Low Outside Temp: 7.6 F at 7:53 AM

Wind Chill:

High Gust: 16.0 Mph at 11:18 PM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 71° in 1981

Record Low: -31° in 1897

Average High: 39°F

Average Low: 19°F

Average Precip in March: 0.44

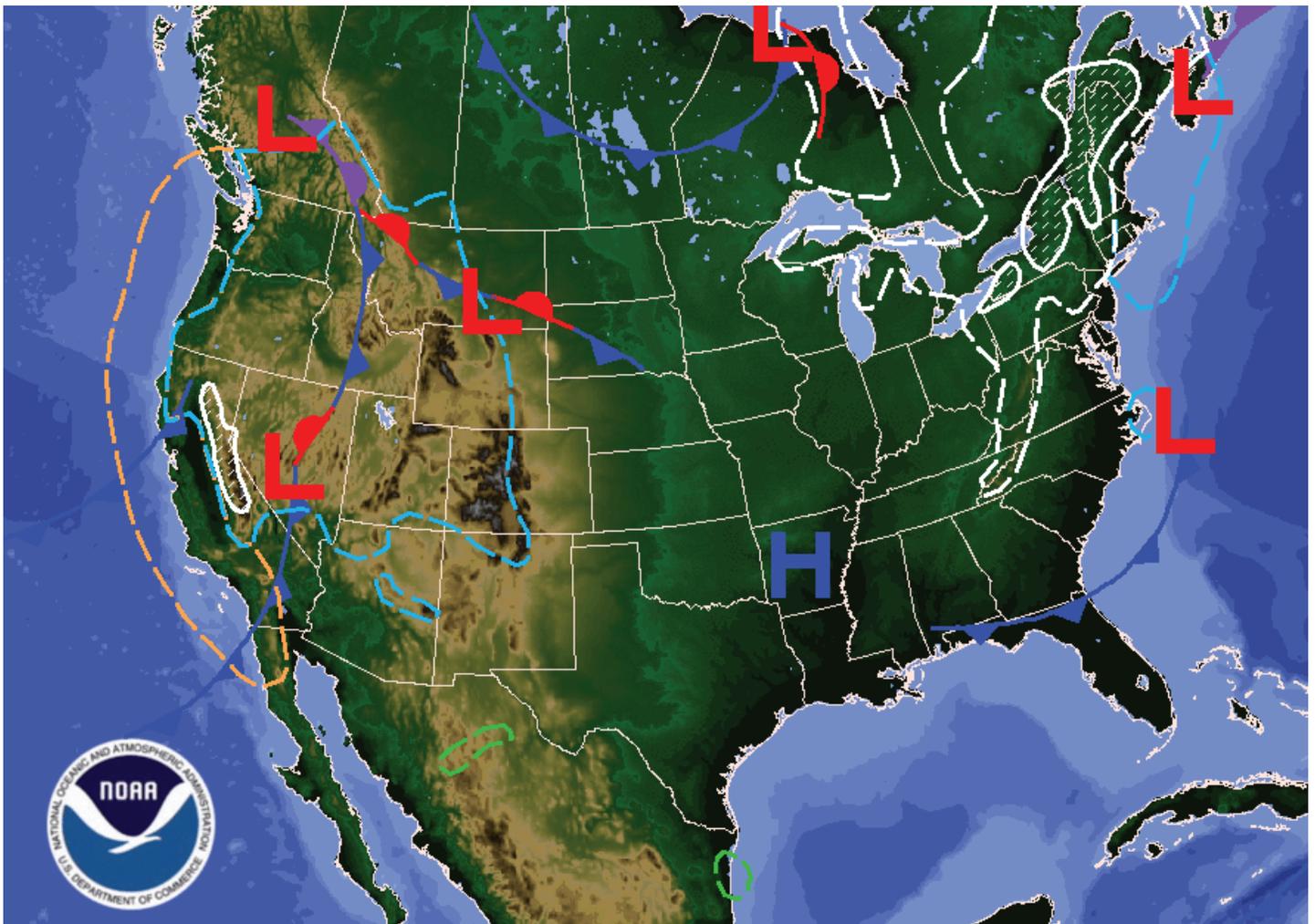
Precip to date in March: 0.94

Average Precip to date: 1.46

Precip Year to Date: 1.35

Sunset Tonight: 7:38 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:46 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Wed, Mar 14, 2018, issued 4:54 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain

Rain and T'Storms

Rain and Snow

Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)

Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)

Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)

Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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GOD WILL JUDGE!

Robert G. Ingersoll is recognized as one of the most influential agnostics who ever lived. One night in New York he was dramatically and forcefully giving a lecture that explained his doubts about judgment and hell. When the gifted lecturer finished his address, a man who was very drunk stumbled his way to the front of the auditorium and said in slobbering terms, "I sure hope you are right, Brother Bob. I sure hope you are right because I'm counting on that!"

Few today want to think of God as a Judge. It is much more pleasant to think of Him as a loving, caring, compassionate and gracious Father - which He certainly is - than as a stern judge who will "judge the world in righteousness." Many would apologize for considering their God in such terms, but this way of thinking is inconsistent with what God's Word teaches.

And there are many who want to fashion Him after their own likes and dislikes and endow Him the nature and character they would like Him to possess. They want to make Him consistent with their own wishful thinking so that they will be comfortable in their sins. Their god has the attributes of our God in that he is compassionate and loving but they refuse to accept the fact that His attributes also contain wrath and justice. This would mean that there would be no judgment and no punishment for sins. However, our God is a Holy God. But our God, Who "is love," will one day judge "the world with righteousness and the people with truth."

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to live in the light of Your judgment and know we will hear You say, "Well done!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 96:13 For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.

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

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Mega Millions

06-30-58-60-61, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 5

(six, thirty, fifty-eight, sixty, sixty-one; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$318 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$420 million

Sioux Falls deplaning delay sparks social media backlash

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Delta Airlines faced several disgruntled customers and frustrated social media posts following a flight from Minneapolis that took more than an hour to deplane after landing in Sioux Falls.

The Sioux Falls Regional Airport delay on Sunday sparked complaints on Twitter as flyers and family members called the wait “ridiculous” and “unacceptable.” Some criticized the airline for not having enough staff to handle the situation.

The airport’s executive director, Dan Letellier, told the Argus Leader that it’s up to each individual airline to ensure flights stick to schedule. Letellier said Delta was handling two arrivals at nearly the same time due to an extensive delay on another flight.

He said it’s possible the airline’s local ground crew was understaffed. Sioux Falls’ low unemployment rate has led to workforce shortages across many industries.

Delta emailed a statement that said, “Delta apologizes to customers on flight 2048 from Minneapolis who were delayed deplaning in Sioux Falls while Delta’s ground crews worked to board another flight at an adjacent gate.”

Lisa and Steve Johnson were waiting at the airport to pick up their teenage daughter, who was stuck on the Minneapolis flight. Lisa Johnson said her daughter and other passengers noticed an exhaust-like smell, while their patience wore thin.

“She was just more irritated and uncomfortable,” she said. “We told her, ‘we’re here, we can see the plane.’”

Steve Johnson said, “They should have a couple of maintenance people there that could handle unloading a plane. What if there’s an emergency?”

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

Oklahoma Senate OKs adoption bill LGBT group is fighting

By The Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A bill that opponents say would allow religious-based adoption agencies to discriminate against same-sex couples, single people and non-Christians has cleared the Oklahoma Senate.

Senate Bill 1140 passed 35-9 Tuesday and now heads to the House.

The bill would cover child-placing agencies that block adoptive parents who do not meet the agencies’ religious or moral standards.

Republican Sen. Greg Treat sponsored the bill and said it would protect that practice from potential lawsuits.

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Gay rights advocates say the measure is unnecessary and would keep children from loving homes. The group Freedom Oklahoma launched a campaign Monday to kill the bill.

Similar laws have been passed in at least seven other states, including Alabama, South Dakota and Texas last year. A bill with similar language has been introduced in U.S. Congress.

Elections office separates Krebs from US House race info

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Secretary of State Shantel Krebs' office has instituted a "legal firewall" separating Krebs from information about the South Dakota U.S. House election in which she's running.

The office says Krebs instituted the policy to protect the "integrity of her office and the election process." All office employees have signed it.

The policy is written generally for secretary of state personnel who are candidates for public office. It says avoiding the appearance of impropriety is of "utmost importance."

It says also that a candidate's name and photo will be removed from the state's Election Night Reporting System. The office's website currently features Krebs' name and picture.

Krebs, former Public Utilities Commissioner Dusty Johnson and state Sen. Neal Tapio are competing in the Republican primary for the seat. Former Judge Tim Bjorkman is a Democratic candidate.

Flooded families petition for attorney's fees

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Some Shindler area families who successfully sued South Dakota for a poorly designed highway that flooded their homes are petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court in hopes of forcing the state to pay attorney's fees in the case.

A jury awarded the five families \$1 million in 2014. Jurors found the state failed to heed warnings by its own engineers about possible flooding if it built culverts on Highway 11 that were too narrow.

The state Supreme Court upheld that decision last fall, but did not order payment of attorney's fees. The Argus Leader reports the families say the state is violating federal law by refusing to pay the fees. In their petition, the families say the law requires payment of legal fees to those displaced by the actions of the government.

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

Daum heads list of notable NCAA players from one-bid leagues

By STEVE MEGARGEE, AP Sports Writer

South Dakota State forward Mike Daum already has experienced the NCAA Tournament twice before. Now he wants to discover what it feels like to win on college basketball's biggest stage.

Daum, one of the nation's most prolific scorers, heads a list of several notable players from one-bid leagues relishing their chance at the spotlight this week. South Dakota State (28-6) is the No. 12 seed in the West Region and faces Ohio State (24-8) on Thursday in Boise, Idaho.

"Being able to say I won a game in March Madness would be something I've dreamed about ever since I was a little kid," Daum said. "It would be a blessing to be able to do this."

Daum's had a couple of shots before. He scored 16 points in a 79-74 NCAA Tournament loss to Maryland two years ago and had 17 points last season when South Dakota State fell 66-46 in the opening round to Gonzaga .

Those games provided a rare national showcase for Daum, one of the nation's top players from outside the major conferences.

After redshirting his first year at South Dakota State, Daum has developed into a two-time Summit League player of the year. The 6-foot-9 junior is one of five finalists for the Karl Malone Award given annually to the nation's top power forward.

Daum ranks sixth among all Division I players in scoring (23.8) and 14th in rebounding (10.4) this season.

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He's ready to apply the lessons learned from South Dakota State's last two NCAA appearances while trying to lead the Jackrabbits beyond the first round.

"The size and length is the biggest noticeable aspect of other (NCAA Tournament) teams," Daum said. "We don't have a lot of guys who are 7-footers or 6-9 with 7-foot wingspans in the Summit League, guys who are unbelievable athletes. When we get into the NCAA Tournament, you play a team with a full roster of guys like that. For us, it's just mentally preparing for things like that."

Here's a rundown of some other potential NCAA Tournament impact performers from one-bid leagues:

JOE CHEALEY (guard, College of Charleston)

Next game: Friday vs. Auburn at San Diego

Notable: Chealey scored 32 points as Charleston erased a 17-point, second-half deficit to beat Northeastern 83-76 in overtime in the Colonial Athletic Association championship game. The 6-4 senior has been named first-team all-CAA two straight years. He has 18.5 points per game.

CLAYTON CUSTER (guard, Loyola of Chicago)

Next game: Thursday vs. Miami in Dallas

Notable: Custer was named the Missouri Valley Conference's player of the year. The 6-1 junior has 13.4 points and 4.3 assists per game. He has helped Loyola earn its first NCAA berth since 1985. Custer was part of the 2014-15 Iowa State team that made the NCAA field, but he didn't play in the NCAA Tournament.

JON ELMORE (guard, Marshall)

Next game: Friday vs. Wichita State in San Diego

Notable: This 6-3 junior has two triple-doubles and ranks eighth in Division I in scoring (22.8) and seventh in assists (6.9). He has led Conference USA in scoring and assists each of the last two seasons. Elmore also has 6 rebounds per game. He could become the first Division I player to average at least 22 points, 6 rebounds and 6 assists in a season since Memphis' Penny Hardaway in 1992-93.

DEMONTRAE JEFFERSON, (guard, Texas Southern)

Next game: Wednesday vs. North Carolina Central in Dayton, Ohio

Notable: This 5-7 dynamo averages 23.4 points and 4.5 assists. He served a five-game suspension but returned to lead Texas Southern to a Southwest Athletic Conference Tournament title. He scored 29 against TCU, 24 each against Kansas and Baylor, 22 against Clemson and 20 against Gonzaga.

JEMERRIO JONES (forward, New Mexico State)

Next game: Friday vs. Clemson in San Diego

Notable: The Western Athletic Conference player of the year averages 13.1 rebounds to rank second among all Division I players. The 6-5 senior also has 11.1 points per game. He has five double-doubles in his last six games. He has reached the 20-rebound mark five times in his last 11 contests.

JAIRUS LYLES (guard, Maryland-Baltimore County)

Next game: Friday vs. Virginia in Charlotte, North Carolina

Notable: This 6-foot-2 graduate student sank a tiebreaking 3-pointer with less than a second left as UMBC upset top-seeded Vermont in the America East championship. Lyles has averaged 20.2 points to earn first-team all-America East honors.

GARRISON MATHEWS (guard, Lipscomb)

Next game: Friday vs. North Carolina in Charlotte.

Notable: Mathews helped Lipscomb earn its first NCAA invitation by leading the Atlantic Sun with 22.1 points per game. The 6-5 junior scored 33 points in the Atlantic Sun championship game. He's scored at

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least 23 points in seven of his last 10 games.

D'MARCUS SIMONDS (guard, Georgia State)

Next game: Friday vs. Cincinnati in Nashville, Tennessee

Notable: Simonds leads the Sun Belt in scoring (21.1) and is the league's player of the year. The 6-3 sophomore scored 27 points as Georgia State beat Texas Arlington 74-61 in the Sun Belt championship game .

JONATHAN STARK (guard, Murray State)

Next game: Friday vs. West Virginia in San Diego

Notable: This 6-foot senior has led the Ohio Valley Conference in scoring each of the last two years and was named the OVC player of the year this season. He averages 21.8 points and has scored at least 22 points in 11 of his last 13 games. Stark has made 3.52 3-point baskets per game to rank sixth in Division I .

ZACH THOMAS (forward, Bucknell)

Next game: Friday vs. Michigan State in Detroit

Notable: Thomas leads the Patriot League in scoring (20.3) and rebounding (9.2). The 6-7 senior is the Patriot League's player of the year. He had a 24-point, 10-rebound performance against Arkansas and also scored 21 against North Carolina and 17 against Maryland .

Follow Steve Megargee at <https://twitter.com/stevemegargee>

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

Authorities ID 3 family members killed in weekend crash

PARKSTON, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified a mother, father and teenage son from Tyndall who died in a vehicle crash in Hutchinson County over the weekend.

The Highway Patrol says 16-year-old Zachary Johnson was driving a car that went out of control on an icy state Highway 37 and went into the oncoming lane, colliding with a semitrailer.

His 48-year-old mother, Tina Johnson, and 49-year-old father, Daniel Johnson, were riding in the car. All three were killed in the crash Saturday morning south of Parkston.

The semi driver wasn't hurt.

The Daily Republic newspaper reports that the family was headed to a regional youth wrestling tournament in Mitchell.

The Bon Homme School District held an assembly with students Monday morning to help them cope. Counselors are being made available at the school.

Capitol flags flying at half-staff to honor late lawmaker

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard has ordered state Capitol flags to be flown at half-staff Tuesday in honor of former state Rep. Hal Wick.

Daugaard's office says the 73-year-old Wick, of Sioux Falls, died March 7. He served 20 years over several stints in the House of Representatives from 1977 until 2014.

A funeral for Wick will be held on Tuesday in Sioux Falls. The South Dakota Republican Party says Wick was a longtime member of the Minnehaha County GOP and served in many roles for the party.

6-year-old boy injured in crash near Brookings dies

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — A 6-year-old Aurora boy has died from injuries he suffered in a two-vehicle crash in Brookings County.

The Highway Patrol says Ethan Rosa was riding in a car that spun out of control on an icy U.S. Highway 14 on March 7, about 3 miles east of Brookings.

The car slid into the oncoming lane and collided with a semitrailer. The boy was among three passengers in the car who were injured. He died over the weekend in a Sioux Falls hospital.

Jason Jones named to serve as new Pierre police chief

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The city of Pierre has named Jason Jones as police chief.

The longtime member of the Pierre Police Department will officially assume the role Friday. Jones is replacing Dave Panzer Jr., who has retired.

Jones serves now as the department's administrative captain. He started with Pierre police in 2000 and holds a degree from the University of South Dakota.

Pierre Mayor Steve Harding says Jones has proven himself a capable leader, a strong administrator and adept at forging community relations. The department has 45 employees.

Teen in custody for alleged threats against Corsica school

CORSICA, S.D. (AP) — A 15-year-old juvenile is in custody for alleged threats of gun violence toward Corsica-Stickney High School.

Aurora County Sheriff David Fink tells The Daily Republic that the juvenile is a student at the school in Corsica. Fink didn't identify the person.

The sheriff says a school official notified law enforcement Sunday night of threats on social media. Authorities are still investigating whether the student actually had access to a gun.

The start of classes Monday was delayed until 10 a.m. Corsica-Stickney Superintendent Scott Muckey said administrators held an assembly Monday morning, but he declined to say what was said to students.

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

1 person hospitalized after apartment fire in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — One person is hospitalized after an apartment fire in Sioux Falls.

The fire department says the blaze broke out in a third-floor unit shortly before 10 p.m. Monday. The building was evacuated.

Firefighters who entered the apartment where the fire started found a person inside in need of help. The person was taken to the hospital with undisclosed injuries. No one else was hurt.

The building's sprinkler system contained the fire to the room of origin. But other parts of the building suffered smoke and water damage.

The cause of the fire wasn't immediately determined.

Victim of 3-vehicle fatal crash near Sioux Falls ID'd

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified the victim of a three-vehicle fatal crash in Minnehaha County.

The Highway Patrol says 19-year-old Caitlyn Carman of Sioux Falls was driving a sport utility vehicle that was struck from behind on state Highway 42 by a minivan. The collision Thursday evening pushed Carman's vehicle into the path of a semitrailer.

Carman died at the scene about 15 miles west of Sioux Falls. A 10-year-old Parker boy who was a passenger in her vehicle was flown to a Sioux Falls hospital with what the patrol says are life-threatening injuries.

The driver of the second SUV and the semi were treated at the scene for minor injuries.

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The Latest: Democrat Lamb's slim lead grows in Pa. House bid

MT. LEBANON, Pa. (AP) — The Latest on the special congressional election in Pennsylvania (all times local): 7:45 a.m.

Democrat Conor Lamb has added to his slim lead over Republican Rick Saccone (suh-KOHN') in their closely watched special election for Congress in Pennsylvania.

Unofficial results show that Lamb's lead now stands at 641 votes — out of more than 224,000 votes cast. Election officials say there are about 200 absentee votes and an unknown number of provisional ballots still to be counted.

The four counties in the western Pennsylvania district have seven days to count provisional ballots.

Either candidate's supporters can ask for a recount but there are stiff requirements.

Lamb's lead grew by 62 votes on Wednesday morning when Washington County finished counting absentee ballots.

The contest has drawn national attention as a bellwether for the midterm elections in November when the Republican Party's House and Senate majorities are at risk.

7:25 a.m.

Democrat Conor Lamb, who has a razor-thin lead over Republican Rick Saccone in Pennsylvania's special congressional election, says he's confident he'll be the ultimate winner.

With some absentee ballots still being counted, Lamb tells CNN his campaign had made a push to help voters get absentee ballots.

Asked about his strong showing in a Republican district that Donald Trump carried by 20 points in 2016, Lamb says, "This is my home. You call it a red district, I call it western Pennsylvania."

Trump campaigned for Saccone last weekend, urging voters not to "be conned by this guy Lamb."

Asked about Trump's remarks, Lamb said, "There was a lot of foolishness in this election and a lot of really cartoonish campaigning, and I think by the time of the president's visit ... there was just a little bit of burnout on that type of campaigning."

But Lamb says there are still "plenty of people here who are still pretty supportive" of Trump.

6:30 a.m.

A razor's edge is separating Democrat Conor Lamb and Republican Rick Saccone in the special congressional election in Pennsylvania. The 18th Congressional District went heavily for Donald Trump in 2016, but Lamb has claimed victory.

Absentee ballots were still being counted. The contest has drawn national attention as a bellwether for the midterm elections in November when the Republican Party's House and Senate majorities are at risk.

Lamb's showing in a district Trump won by 20 points in the presidential race is sure to stoke anxiety among Republicans nationwide and renewed enthusiasm among Democrats.

Either candidate's supporters can ask for a recount. However there are stiff requirements.

The ultimate winner will face re-election in just eight months, and the congressional district as currently shaped will likely vanish next year thanks to a court-ordered redrawing of the state's district maps.

Trump's State, CIA picks face confirmation fights in Senate

By LISA MASCARO, AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate confirmation isn't expected to go as smoothly for President Donald Trump's new selections for secretary of state and CIA director as they did last year.

Senate Democrats — and some top Republicans — are slow-walking the process amid fresh questions over the Trump administration's stance toward Russia and the CIA's dark history of torture.

Trump's firing of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson touched off a confirmation battle that will play out ahead of midterm elections, which determine party control of Congress.

Trump's pick to replace Tillerson, CIA Director Mike Pompeo, is expected to be asked about his loyalty

to Trump and his approach toward Russia.

And Trump's choice to replace Pompeo at the CIA, Gina Haspel, is likely to be asked about her role in the CIA's interrogation program.

Students to walk out nationwide protesting gun violence

By COLLIN BINKLEY, Associated Press

From Maine to Hawaii, students planned to walk out of school Wednesday to protest gun violence in the biggest demonstration yet of the student activism that has emerged in response to last month's massacre of 17 people at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

In nearly 3,000 protests nationwide, students from the elementary to college level are taking up the call in a variety of ways. Some planned roadside rallies to honor shooting victims and protest violence. Others were to hold demonstrations in school gyms or on football fields. In Massachusetts and Georgia and Ohio, students said they'll head to the statehouse to lobby for new gun regulations.

The coordinated walkouts were loosely organized by Empower, the youth wing of the Women's March, which brought thousands to Washington, D.C., last year. The group urged students to leave class at 10 a.m. local time for 17 minutes — one minute for each victim in the Florida shooting -- and suggested demands for lawmakers, including an assault weapons ban and mandatory background checks for all gun sales.

"Our elected officials must do more than tweet thoughts and prayers in response to this violence," the group said on its website.

But each community was urged to shape its own protests, and while parents and teachers in many districts worked together to organize age-appropriate activities, school administrators had mixed reactions. Some have applauded students for taking a stand, while others threatened discipline.

Districts in Sayreville, New Jersey, and Maryland's Harford County drew criticism this week when they said students could face punishment for leaving class. In Pensacola, Florida, Superintendent Malcolm Thomas ordered students to hold an in-school assembly instead, telling them they could discuss voting and mental health issues, but not guns, and saying that political banners would not be allowed.

"You can't make political statements, it can't be a pro-gun or anti-gun assembly," Thomas told the Pensacola News-Journal.

Free speech advocates geared up for battles.

The American Civil Liberties Union issued advice for students, saying schools can't legally punish them more harshly because of the political nature of their message. In Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Texas, some lawyers said they will provide free legal help to students who are punished. The ACLU of Georgia's guidance letters to districts said "The United States Supreme Court has long held that students do not 'shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.'"

This nationwide action is one of several protests planned for coming weeks. The March for Our Lives rally for school safety is expected to draw hundreds of thousands to the nation's capital on March 24, its organizers said. And another round of school walkouts is planned for April 20, the 19th anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado.

After the walkout Wednesday, some students in Massachusetts say they plan to rally outside the Springfield headquarters of Smith & Wesson, where students and religious leaders are expected to call on the gun maker to help reduce gun violence.

At Case Elementary School in Akron, Ohio, a group of fifth-graders organized a walkout with the help of teachers after seeing parallels in a video they watched about youth marches for civil rights in 1963. Case instructors said 150 or more students will line a sidewalk along a nearby road, carrying posters with the names of Parkland victims.

The walkouts have drawn support from companies including media conglomerate Viacom, which said it will pause programming on MTV, BET and all its other networks for 17 minutes during the walkouts, and allow students to temporarily take over MTV's social media accounts.

In suburban Atlanta, one of Georgia's largest school systems announced that students who participate

might face unspecified consequences.

But some vowed to walk out anyway, understanding that accepting punishments is part of what can make civil disobedience powerful.

"Change never happens without backlash," said Kara Litwin, a senior at Pope High School in the Cobb County School District.

The possibility of being suspended "is overwhelming, and I understand that it's scary for a lot of students," said Lian Kleinman, a junior at Pope High. "For me personally this is something I believe in, this is something I will go to the ends of the Earth for."

Other schools sought a middle ground, offering "teach-ins" or group discussions on gun violence and working to keep things safe. Officials at Boston Public Schools said they arranged a day of observance Wednesday with a variety of activities "to provide healthy and safe opportunities for students to express their views, feelings and concerns." Students who don't want to participate could bring a note from a parent to opt out.

Associated Press writers Jeff Martin in Atlanta and Kantele Franko in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report. Follow Binkley on Twitter at @cbinkley

Stephen Hawking: 'His laboratory was the universe'

By **SETH BORENSTEIN, AP Science Writer**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Everyone knew of Stephen Hawking's cosmic brilliance, but few could comprehend it. Not even top-notch astronomers.

Hawking, who died at his home in Cambridge, England, on Wednesday at age 76, became the public face of science genius. He appeared on "Star Trek: The Next Generation," voiced himself in "The Simpsons" cartoon series and wrote the best seller "A Brief History of Time." He sold 9 million copies of that book, though many readers didn't finish it. It's been called "the least-read best-seller ever."

In some ways, Hawking was the inheritor of Albert Einstein's mantle of the genius-as-celebrity.

"His contribution is to engage the public in a way that maybe hasn't happened since Einstein," said prominent astronomer Wendy Freedman, director of the Carnegie Observatories. "He's become an icon for a mind that is beyond ordinary mortals. ... People don't exactly understand what he's saying, but they know he's brilliant. There's perhaps a human element of his struggle that makes people stop and pay attention."

With Einstein, most people are familiar with $E=mc^2$, but they don't know what it means. With Hawking, his work was too complicated for most people, but they understood that what he was trying to figure out was basic, even primal.

"He was asking and trying to address the very biggest questions we were trying to ask: the birth of the universe, black holes, the direction of time," said University of Chicago cosmologist Michael Turner. "I think that caught people's attention."

And he did so in an impish way, showing humanity despite being confined to a wheelchair with ALS, the degenerative nerve disorder known in the U.S. as Lou Gehrig's disease. He flew in a zero-gravity plane. He made public bets with other scientists about the existence of black holes and radiation that emanates from them — losing both bets and buying a subscription to Penthouse for one scientist and a baseball encyclopedia for the other.

"The first thing that catches you is the debilitating disease and his wheelchair," Turner said. But then his mind and the "joy that he took in science" dominated. And while the public may not have understood what he said, they got his quest for big ideas, Turner said.

Andy Fabian, an astronomer at Hawking's University of Cambridge and president of the Royal Astronomical Society, said Hawking would start his layman's lectures on black holes with the joke: "I assume you all have read 'A Brief History of Time' and understood it." It always got a big laugh.

"You'd find the average astronomer such as myself doesn't even try to follow the more esoteric theories that (Hawking) pursued the last 20 years," Fabian said. "I've been to talks Hawking has given and cannot

follow them myself.”

Hawking, who was born 300 years to the day after Galileo died, was the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge. It was the same post that Isaac Newton held. Both physicists and astrophysicists claimed him as their own. And much of Hawking’s work was in the field of cosmology, a deep-thinking branch of astronomy that tries to explain the totality of the universe.

Hawking’s title “is not relevant here; what matters is what his brain did,” said Neil deGrasse Tyson, director of New York’s Hayden Planetarium. “We claim him as an astrophysicist because his laboratory was the universe.”

And Hawking’s black hole work in the mid-1970s made a crucial connection in physics. Until Hawking discovered radiation coming from black holes — named “Hawking radiation” after him — the two giant theories in physics, Einstein’s general relativity and quantum mechanics, often conflicted. Hawking was the first to show they connected, which Turner and others described as breakthrough at the time.

The concept that stuff, radiation, comes out of black holes may have upset science fiction authors, but it inspired young scientists such as Tyson, who described it as “spooky profound.”

The idea behind this was also novel because it said “black holes aren’t forever,” Turner said.

Hawking also pioneered a “no hair” theory of black holes that they were simple, with just spin, mass and charge and nothing else.

Both of those concepts are cornerstones of current black hole theory.

Hawking’s other work went beyond black holes into the more cosmic, the origins of the universe. Initially he theorized about the “singularity” of the baby universe in thick but elegant mathematical equations comparing early time to wave functions. Later, his own work contradicted some of that and he was instrumental to theories about inflationary cosmology, where the universe’s beginning is more of a half ball. That theory got its kick-start at a conference Hawking hosted in 1982 with a dinner party and croquet match, Turner said.

The high-concept theory-making didn’t quite match the personality behind it. Colleagues often mention his off-the-wall humor, his big grin, his stubbornness.

And even the public picked up on his cheeky attitude instantly, Turner and Freedman said.

“He added a human face to science,” Turner said. “It goes well beyond the wheelchair.”

The bigger story was how the public became fascinated with this small man, stuck in a wheelchair with a worsening disease, and an intellect that few could fathom. They related to the man, Stephen Hawking, and his story, Freedman said.

The insight he gave on the mysteries of the cosmos was just a bonus.

Attention turns to affiliations of mosque-bombing suspects

By MICHAEL TARM and AMY FORLITI, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Why three men allegedly chose to travel some 500 miles (805 kilometers) from a rural farming community of less than 100 residents in central Illinois to bomb a particular mosque in suburban Minneapolis isn’t clear.

But a complaint released as they were charged Tuesday in the 2017 attack on the Dar Al-Farooq Islamic Center includes a chilling comment one suspect allegedly made about their desired effect: They hoped to scare Muslims into leaving the U.S.

Attention by investigators, as well as members of the Bloomington, Minnesota, mosque, now turns to the suspects’ affiliations and backgrounds and what else these might reveal about their motivations.

A statement from the U.S. attorney’s office in Springfield, Illinois, says the men also are suspected in the attempted bombing of an abortion clinic. The Dar Al-Farooq Islamic Center in Bloomington, Minnesota, was bombed just before morning prayers on Aug. 5, causing a fire and extensive damage although no one was injured or killed. And there was an attempted bombing of the Champaign, Illinois, Women’s Health Practice on Nov. 7.

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One of the men, Michael B. Hari, 47, described in an April 2017 Chicago Tribune article how he drafted a \$10 billion plan to build a wall along the border with Mexico, citing President Donald Trump's call for such a wall. Hari drew up the proposal after launching a security company, Crisis Resolution Security Services, the newspaper said.

Hari also filed a federal lawsuit just last month in central Illinois, naming the U.S. secretaries of agriculture and health and human services as defendants. It accuses their departments of violating his constitutional rights by doing the food-safety certification work that his firm, Equicert, does.

"The People of the United States have rejected the Marxist doctrine that the government shall own the means of production," he wrote, according to the court document. He requested a court order barring federal officials from interfering with his business.

The other two men charged in the mosque bombing with Hari were identified as Joe Morris, 22, and Michael McWhorter, 29. All three are from Clarence, a rural community of less than 100 residents some 35 miles (56 kilometers) north of Champaign-Urbana. A fourth man was charged with a gun offense, but he was not identified as a suspect in the bombing or attempted bombing.

A complaint said a tip in December led authorities to investigate the three men, after a person sent the local sheriff photos of guns and bomb-making material inside Hari's parents' home, where Hari often stayed. In January, a second informant told authorities that the three men had carried out the mosque bombing and the failed clinic bombing, according to the complaint.

McWhorter allegedly told an FBI agent during an interview that the three rented a pickup in Champaign and drove more than 500 miles (805 kilometers) to Minnesota with a plan to bomb the mosque, according to a criminal complaint. He said they wanted to let Muslims know they are not welcome in the United States and "scare them out of the country," according to notes taken by the FBI.

It wasn't clear from the complaint why the men may have targeted a mosque so far from Illinois.

Morris told one informant that Hari had promised to pay him and McWhorter \$18,000 for participating in the mosque bombing, according to the complaint. An affidavit says the men broke a window to the imam's office and threw a pipe bomb containing black powder into the mosque. The pipe bomb exploded, causing a fire that was extinguished by sprinklers.

A witness outside the mosque heard the sound of breaking glass and saw a man get into a dark pickup truck. The truck then sped away, the affidavit said.

Minneapolis FBI Acting Special Agent in Charge Robert Bone said authorities no longer believe there is any further threat to the community in connection with this incident.

McWhorter also allegedly admitted that the three men tried to bomb the abortion clinic on Nov. 7, again renting a truck to carry out the attack. McWhorter described a PVC pipe bomb and said Morris broke a window and threw it in, where it failed to go off, according to the complaint.

The complaint also said nothing about a possible motivation for the clinic attack.

Jaylani Hussein, executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Muslim advocacy and civil liberties group Council on American-Islamic Relations, welcomed news of the arrests.

"This is definitely a relief that this case is finally to conclusion and those assailants-slash-suspects are apprehended and no longer a threat to our community," Hussein said in a telephone interview Tuesday.

The Islamic Center primarily serves Somalis in the Minneapolis area and houses a mosque and religious school for children. Minnesota is home to the largest Somali community outside of east Africa, with an estimated 57,000 people, according to the most recent census estimates.

Mohamed Omar, the center's executive director, said at the time that the mosque didn't receive any threats beforehand or claims of responsibility afterward. The FBI had offered a \$30,000 reward for information leading to a conviction in the bombing. It's unclear if the reward money will be paid.

Officials said at the time that witnesses saw someone throw something from a truck or van before the blast and saw a vehicle speed away afterward. Mosque leaders later released security video from inside the mosque that caught the moments before the explosion, and some smoke and flying debris. The video didn't show the blast itself.

Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton called the bombing an act of terrorism when he and other officials visited

the mosque the day after the explosion.

"That bombing that took place last summer was a tragedy for all Minnesotans," U.S. Attorney Gregory Brooker said, adding that it remains a top priority for law enforcement.

Forliti reported from Minneapolis. Associated Press writer Jeff Baenen contributed from Minneapolis.

Prosecuting more who lie to buy guns could strain resources

By **SADIE GURMAN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Trump administration plan to crack down on people who lie to buy guns faces a giant hurdle by relying on federal agents and prosecutors who are already overwhelmed with responsibilities.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions this week prosecutors to take on more of the so-called lie-and-try cases. Lying on federal background check forms to buy a gun is a felony, but prosecutors rarely take on such cases.

A spokesman for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives says it supports the administration's approach and will shift resources accordingly.

Sessions asks federal prosecutors to focus on people with a propensity for violence. But some officials say any additional emphasis on such cases would strain resources that could be put toward more pressing concerns.

Trump views designs for border wall while bashing California

By **JULIE WATSON and JILL COLVIN, Associated Press**

SAN DIEGO (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday eagerly inspected eight towering prototypes for his long-sought wall at the U.S.-Mexico border and accused California of putting "the entire nation at risk" by refusing to take tough action against illegal immigration.

Trump, making his first trip to California as president, said he preferred a fully concrete wall because it was the hardest to climb, but he noted that it needed to be see-through. He said the first thing he noticed on the drive to the border was the patched-up holes in part of the existing fence.

"We have a lousy wall over here now, but at least it stops 90, 95 percent," Trump said. "When we put up the real wall, we're going to stop 99 percent. Maybe more than that."

Trump's visit was greeted with peaceful protests by demonstrators both for and against his planned wall. The trip came amid an escalating battle between his administration and the liberal state, which has refused to help federal agents detain immigrants in the U.S. illegally.

The president renewed his criticism of Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown, saying Tuesday that he was presiding over sky-high tax rates and that the state's sanctuary policies "put the entire nation at risk."

"They're the best friend of the criminal," Trump said. "That's what exactly is happening. The criminals take refuge in these sanctuary cities and it's very dangerous for our police and enforcement folks."

The Justice Department last week sued to block a trio of California laws designed to protect people living in the U.S. illegally. Brown accused U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions of "going to war" with California to appease Trump.

After leaving the border, Trump basked in the cheers of U.S. Marines in Miramar, pointing to his work to build up the nation's military. He also suggested there may someday be a "space force" fighting alongside the nation's military branches.

Referencing his 2016 campaign showdown against Hillary Clinton — she received 4 million more votes than Trump in California — the president vowed that "very soon we're going to Mars" and the nation would not be seeking to explore the red planet had his opponent won.

Trump later attended a high-dollar fundraiser near Los Angeles, where he was staying overnight. Guests paid up to \$250,000 to attend the event at the Beverly Hills home of Ed Glazer, co-chairman of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The money raised will go to a joint fundraising committee that benefits Trump's 2020 re-election campaign and the Republican National Committee.

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A few hundred protesters for and against Trump faced off at a Beverly Hills park. A group of pro-immigration demonstrators chanted, "Say it now, say it clear, immigrants are welcome here."

Demonstrations were also held at the San Ysidro port of entry in San Diego, the nation's busiest border crossing, where protesters chanted, "No ban! No wall!" as honking cars and buses cheered them on. Protests were also held on the Mexican side, in Tijuana.

At San Ysidro, Jose Gonzalez, 21, stopped to snap a photo of the protesters holding signs, including one that read: "Wall off Putin!" in reference to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has a seemingly close relationship with Trump.

"I don't think it's really fair how he has the choice to separate us," said Gonzalez, a dual citizen who lives in Tijuana and crosses the border daily to work at a San Diego ramen restaurant.

Army veteran Mark Prieto, 48, shook his head as he walked by the protest.

"People are so narrow-minded," the Riverside firefighter said as the crowd chanted. "Finally we have someone who is putting America first."

His wife, Corina Prieto, a nurse who has extended family in Mexico, agreed. Both voted for Trump.

"I think he is doing a lot of good, like protecting our Border Patrol," she said.

Carla Provost, acting Border Patrol chief, said Trump "walked away with great understanding of the requirements we have on the border." She and other agents briefed the president on beefed-up security in California, Arizona and Texas over the years and cautioned that any changes need to preserve the ability to see what's happening on the other side. Provost said Congress has so far funded 40 miles of replacement wall — 14 miles in San Diego, 2 miles in Calexico, California, and 24 miles in El Paso, Texas.

Trump is seeking \$25 billion from Congress to extend the wall but Democratic leaders have balked. His insistence that Mexico pay has gotten no traction.

San Diego's Republican mayor criticized Trump's short visit, saying the president wouldn't get a full picture of the city. Kevin Faulconer said a popular cross-border airport terminal connecting San Diego and Tijuana shows that "building bridges has worked wonders."

Faulconer, writing in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, also said San Diego police work to protect everyone regardless of immigration status, an apparent dig at Trump's push to target illegal immigration.

Trump tweeted about California's immigration policies as he flew to the state aboard Air Force One.

"California's sanctuary policies are illegal and unconstitutional and put the safety and security of our entire nation at risk. Thousands of dangerous & violent criminal aliens are released as a result of sanctuary policies, set free to prey on innocent Americans. THIS MUST STOP!" he wrote.

This isn't Trump's first visit to the border. He traveled to Laredo — one of Texas' safest cities — weeks after declaring his candidacy in June 2015.

Trump told reporters then that he was putting himself "in great danger" by coming to the border. But, he said, "I have to do it. I love this country."

Associated Press writers Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, John Antczak and Christopher Weber in Los Angeles, Elliot Spagat in San Diego, Greg Bull in Tijuana, Mexico, and Darlene Superville, Ken Thomas and Nancy Benac in Washington contributed to this report.

Federal trial begins for widow of Orlando nightclub shooter

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The widow of the man who shot and killed 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando goes on trial in federal court Wednesday.

Noor Salman, 31, is charged with aiding and abetting her husband Omar Mateen in planning the 2016 attack on the Pulse nightclub. She's faces life in prison if convicted. She has pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutors have said Salman accompanied her husband when he cased locations for potential terrorist attacks, knew ahead of time that he was planning the attack and misled FBI agents about what she knew about her husband's plans.

The defense plans to argue that Salman was abused by her husband and was afraid of him.

It took several days to select a jury of 12 and six alternates.

U.S. District Judge Paul G. Byron said the trial could last five weeks or more. Jurors were asked whether they could be impartial in the wake of the Parkland, Florida, school shooting, and also asked if they believe the war on terror targets Muslims. They were also quizzed on whether they knew survivors or victims of a terrorist attack.

Mateen, who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, was killed by police in the hours after the shooting. At the time of the attack, it was the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history. It was surpassed last October by the fatal shooting of 58 people in Las Vegas.

Salman was arrested in California in 2017, where she was staying with family, and has been jailed since.

From various court documents, it is expected that the defense will say Salman was abused by her husband and feared for her life. Her attorneys also claim she wasn't given proper Miranda warnings, which tell suspects they have a right to remain silent and have an attorney present, before she made statements.

Facing death penalty, school shooting suspect in court

By **CURT ANDERSON, AP Legal Affairs Writer**

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Now formally facing the death penalty, the suspect in the Valentine's Day school shooting that killed 17 people in Florida is headed for a court appearance Wednesday on a 34-count indictment.

An arraignment hearing is set for 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, whose attorneys say he will plead guilty to all charges if the death penalty is not pursued in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School massacre. But Broward County State Attorney Michael Satz on Tuesday filed formal notice that prosecutors will indeed seek capital punishment.

Broward County Public Defender Howard Finkelstein, whose office is representing Cruz, has said there were so many warning signs that Cruz was mentally unstable and potentially violent, and that the death penalty might be going too far.

In an email Tuesday, Finkelstein said Cruz is "immediately ready" to plead guilty in return for 34 consecutive life sentences.

"We are not saying he is not guilty but we can't plead guilty while death is still on the table," Finkelstein said.

If Cruz does not enter a plea himself — known as standing mute before the court — a not guilty plea will likely be entered on his behalf by Broward Circuit Judge Elizabeth Scherer to keep the legal process moving along, his attorneys have said.

In every case, there is always the possibility of a plea deal. The only other penalty option for Cruz, if convicted, is life in prison with no possibility of parole.

Fred Guttenberg, whose daughter Jamie Guttenberg died in the shooting, was angry the state decided to pursue the death penalty, noting how tortuously long capital punishment cases last.

"This guy's is willing to plea and spend the rest of his life in the general population. Let him do that and let them do what they want with him," Guttenberg said. "Why not take the plea and let the guy rot in hell?"

Follow Curt Anderson on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/Miamicurt>

Associated Press writers Gary Fineout in Tallahassee, Jason Dearen in Gainesville and Tamara Lush in St. Petersburg contributed to this story.

Storm blasts winter-weary Northeast; thousands lose power

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The third powerful nor'easter in two weeks slammed the Northeast on Tuesday, bringing blizzard conditions and 2 feet of snow to some communities and knocking out power to tens of thousands of homes and businesses.

High winds and blowing snow led meteorologists to categorize the storm as a blizzard in parts of New England, including Boston. By afternoon, power outages climbed to more than 250,000 just in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

"We're not out of winter yet, that's for sure," Paul Knight, of Portland, said as snow accumulated on his eyebrows during a stroll. "The groundhog was right. Six more weeks of winter, and probably then some."

Boston's usually-packed subway trains were nearly empty as many workers stayed home and schools closed. Amtrak suspended all service Tuesday between Boston to New York City. The railroad later announced that most service between the two cities would resume on Wednesday.

The storm was expected to last through most of Tuesday, disrupting road and air travel. The flight-tracking site FlightAware reported more than 1,500 canceled flights on Tuesday. At Boston's Logan International Airport, the terminals were mostly empty with airport workers and the cleaning crew outnumbering passengers.

Nearly 2 feet (0.61 meters) of snow was reported in parts of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Maine by Tuesday evening. In New Hampshire, a little over 2 feet, 25 inches (63.5 centimeters), was reported near Derry.

Not everyone complained. Andrew Gesler, who was walking in Portland with his son in a stroller and his dog alongside, said he was happy to see another big storm.

"I think it may be one of the last ones so I'm out here appreciating it," Gesler said. "I love the white stuff, always had ever since I was a kid."

Janice James' Osterville house on Cape Cod was in the dark again after losing power for three days in the last storm. James and her four children spent Tuesday eating baked goods she made before the storm and hoping the lights and heat come back soon.

"We are freezing," the 39-year-old said.

Joe Rotella ducked into a train station as he tried to find his way to a hotel that's hosting a convention where he's speaking. Organizers were scrambling to establish video links to speakers whose planes were delayed or canceled, said Rotella, chief medical officer with the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine.

"As a visitor to Boston, I've been looking forward to this for months, and this is kind of an adventure for me," the Louisville, Kentucky, man said. "I didn't have to go through the last two nor'easters so this still feels like fun."

Miami residents Ashley Pozo, 21, and Ray Milo, 25, who were visiting friends in Boston, were stuck at the airport after their Tuesday flight was canceled. Rather than risk getting stranded in the city, they plan to stay another night in the airport, sleeping on chairs, watching Netflix and munching on supplies they picked up from a CVS drug store.

In Rhode Island, the snow didn't stop residents from getting to church. In East Greenwich, the Rev. Bernard Healey said he celebrated noon Mass with "two hearty souls" who came despite the nor'easter.

"If I lost power, we'd (still) celebrate Mass," Healey said. "We would just use more candles."

Eastern Long Island felt the brunt of the storm in New York. Newsday reported that the storm knocked out power to more than 6,000 homes and businesses on Long Island, and forecasters said the island's East End could get up to a foot of snow.

Slick roads were blamed for at least one death in North Carolina, which got snow Monday.

Associated Press writers Mark Pratt, Michael Casey, and Sarah Betancourt in Boston; Michelle Smith in Providence, Rhode Island; Jennifer McDermott in Warwick, Rhode Island; and David Sharp and Bob Bukaty in Portland, Maine, contributed to this report.

Trump considers ousting his VA secretary in Cabinet shuffle

By HOPE YEN and ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is considering ousting embattled Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, who has faced an insurgency within his department and fresh allegations that he used a member of his security detail to run personal errands.

Trump has floated the notion of moving Energy Secretary Rick Perry to the VA to right the ship, believing Shulkin has become a distraction, according to two sources familiar with White House discussions. The sources were not authorized to discuss internal deliberations.

Shulkin has faced several investigations over his travel and leadership of the department, but until now has received praise from the president for his work to turn it around. The news comes after Trump fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson Tuesday.

Trump raised the idea with Perry on Monday but did not offer the job to him, according to one White House official. Trump has been angry with Shulkin, the official said, but is known to float staffing changes without always following through.

Shulkin did not respond to requests for comment via phone and text message. He has been holding on to his job by a thread since a bruising internal report found ethics violations in connection with his trip to Europe with his wife last summer. A spokeswoman for Perry also had no comment.

The VA inspector general also is looking into a complaint by a member of Shulkin's 24-7 security detail that he was asked to accompany the secretary to a Home Depot and carry furniture items into his home, according to two people familiar with the allegation who requested anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

Within the agency, a political adviser installed by Trump has openly mused to other VA staff about ousting the former Obama administration official. And a top communications aide has taken extended leave following a secret, failed attempt to turn lawmakers against him.

"The honeymoon is ending with a crash that hurts veterans most of all," said Paul Rieckhoff, founder and CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, who has been a close observer of VA for more than a decade. "VA always has bad news, but Shulkin's ethical and leadership failures are still significant — despite any internal attacks."

Senior administration officials describe a growing frustration that Shulkin repeatedly ignores their advice, only to beg for their help when he runs into ethical trouble. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity in order to describe sensitive internal discussions, say Shulkin has been given a final warning to end the swirl of distractions. The administration is currently seeking to push Trump's agenda of aggressively expanding the Veterans Choice program, which major veterans groups worry could be an unwanted step toward privatizing VA health care.

The issue came to the fore at a White House meeting last week, when chief of staff John Kelly told Shulkin to stop talking to the news media without clearing it first with the White House and to stay focused on fixing veterans care.

Shulkin was escorted from that meeting to the Oval Office, where Trump questioned him about his efforts to push the Choice expansion, which lawmakers are now seeking to include in a massive spending bill that must be approved by next week to avert a government shutdown.

With Shulkin present, the president telephoned conservative Pete Hegseth, a "Fox & Friends" contributor who was vetted in late 2016 for VA secretary, to get his views on how to proceed with the expansion. The scene was first reported by Axios. Hegseth, a former president of the conservative group Concerned Veterans for America, declined to comment for this article.

Dan Caldwell, executive director of CVA, lauded the White House focus on Choice amid the ongoing controversies involving Shulkin. "Despite the internal drama going on in the VA, which has been a distraction, Congress has continued to work to a solution that everyone can rally around," he said.

Shulkin is blaming the internal drama on a half-dozen or so political appointees whom he had considered firing, only to be blocked by Kelly.

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"I regret anything that has distracted us from what we should be focusing on, which is serving veterans," Shulkin told the AP shortly before release of an inspector general report that faulted the VA for "failed leadership" and an unwillingness or inability of leaders to take responsibility for accounting problems at a major VA hospital that put patients at risk.

It wasn't always this way.

Early in the administration, Shulkin was often seen at Trump's side, waving to crowds at campaign-style events in Pennsylvania or addressing reporters in a doctor's lab coat as he tutored Trump on telehealth. Trump called him the "100-to-nothing man" — a reference to his unanimous Senate confirmation vote — and publicly teased that he probably would never be fired because he had successfully shepherded legislation to improve accountability at the VA and speed disability appeals.

By December, relations at the VA between Shulkin and several political appointees began to fray over philosophical differences.

In a Dec. 4 internal email obtained by the AP, Jake Leinenkugel, a senior aide installed as part of a Cabinet-wide program to monitor secretaries' loyalty, said Shulkin was becoming increasingly distrustful and regarded Camilo Sandoval, a senior adviser in VA's health arm, as a White House "spy."

The email to Sandoval alluded to White House efforts to gain more control, including ousting Shulkin's chief of staff, and said the secretary had been "put on notice to exit" once the administration gets the Choice legislation through Congress.

There were other signs.

At a Jan. 17 hearing, Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., openly blamed the deadlock over Choice to Shulkin's ever-shifting positions. "I am of the opinion that our inability to reach an agreement is in significant part related to your ability to speak out of both sides of your mouth, double-talk," Moran said. A grim Shulkin denied the accusation, but the White House was later forced to clarify its position on the bill due to lawmaker confusion.

Last month, the inspector general released a blistering report finding ethical violations in Shulkin's trip last July to Denmark and England that mixed business with pleasure. The IG found that Shulkin's chief of staff Vivieca Wright Simpson had doctored emails to justify his wife accompanying him at taxpayer expense. Wright Simpson retired after the report was issued.

Seizing on the report, John Ulyot, a top communications aide, and VA spokesman Curt Cashour told the Republican staff director of the House Veterans Affairs Committee that Shulkin would be out by that weekend and asked if Republicans would push for his removal.

The staff director, John Towers, told Ulyot "no," and made clear that committee Chairman Phil Roe had expressed support for Shulkin, according to a House aide familiar with the phone conversation. That aide also requested anonymity in order to discuss a sensitive internal matter. In a statement, Cashour and Ulyot deny that account, saying the call was intended instead to warn the committee that some of Shulkin's denials of wrongdoing were unfounded.

Asked this week about Ulyot's current leave of absence, Cashour released a statement saying, "there are no personnel changes to announce at the Department of Veterans Affairs."

For now, Shulkin appears to be hanging on. At a Cabinet meeting last Thursday, Shulkin took a different seat reserved for him — next to the president.

Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire, Matthew Daly and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Follow Yen on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/hopeyen1> and Miller at <http://twitter.com/@ZekeJMiller>

House Democrats cite 'evidence' of Trump-Russia collusion

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee are sharply disagreeing with Republicans on the panel who say they don't see any evidence of collusion or coordination between President Donald Trump's 2016 campaign and Russia.

California Rep. Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the panel, said Tuesday that he believes there is "significant evidence" of collusion between Trump's campaign and Russia, though he couldn't say if there was criminal wrongdoing.

Republicans on the committee announced Monday that they'd completed a draft report and they saw no evidence of collusion. Schiff, who saw the GOP report for the first time on Tuesday, said Democrats on the committee would try to continue the investigation where possible and would write their own report to lay out conclusions from the intelligence panel's yearlong investigation into Russian meddling.

The GOP report "misleadingly characterizes events, and paints a portrait and tells a story that could not have been better written if it was written in the White House itself," Schiff said.

Trump enthusiastically praised the draft Republican report, telling reporters Tuesday morning that the White House is "very, very happy" with the GOP conclusions.

"It was a powerful decision that left no doubt and I want to thank the House intelligence committee," Trump said.

Democrats have said for some time that they believed Republicans weren't conducting a serious investigation. Schiff on Tuesday released a 22-page report detailing threads that Democrats still believe the committee should pursue and witnesses they still want to hear from. Those include White House officials, campaign officials and people in the intelligence community.

As examples of evidence of coordination, Schiff cited multiple contacts between Trump's campaign and Russia, including a meeting in Trump Tower in June 2016 and information passed on to an Australian diplomat by a former Trump campaign aide, George Papadopolous, that the Russians had dirt on Hillary Clinton.

Schiff said Democrats would try to release all committee interview transcripts in their report. He also signaled that he would reopen or begin certain lines of inquiry if Democrats retake the majority of the House this November.

Texas Rep. Mike Conaway, the Republican leading the Russia probe, previewed some of the GOP report's findings on Monday, but said the public will not see the full document until Democrats have reviewed it and the intelligence community has decided what information can be released, a process that could take weeks.

"We found no evidence of collusion," Conaway said, suggesting that those who believe there was collusion are reading too many spy novels. "We found perhaps some bad judgment, inappropriate meetings, inappropriate judgment in taking meetings. But only Tom Clancy or Vince Flynn or someone else like that could take this series of inadvertent contacts with each other, or meetings or whatever, and weave that into sort of a fiction page-turner, spy thriller."

In addition to the statement on coordination with Russians, Republicans said the draft challenges an assessment by U.S. intelligence agencies that the Russian government, at the direction of President Vladimir Putin, waged a covert influence campaign to interfere in the election with the goal of hurting Clinton's candidacy and helping Trump's campaign.

House Intelligence Committee officials said they spent hundreds of hours reviewing raw source material used by the intelligence services in the assessment and that it did not meet the appropriate standards to make the claim about helping Trump. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the intelligence material.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence issued a statement soon after the GOP announcement, saying it stood by the intelligence community's findings.

Conaway appeared to walk that conclusion back a bit on Tuesday, saying it was clear that the Russians intended to hurt Clinton and make her a less effective president, if she won.

"Whether or not they were trying to hurt Hillary, help Trump, whatever it is — it's kind of the glass half

full, glass half empty," Conaway said.

Conaway said there will be a second report just dealing with the intelligence assessment and its credibility.

According to Conaway, the GOP report will agree with the intelligence assessment on most other details, including that Russians did meddle in the election. It will detail Russian cyberattacks on U.S. institutions during the election and the use of social media to sow discord. It will also show a pattern of Russian attacks on European allies — information that could be redacted in the final report. It will blame officials in former President Barack Obama's administration for a "lackluster" response and look at leaks from the intelligence community to the media.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, which is also investigating the Russian intervention, is expected to have a more bipartisan report out in the coming weeks dealing with election security. The Senate panel is expected to issue findings on the more controversial issue of coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia at a later date.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, also investigating the meddling, is expected to release transcripts soon of closed-door interviews with several people who attended the 2016 meeting between the Trump campaign and Russians. It's unclear if the Judiciary panel will produce a final report.

The congressional investigations are completely separate from special counsel Robert Mueller's criminal probe into Trump campaign ties to Russia and possible obstruction of justice, which is likely to take much longer. So far, Mueller has charged nearly 20 people as part of his investigation, including three Trump associates who have pleaded guilty.

House Democrats signaled they were pinning their hopes on the Senate, and on Mueller.

Texas Rep. Joaquin Castro, a Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, said they will continue to try to probe the meddling, but "we also hope the Senate investigation will go further, will get out more to the American people, and then of course special counsel Mueller will do his job."

Associated Press writers Chad Day and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Ropes, phone lights used in rescue after deadly bus plunge

By JAY REEVES and DAN ANDERSON, Associated Press

LOXLEY, Ala. (AP) — Lulled asleep by the humming of their Texas-bound charter bus following a trip to Disney World, members of a high school band were jarred awake before dawn Tuesday when the rig ran off a highway and plunged into a deep ravine.

One person died, driver Harry Caligone, and about three dozen others were hurt, three seriously, authorities and the bus company said. Interstate 10 didn't reopen in both directions for about 10 hours after the accident occurred between Mobile, Alabama, and Pensacola, Florida.

The cause of the crash wasn't immediately known, but survivors from Channelview High School in metro Houston described being asleep one moment and tumbling through the air the next.

Student DeWayne Benson, 15, told KTRK-TV by telephone he awoke to hear the band director repeatedly say "Harry" before the bus hit some bumps followed by one "huge bump."

"Some students were stuck under seats, some were on top of other students and there's a lot of panic to get people out," said Benson, who was taken to a hospital but wasn't injured.

Students used cellphones as lights to get out and grabbed blankets to help people outside, he said. Temperatures were in the 40s at the time of the wreck, which happened around 5:30 a.m.

First responders used ropes to rappel down the more than 50-foot (15-meter) ravine in the middle of I-10 and then had to cut some of the victims from the wreckage, said Baldwin County Sheriff Huey Hoss Mack.

The Channelview Independent School District said 40 students and six adults from the school were on board. Medical officials said at least 37 people, most of them teenagers, were treated at hospitals or other facilities in Pensacola and southwest Alabama for injuries that ranged from minor to very serious.

The sheriff said it wasn't immediately clear what caused the bus to enter the grassy median, which abruptly ends at a steep embankment where the interstate passes over Cowpen Creek. First Class Tours

Inc., the bus operator, identified Caligone as a longtime driver with the company.

Sister-in-law Angela Caligone, 58, of Houston, said Harry Caligone had been a bus driver for 20-plus years, the last 15 with the company, and had "just passed his physical with flying colors." She recalled him as "fun-loving, caring, dedicated to his job, dedicated to his kids."

Channelview High's graduates include University of Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts, who tweeted: "Wow, praying for everyone involved! #PrayforChannelview."

Josh Torres said his 17-year-old sister, Bianca Torres, was sitting at the rear of the bus when the impact of the wreck tossed her forward several rows. She had pain in her legs and bruising but was otherwise unscathed and taken to a hospital for evaluation, he said.

"All that she remembers is that she felt a bump, then a crash and then the bus flipping onto its side," Torres said.

Torres said his brother, also a member of the Channelview band, was on a second band bus that wasn't involved in the accident. That bus stopped briefly and continued on to Channelview, a Houston suburb of about 38,000.

Only hours before the crash, the band's Facebook page had been updated to show a large group posing outside Disney World, where the band performed at a music festival Saturday.

Norman Haynes of Victoria, Texas, said his daughter, 18-year-old trumpet player Makena Campa, was headed home on the bus with her mother. He spoke with both of them after the crash and was on his way to the hospital.

"My daughter was really groggy because they had her on some very heavy pain medication," he said. "They sounded kind of shook up. I think I'd be shook up as well."

The bus charter company pledged to help local authorities investigating the crash in a statement that offered prayers for injured and their families. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration gives First Class Tours a satisfactory rating, meaning records show no evidence of substantial non-compliance with safety requirements.

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration records show that in the last two years, the carrier has been involved in four crashes prior to Tuesday's crash, one involving a fatality. A police report showed a bus in May 2017 failed to yield the right of way in Houston as it turned left and fatally struck a pedestrian in a crosswalk.

Texas Peace Officer's Crash Reports also offer details of three crashes involving the company's buses without deaths or injuries. In January, a bus driver was given a warning citation in Houston for turning too wide after the bus and an SUV collided. In August 2017 in Sugar Land, near Houston, a bus was hit from behind in traffic. In March 2016, a man driving an SUV was cited for an unsafe lane change in front of a bus after the two vehicles collided in Houston.

Reeves reported from Birmingham, Ala., and Anderson from Loxley. Associated Press contributors include Bill Kaczor in Pensacola, Florida; David Warren in Dallas; Michael Graczyk in Channelview, Texas; Rebecca Santana in New Orleans; and Jamie Stengle in Dallas.

Families of 2 Austin package bomb victims knew each other

By WILL WEISSERT and PAUL J. WEBER, Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Families of two people killed by package bombs left on their doorsteps in Austin knew each other and were connected through local activism in the black community, a civic leader said Tuesday. But it was not clear how they might be tied to a third household where a package bomb also exploded.

Investigators have said the three blasts that killed two people and wounded two others could have been hate crimes since all the victims were black or Hispanic. But they also said they have not ruled out any possible motive.

Draylen Mason, 17, was killed and his mother wounded when a package bomb was opened Monday in

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their kitchen. The teen's grandfather is Norman Mason, a prominent dentist in east Austin. He was friends with Freddie Dixon, stepfather of 39-year-old Anthony House, who died in a similar attack in another part of the city on March 2, said Nelson Linder, president of the Austin chapter of the NAACP.

"I don't believe in coincidences," Linder said, explaining that he was concerned by the fact that the families were acquainted.

Still unknown is what connection — if any — the two families had to a third household where another package bomb exploded Monday, wounding a 75-year-old Hispanic woman who remains hospitalized in critical condition but has not yet been identified.

Austin Police Chief Brian Manley said he was aware of the connection but did not know if would affect the case.

"Our detectives are currently looking at that to evaluate that lead and to see if it is in fact relevant to what we are investigating," Manley said.

Business records indicate that Dixon was a leader of Austin's African American Cultural Heritage District, or "Six Square," which the city defines as 6 square miles of east Austin that was originally created as the Negro District by the Austin City Council in 1928. He also was a longtime pastor at Wesley United Methodist Church, one of the city's oldest historically black churches.

Dixon was quoted by the Austin American-Statesman in 2015 lamenting how Austin's population growth and prosperity were effectively creating economic segregation by raising the cost of living.

"Austin is quickly becoming a city of the privileged and the non-privileged," Dixon told the newspaper. "Is that the kind of Austin we want?"

Linder said Austin's minority community is on edge following the bombings.

"Given the fact these people are people of color, that definitely gets people's attention," he said. "They feel vulnerable, and they should based on the nature of the incidents."

The FBI and other federal officials continue to assist in the investigation. Manley said, "We're not saying that we believe terrorism or hate is in play, but we absolutely have to consider that because we don't want to limit what we are investigating, what we are considering and how we are approaching this case."

Tina Sherrow, a retired agent for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, said the materials to build such bombs are commonly available at hardware stores or online, and that police have been mum on details because the perpetrators may be watching media coverage.

"I don't look at it as terrorism, but it's terrorism of a community for sure," Sherrow said.

The package explosives were not delivered by the U.S. Postal Service or any private carrier but left overnight on doorsteps. Still, Manley urged Austin residents to call 911 if they receive any unwanted packages that look suspicious. Authorities responded to 250-plus calls about parcels without finding any that were explosives.

Austin police are offering a \$50,000 reward for information leading to an arrest, Manley said. That's in addition to the \$50,000 that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has already offered.

Manley said he could not divulge too many details about the packages, saying those responsible could vary their future tactics. But he said the packages were "not at all identifiable" as a standard shipping box or standard shipping labels would be.

Investigators collecting evidence continued to come and go, and yellow police tape still marked off the sites of Monday's two blasts, which occurred about 5 miles apart.

At the site of the March 2 bombing, there were no police, but the door to the red-brick house where the package exploded was still boarded up.

There's nothing obvious linking the three neighborhoods, other than all were east of Interstate 35, which divides the city. The east side has historically been more heavily minority and less wealthy than Austin's west side, although that has changed as gentrification has raised home prices and rents everywhere.

The blasts occurred during the South By Southwest music festival, which attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to Austin each March. But they happened far from the main events and concert venues.

Associated Press writers John Mone and Jim Vertuno in Austin and Randy Herschaft, in New York contributed to this report.

This story has been updated to correct Mason's first name to Norman, instead of Dixon, and to correct the spelling of Freddie Dixon's first name.

Trump's CIA pick is career spymaster, oversaw secret prison

By DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's pick to be the next director of the CIA is a career spymaster who oversaw torture at a secret prison during one of the darkest chapters in the agency's history. If confirmed, 61-year-old Gina Haspel would become the first female head of the CIA.

She's described by colleagues as a seasoned veteran with 30-plus years of intelligence experience who would lead the agency with integrity. But it's the few years she spent supervising a secret black site that will be closely scrutinized at her confirmation hearing.

Trump announced on Tuesday that he had chosen Haspel to succeed Mike Pompeo, who is replacing ousted Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. She joined the CIA in 1985 and has been deputy director of the agency since February 2017.

Between 2003 and 2005, Haspel oversaw a secret CIA prison in Thailand where terror suspects Abu Zubaydah and Abd al Rahim al-Nashiri were waterboarded, current and former U.S. intelligence officials said. Waterboarding is a process that simulates drowning and is widely considered to be a form of torture. Haspel also helped carry out an order to destroy waterboarding videos, which prompted a lengthy Justice Department investigation that ended without charges.

Trump has said that he would reintroduce waterboarding and "a lot worse," but there's no indication that his decision to pick Haspel signals a desire to restart the harsh interrogation and detention program. He would face steep legal and legislative hurdles if he tried.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said Haspel must explain the nature and extent of her involvement in the CIA's interrogation program.

"Current U.S. law is clear in banning enhanced interrogation techniques," said McCain, who was beaten as a prisoner during the Vietnam War. "Any nominee for director of the CIA must pledge without reservation to uphold this prohibition."

Former CIA Director John Brennan declined to say what Haspel's exact role was in the interrogation program, but he told NBC that she has a "lot of integrity" and has tried to carry out her agency duties "when asked to do difficult things in challenging times."

Brennan predicted she would be confirmed. "Gina is a very competent professional who I think deserves the chance to take the seat," he said.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., the chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, which will vote whether to confirm Haspel, said she has the "right skill set, experience and judgment" to lead the CIA.

Human rights advocates said they opposed Haspel's promotion to the helm of the CIA.

"No one who had a hand in torturing individuals deserves to ever hold public office again, let alone lead an agency," Human Rights First's Raha Wala said Tuesday. "To allow someone who had a direct hand in this illegal, immoral and counterproductive program is to willingly forget our nation's dark history with torture."

After Haspel was named deputy CIA director, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights asked German prosecutors to issue a warrant for her arrest over her role in the interrogations. Federal prosecutors never issued the warrant because the case lacked a connection to Germany. But the rights group's allegations against Haspel remain part of a preliminary investigation that German authorities could revive if they receive evidence that any of the parties have links to Germany.

Last year, Haspel's name came up during a civil lawsuit in Spokane, Washington, filed by three men who said they suffered waterboarding, beatings and sleep deprivation in the CIA interrogation program developed by former Spokane psychologists James E. Mitchell and Bruce Jessen.

Lawyers for the psychologists wanted to interview Haspel and another CIA official involved in the program, but government lawyers told the federal judge in the case that the officials and documents were protected under the state secrets privilege and making them public would threaten national security.

Haspel has been chief of station at CIA outposts abroad. In Washington, she has held several senior leadership positions, including deputy director of the National Clandestine Service.

In her current post, she worked with Pompeo to manage intelligence collection, analysis, covert action, counterintelligence and cooperation with the CIA's foreign counterparts.

In a brief statement, the former undercover officer said she was "humbled" by Trump's confidence in her to lead the agency.

Associated Press writer Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.

Zinke defends plan to raise park fees amid flap over travel

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke bristled Tuesday under questioning by Democrats about his travel spending as the Trump administration seeks deep cuts to conservation programs and fee increases at national parks.

Zinke testified before a Senate committee about the agency's proposed \$11.7 billion budget for 2019.

He has proposed doubling entry fees during peak seasons at some of the nation's most popular national parks to help make up for an \$11 billion backlog in needed maintenance. Meanwhile, an Interior advisory committee has proposed cutting royalty fees paid by energy companies to drill for oil and natural gas in federal waters.

The former Navy SEAL flashed with anger when the Energy and Natural Resources Committee's ranking Democrat pressed him on whether he could justify increasing access fees for working Americans when he has been spending taxpayer money on chartered airplane flights. Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington asked Zinke if it was a mistake for him to spend \$12,375 on a late-night trip in June from Las Vegas to his home state of Montana on a private jet.

"Well, first, insults and innuendos are misleading. I never took a private jet anywhere," Zinke said, adding that all three flights he had taken on private planes as secretary were on aircraft driven by propellers, not jet engines.

Zinke also referenced a report last week by The Associated Press that the Interior Department is spending nearly \$139,000 to upgrade three sets of double doors in his office at the agency's headquarters.

"I resent the fact of your insults, I resent the fact they're misleading, I resent the fact of the doors," Zinke said to Cantwell, the tone of his voice growing sharp. "And I'll go through line by line. ... To allege that it's a private jet is inappropriate, ma'am."

Zinke is one of several members of President Donald Trump's Cabinet who have been under intense scrutiny for spending on travel and other expenses that critics deemed questionable. Records show he also spent more than \$53,000 on three helicopter trips last summer, including one that allowed him to return to Washington in time to take a horseback ride with Vice President Mike Pence.

Zinke has previously derided the flap over his pricey flights as "a little BS" and pointed to flights taken by former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell during the Obama administration.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., told Zinke he has fallen far short of his self-professed role model, Theodore Roosevelt, a renowned conservationist who protected about 230 million acres of public lands. By contrast, Zinke "pushed the largest reduction of ... treasured public lands in American history," proposed opening most of America's coasts to offshore oil drilling and "played a shell game" with wildfire budgeting during the most expensive wildfire season in U.S. history, Wyden said.

Wyden, who has served in Congress for nearly four decades, called his vote to confirm Zinke "one of the biggest regrets of my time in public service."

Interior's inspector general is investigating Zinke's travel and is expected to issue a report within a few

weeks.

It is not the first time Zinke has faced questions over his travel spending. A 1999 report by the Navy faulted Zinke for improper travel expenses submitted for two flights to Montana while he was an officer, including one for which he reimbursed the Navy for \$211.

Zinke told The Associated Press in 2014 that the travel disputes occurred because his commanding officer disagreed with his belief that Montana should be used for SEAL training.

At Tuesday's hearing, Zinke also defended proposed increases to national park entrance fees and downplayed the possibility of oil and gas exploration off the Pacific coast, where officials in California, Oregon and Washington are adamantly opposed.

The coasts of Oregon and Washington and most of California have "no known resources of any weight," Zinke said.

Likewise, Maine has little recoverable oil and gas off its coast, Zinke said.

Zinke's proposal to open 90 percent of the nation's offshore reserves to development has sparked widespread opposition along the East and West coasts.

Zinke's plan to charge \$70 per vehicle at some of the busiest national parks — including Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Yosemite and Zion — also has drawn fierce opposition. Currently, the Park Service charges entry fees of \$25 or \$30 per vehicle.

"When you give discounted or free passes to elderly, fourth graders, veterans, disabled, and you do it by the carload, there's not a whole lot of people who actually pay at our front door," Zinke said. "So, we're looking at ways to make sure we have more revenue in the front door of our parks themselves."

The Park Service increased the cost of a lifetime pass for seniors last year from \$10 to \$80. An annual pass costs non-seniors \$80, an amount Zinke called "the greatest bargain in America."

"I just took my kids to the theater, and after paying the ticket to the theater and having popcorn, it's more than \$80," said Zinke, who according to his financial disclosure statements has personal assets worth between \$1.8 million and \$2.8 million.

Follow AP environmental writer Michael Biesecker at <http://twitter.com/mbieseck> and Matthew Daly at <http://twitter.com/MatthewDalyWDC>

Dog dies after airline worker has it placed in overhead bin

By DAVID KOENIG, AP Airlines Writer

A dog died on a United Airlines plane after a flight attendant ordered its owner to put the animal in the plane's overhead bin.

United said Tuesday that it took full responsibility for the incident on the Monday night flight from Houston to New York.

In a statement, United called it "a tragic accident that should never have occurred, as pets should never be placed in the overhead bin."

The dog was in a small pet carrier designed to fit under an airline seat.

Passengers reported that they heard barking during the flight and didn't know that the dog had died until the plane landed at LaGuardia Airport.

Passenger Maggie Gremminger posted a photo on Twitter of the dog's owner and children after the flight. "I want to help this woman and her daughter. They lost their dog because of an @united flight attendant. My heart is broken," she wrote.

United spokesman Charles Hobart said the flight attendant told the dog's owner to put the pet carrier in the overhead bin because the bag was partly obstructing the aisle. It is unclear why the carrier was not placed under a seat, he said.

Hobart said United is investigating the incident and talking to the flight attendant, whom he declined to identify. He said the airline refunded the tickets purchased for the dog owner and her two children and the fee that they paid to bring a pet on board — typically \$200.

The cause of the dog's death was not immediately known. The spokesman said Chicago-based United offered to pay for a necropsy.

Last year, 18 animals died while being transported on United — there were six cases on all other U.S. carriers combined, according to the Department of Transportation.

United has suffered a string of incidents that generated bad publicity in the last two years, including the violent removal of a passenger from a United Express plane to make room for a crew member, and the death of a giant rabbit — its Iowa owners sued the airline, which they said cremated the animal to destroy evidence about the cause of death.

David Koenig can be reached at <http://twitter.com/airlinewriter>

Adrian Peterson, Jordy Nelson cut, Brees stays with Saints

By BARRY WILNER, AP Pro Football Writer

Adrian Peterson's short stint in Arizona is over. Jordy Nelson long and productive stay in Green Bay has ended, too.

Meanwhile, Drew Brees is staying put in the Big Easy, Case Keenum is headed to the Rocky Mountains, and Kirk Cousins will make his first visit as a free agent to Minnesota. The Vikings long have been considered a natural landing spot for one of the most valuable quarterbacks available.

One day before the league's new year begins, veteran running back Peterson was released by the Cardinals on Tuesday, and receiver Nelson — Aaron Rodgers' favorite target — was let go by the Packers.

Seven-time All-Pro running back Peterson began last season with New Orleans but, after barely playing there, was dealt to the Cardinals. Peterson rushed for 134 yards in a win over Tampa Bay and 159 in a win over San Francisco. In six games, he gained 448 yards on 129 carries for Arizona before being sidelined with a neck injury.

Peterson, who turns 33 next week, ranks 12th in the NFL in career rushing with 12,276 yards.

Nelson had 550 receptions and 69 touchdown catches in 10 seasons in Green Bay. But his production declined last season with Rodgers sidelined much of the year by a collarbone injury. He missed the 2015 season with a major knee injury, and then was the 2016 Comeback Player of the Year.

"We cannot thank Jordy enough for all that he has given the Green Bay Packers and our community for the past 10 years," general manager Brian Gutekunst said. "He has been an exemplary professional and teammate and greatly contributed to our success."

Brees has agreed to a two-year, \$50 million extension with New Orleans, with \$27 million guaranteed the first year, two people familiar with the contract told The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity Tuesday because the agreement has not been announced.

Brees is 39 and wants to finish his career in New Orleans, where he has played since 2006, won a Super Bowl and led what has been one of the most productive offenses in the NFL since he and coach Sean Payton arrived.

"I'll be here as long as they'll have me," Brees said after last season ended.

In 2017, Brees completed an NFL-record 72 percent of his passes for 4,334 yards and 23 touchdowns against eight interceptions. He ranked fourth in the NFL in yards passing and the Saints ranked second in the NFL in total offense.

Keenum, a backup when the season began, guided Minnesota to the NFC North title and then into the conference championship game. He'll cash in with the Broncos.

The 30-year-old Keenum is considered the second-best QB available in free agency after Cousins. He went 11-3 with 3,547 yards passing, 22 touchdowns and seven interceptions. His last-second throw to Stefon Diggs stunned the Saints 29-24 in the playoffs.

Denver chose to bypass incumbents Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch and go for Keenum, who can't sign until Wednesday.

Six years ago, GM John Elway landed Peyton Manning, the biggest free-agent prize in NFL history, following

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his release by the Colts and a series of neck fusion surgeries. Manning guided the Broncos to two Super Bowls and won the 2015 NFL championship. Now, Elway hopes another free agent will replicate Manning.

Cousins will visit with the Vikings on Wednesday, agent Mike McCartney said. ESPN reported that Cousins will sign with the Vikings, but McCartney said no decision has been made yet by his client.

The Jets and Cardinals also made sense as fits for the 29-year-old who played consecutive seasons for Washington on franchise tags. New York, however, re-signed last year's starter, veteran Josh McCown, and Arizona made a deal with Minnesota's Sam Bradford.

In other moves:

— Super Bowl champion Philadelphia lost two tight ends, cutting veteran Brent Celek, then saw Trey Burton agree to a four-year, \$32 million contract with Chicago. Five-time Pro Bowl defensive tackle Haloti Ngata and linebacker Corey Nelson have agreed to one-year contracts with the Eagles.

The Bears also will be signing Jacksonville receiver Allen Robinson on Wednesday and kicker Cody Parkey.

— Tennessee agreed with New England cornerback and one-time Super Bowl hero Malcolm Butler on a five-year deal worth more than \$60 million. Agent Derek Simpson told The Associated Press that Butler will sign the deal including \$30 million guaranteed once free agency begins.

Butler spent the past four seasons with the New England Patriots and has eight career interceptions. He was benched for the Super Bowl in February.

— Buffalo bolstered its interior defensive line, agreeing to a deal with Carolina tackle Star Lotulelei and re-signing Kyle Williams, who contemplated retirement.

— Kansas City will add wide receiver Sammy Watkins and middle linebacker Anthony Hitchens, filling two glaring needs.

The 24-year-old Watkins intends to sign a \$48 million, three-year contract with \$30 million in guarantees, while the 25-year-old Hitchens agreed to a five-year deal, two people familiar with their decisions told the AP. The Chiefs have needed to pair a playmaking wideout with Tyreek Hill. Watkins, the 2014 fourth overall pick of the Bills, spent last season with the Rams, where he caught 39 passes for 593 yards and eight touchdowns.

— Receiver Albert Wilson is closing in on a \$24 million, three-year deal with the Dolphins. Miami traded top receiver Jarvis Landry to Cleveland and has a need. They also are near an agreement with Patriots receiver Danny Amendola.

The Dolphins also cut linebacker Lawrence Timmons after just one season with them. Timmons went AWOL on the eve of last year's opener, was briefly suspended and played poorly when he returned. He signed a \$12 million, two-year contract in 2017 after 10 seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers. His departure clears \$5.5 million in cap space for Miami.

— Jacksonville linebacker Paul Posluszny, 33, the second-leading tackler in franchise history, retired after 11 seasons. Posluszny started his career in Buffalo before playing the final seven years in Jacksonville. He led the Jaguars in tackles five times. His 973 stops trail only Daryl Smith (1,089) in Jacksonville's record book.

The Jaguars are poised to sign All-Pro guard Andrew Norwell to a five-year, \$66.5 million contract. Norwell's deal will include \$30 million guaranteed.

Receiver Marqise Lee has agreed to re-sign for a four-year deal worth \$38 million.

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

Trump axes Tillerson, names CIA's Pompeo chief US Diplomat

By JOSH LEDERMAN and ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump unceremoniously dumped Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Tuesday — via Twitter — and picked CIA Director Mike Pompeo to shift from America's spy chief to its top diplomat. The abrupt announcement ended the turbulent tenure of the man who reportedly called the president a "moron" but wanted to stay, and deepened the disarray in the Trump administration.

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The plans to oust Tillerson had been drawn up months ago, but the timing caught even senior White House officials unawares. The firing was just the latest in an exodus of administration officials, including those in Trump's inner circle, with the president already setting records for staff turnover and several other Cabinet secretaries facing ethics investigations.

However, Trump emphatically rejected talk of chaos in his year-old administration as he nears a pivotal moment on the international stage with his planned meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. He declared Tuesday, "I'm really at a point where we're getting very close to having the Cabinet and other things that I want."

He said he was nominating the CIA's deputy director, Gina Haspel, to take over for Pompeo at the intelligence agency. If confirmed, Haspel would be the CIA's first female director.

As for Tillerson, the former Exxon Mobil CEO whom Trump picked as his administration's top Cabinet official, the president said simply, "we disagreed on things."

No doubt that was true, one prime example being the agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear efforts. Trump's change puts Pompeo, an ardent foe of the Iran nuclear deal, in charge of U.S. diplomacy as the president decides whether to withdraw the U.S. from the agreement. Tillerson has pushed Trump to remain and had been pursuing a delicate strategy with European allies and others to try to improve or augment the Obama-era deal to Trump's liking.

"We were not really thinking the same," said Trump.

Public policy aside, in the view of current and former White House officials, Tillerson's "moron" comment to senior administration officials last summer — and the subsequent revelation in the press — permanently eroded trust between the two men and it was only a matter of time before Tillerson would be pushed out.

Tillerson himself, his voice occasionally quavering, gave brief farewell remarks at the State Department, thanking department staff and diplomats around the world — but not mentioning Trump except to say that he'd spoken by phone to the president Tuesday while Trump was on Air Force One, hours after the tweeted firing.

The gulf that separated the two men was illustrated one last time by conflicting stories on the circumstances of the firing.

Trump kept the timing to an unusually close circle that included Chief of Staff John Kelly and Vice President Mike Pence, officials said. Pompeo was brought into the White House Friday after returning from an overseas trip and was offered the job formally by phone Saturday.

Kelly was given the task of phoning Tillerson, who was in Africa, but the nature of their conversation was up for dispute. White House officials said Kelly told Tillerson that Trump wanted a change and he should step down. Tillerson, the White House said, asked that Trump wait until he returned to the U.S., and he shortened his trip to Africa — where much of his mission revolved around softening the impact of Trump's recent reported criticisms.

However, Undersecretary of State Steve Goldstein and other State Department officials said that Tillerson hadn't learned he was being dismissed until he saw Trump's early-Tuesday tweet, and hadn't discussed it directly with the president. Goldstein said Tillerson was "unaware of the reason" he was fired and "had had every intention of staying," feeling he was making progress on national security.

That was the end for Goldstein. Hours later, he was fired, too.

Even after Tuesday's announcement, the White House and Tillerson aides were still struggling to determine when and how Tillerson would exit. After hours of bureaucratic tug-of-war, Tillerson, in his final somber turn before the cameras, said he would be delegating his responsibilities to deputy secretary John Sullivan at the end of the workday and would resign effective at the end of the month.

"I will now return to private life, private citizen, a proud American, proud of the opportunity I've had to serve my country," he said.

From the start, the former Exxon chief had been an unlikely pick for top diplomat, with no formal experience but a lifetime's worth of personal relationships with heads of state and powerful global figures, including Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump had boasted to allies that he 'looked the part' of the

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nation's chief diplomat, but differences in style and ideology quickly came to a head.

While he espoused unconventional views on the organization of the State Department — and made sweeping reform of the bureaucracy his top concern — Tillerson proved to be cut from the same cloth of the national security conservatives who have dominated the GOP for decades. He had been recommended for the post by Condoleezza Rice and James Baker.

Tillerson's insult to Trump's intelligence came after heated discussions about Afghanistan policy, in which Trump had pushed to end the U.S. presence altogether and flirted with outsourcing the military counterterrorism campaign to private contractors. Hours before his firing was made public, Tillerson vocally condemned Russia for allegedly poisoning an ex-Russian spy and his daughter in the United Kingdom, even as the White House declined to assert blame.

The pair also never developed a particularly warm relationship.

Trump in recent days has told confidants that he feels emboldened, confident in his decisions to order new international trade on tariffs and to meet with Kim Jong Un and far less willing to put up with disloyalty around him, according to a person who has spoken to the president in recent days but was not authorized to publicly discuss private conversations.

Tillerson's departure adds to a period of intense turnover within Trump's administration that has alarmed those both in and out of the White House. Top economic adviser Gary Cohn announced his resignation last week, not long after communications director Hope Hicks and staff secretary Rob Porter both departed near the start of Trump's second year in office.

Trump has also faced a cloud of ethics allegations surrounding other members of his Cabinet, including Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin — the latter of whom is said to be on thin ice with the president.

Pompeo forged a close relationship with Trump as a regular presence in his presidential daily briefing. Current and former White House officials said Pompeo has proven more adept at negotiating the shifting power structures inside the administration and in reading and responding to the wishes of the president. Trump is also said to respect Pompeo's military background and West Point pedigree.

Pompeo, a former Republican congressman from Kansas, has already been confirmed by the Senate for his current role at the CIA, making it extremely likely that he will be confirmed for the State Department role.

Associated Press writers Matthew Lee, Jill Colvin, Jonathan Lemire, Lisa Moscaro and Ken Thomas contributed to this report.

Pompeo, a hawkish pick, could give State Department new life

By MATTHEW LEE, AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mike Pompeo's hawkish instincts may seem at odds with traditional diplomatic norms. But after 14 demoralizing months of budget cuts and staffing reductions for the State Department, his conservative political bent and closeness to President Donald Trump could breathe new vigor into an agency all too often sidelined on many of the nation's most pressing national security matters.

Pompeo, the outgoing CIA chief, will bring a new, blunt-speaking style to the job of secretary of state, strikingly different from Rex Tillerson's understated approach. Pompeo's arrival in Foggy Bottom also promises far more aggressive stances on Iran and North Korea, and he'll at least start with Trump's full confidence — something Tillerson never enjoyed.

"One of the most important jobs for the secretary of state is to make clear to the world the president's policies and priorities," Sen. Lindsey Graham, an establishment Republican and initial Tillerson backer, said Tuesday, after Trump announced via tweet that Pompeo would replace Tillerson. "No one has a stronger relationship with President Trump than Mike Pompeo. This relationship will empower him throughout his tenure as secretary of state."

Tillerson had been widely criticized for an aloof management style, which had alienated droves of career diplomats and driven many of the agency's senior brass into early retirements. But his foreign policy was

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far less controversial, as he hewed to much of the agency's pragmatic approach, from climate change to free trade agreements, and to preserving the Iran nuclear deal, even when that put him at odds with his president and his most conservative supporters.

In Pompeo, the diplomats and civil servants who make up the 70,000-strong department may now encounter the opposite: a fiercely partisan veteran of some of the most bitter battles in Congress while he was a House Republican, and someone willing to jeopardize his reputation to defend Trump, as evidenced when he called up journalists to try to discredit a New York Times story outlining Trump campaign connections to Russia.

But Pompeo also helped engineer a detente between Trump and the U.S. intelligence agencies after the incoming president likened them to Nazis. In doing so, Pompeo never lost his access to Trump, or experienced a mass revolt to his leadership like Tillerson faced at the State Department.

"Tillerson's ouster is a sign of continued turbulence in U.S. foreign policy," said Jessica Chen Weiss, a Cornell University professor. "A potential silver lining is that the State Department will fare better under someone who has Trump's ear."

Immediately, there were calls for Pompeo to abandon Tillerson's plans to shrink the department and empower marginalized diplomats.

While some opponents lambasted the former Kansas lawmaker for his posturing on a House panel that investigated Hillary Clinton and the 2012 Benghazi attack, some Democrats held out hope he could lead a State Department turnaround.

Rep. Adam Schiff, a harsh critic of Trump and Tillerson, said Pompeo would be wise to let the State Department's talent "do their jobs." Referencing the departure of many senior diplomats, Schiff, the House Intelligence Committee's top Democrat, said Pompeo will "need to recruit and fill the many offices that have been left vacant."

While Tillerson sought to reduce staffing at embassies and consulates abroad, and seemed to hoard many of the agency's minutest decisions among a small group of advisers, Pompeo sent more spies to the field and tried to improve the CIA's agility and speed by cutting bureaucratic red tape and moving decision-making down the chain of command.

Pompeo said his goal as America's spymaster was to create a culture that says: "If you are in a process and you're not adding value, get out of the way."

Pompeo and Tillerson navigated different paths with Trump, too.

While Tillerson survived a tumultuous year amid rampant speculation that the White House wanted him out, he was unable to use a much-touted alliance with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to keep his job. Pompeo took a more direct approach, carefully cultivating Trump and even assuming the previously lower-level responsibility of delivering the daily presentation of intelligence to the president in the Oval Office.

Bigger questions loom about Pompeo's ability to counteract Trump's often unpredictable decision-making processes. For all of Tillerson's bureaucratic stumbles, some of the president's most bitter adversaries credited the ex-oilman with acting as an adult and serving with dignity even as Trump publicly humiliated him.

And, as Trump noted Tuesday, he and Pompeo have a "similar thought process" on the Iran deal, which Trump has threatened to abandon unless there are significant changes by May.

Tillerson "has been a poor advocate for the State Department, but he served as a Cabinet-level check on some of President Trump's worst impulses," said Thomas Countryman, one of the career diplomats who left in early 2017. Countryman, who was assistant secretary of state for international security and nonproliferation, said if Pompeo "has a disdain for diplomacy mirroring Trump's, it will be bad for the department and the country."

Tillerson's firing the latest messy breakup for Trump

By **KEN THOMAS, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The man who famously coined the reality TV mantra "You're fired!" has notched quite a record of awkward and messy breakups in his 14 months as president.

On Tuesday, President Donald Trump ousted Secretary of State Rex Tillerson via Twitter. It was hours later before the president picked up the phone to talk directly to his latest casualty.

Despite his signature catchphrase, Trump often lets others in the White House do his dirty work or pushes out subordinates by tweet or through public shaming.

Onetime chief of staff Reince Priebus learned he was being replaced by John Kelly last summer from Twitter. The president tweeted the news from Air Force One following a trip to New York — prompting the outgoing chief of staff to drive off in a black SUV, leaving the rest of the presidential motorcade behind in a driving rainstorm.

Perhaps Trump's most consequential firing came last May, when he dismissed FBI Director James Comey. Rather than informing Comey in person or by phone, Trump sent his longtime bodyguard-turned-director of Oval Office operations Keith Schiller to the Justice Department to deliver a letter notifying the FBI head he was done.

But Comey was in a Los Angeles meeting with FBI agents at the time and only learned of his dismissal from TV. Comey said last year in testimony before Congress that his ouster caught him by surprise and criticized Trump for saying the bureau was in disarray.

Onetime communications director Anthony Scaramucci, hired over Priebus' objections, only lasted 10 days in the White House last summer before being pushed out after giving an expletive-laced interview to *The New Yorker* in which he called Priebus a "paranoid schizophrenic."

Scaramucci's hiring prompted press secretary Sean Spicer to quit after a six-month run that included a string of public slights by Trump, including the president excluding the devout Roman Catholic from a meeting with the pope during a trip to the Vatican.

More recently, Trump left it to Kelly to force staff secretary Rob Porter to resign after he was accused of emotional and physical abuse by his two ex-wives. Porter has denied harming his former spouses.

Kelly helped push out a number of other top aides, including top strategist Steve Bannon, national security aide Sebastian Gorka and public liaison communications director Omarosa Manigault Newman. She had earlier appeared on Trump's reality TV show, "The Apprentice."

Back on TV after her White House gig, Manigault Newman recently warned on "Celebrity Big Brother" that the U.S. would "not be OK" under Trump, prompting White House spokesman Raj Shah to respond: "Omarosa was fired three times on 'The Apprentice.' And this was the fourth time we let her go."

On Twitter follow Ken Thomas at <https://twitter.com/KThomasDC>

Turkish forces surround Kurdish town in northern Syria

By **SARAH EL DEEB and SUZAN FRASER, Associated Press**

BEIRUT (AP) — Turkey said Tuesday its troops and allied Syrian fighters have encircled the Kurdish-held town of Afrin in northern Syria, putting hundreds of thousands of civilians under siege and marking a significant military advance in the seven-week operation.

Turkey launched its assault on the border enclave on Jan. 20 to drive out Syrian Kurdish forces that it views as "terrorists" linked to Kurdish rebels fighting inside Turkey. The Turkish military said the siege of Afrin, the main town in the enclave of the same name, began Monday after the military took control of "critical areas."

A passage out of Afrin remained partially open, and thousands of people have reportedly fled the town, heading toward nearby areas controlled by the Syrian government. Syria's Al-Ikhbariya TV showed cars, trucks and tractors loaded with civilians driving out of the town.

Panic was spreading in the town as the Turkish forces approached, and some civilians came under fire

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when they tried to leave, according to residents and Syrian Kurdish officials.

Azad Mohamed, a 32-year old resident, said his relatives were fired upon as they tried to escape Monday, forcing them to turn back. He said he can't decide whether to risk the journey out of Afrin with his two children or to remain in place.

"Most of the time, I swear, I am acting like a mad man. When I sit down for two minutes, I get up again and start pacing to ease the tension," he told The Associated Press in a series of text messages. "Every time I remember they (Turkish forces) are closer, I think of my wife and kids and parents. I am afraid and I feel like there is a volcano in my belly."

Col. Moataz Raslan, commander of one of the Turkey-allied opposition groups, said the Kurdish fighters in Afrin should surrender or leave the area. He said it was the Kurdish fighters who were preventing civilians from leaving and firing on those who do.

But Mohamed said most of the Kurdish fighters come from the area and would never give up their hometown. "Their families will never forgive them if they leave," he said.

A top Syrian Kurdish official, Fawza Yousef, described intense Turkish shelling of the town and said Turkish forces were expected to "invade" soon.

Elsewhere in Syria, dozens of civilians were evacuated from the besieged, rebel-held Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta, arriving on foot and in buses at an army checkpoint set up by the Syrian and Russian militaries.

The Syrian American Medical Society, which supports health facilities in eastern Ghouta, said 31 patients were evacuated along with their families, amounting to 170 civilians. It said another 1,034 people still inside the enclave need immediate medical evacuation.

The United Nations says it observed the evacuation of 147 civilians, including 10 critical cases, from Douma, the largest town in eastern Ghouta. U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters there are plans to send another humanitarian convoy to Douma "in the coming days."

Some 400,000 people are estimated to be trapped in eastern Ghouta, which has been under a crippling blockade and heavy bombardment for weeks. Syrian government forces have split the region into three separate sectors in recent days in rapid advances against rebels.

The largest rebel group in the area, the Army of Islam, reached a deal with Russian forces to evacuate the wounded, but nevertheless vowed to fight to the end.

"We will stay in our Ghouta to defend it until we achieve one of two good things," spokesman Hamza Bayraqdar said in a video statement, using an Islamic expression that means victory or martyrdom.

Opposition activists say more than 1,100 civilians have been killed since the latest offensive began in February. In Douma, residents and displaced families were sleeping in shops and in the streets as basements and underground shelters filled up.

The Britain-based Observatory for Human Rights and the opposition's Syrian Civil Defense reported airstrikes and shelling Tuesday morning on several towns that killed and wounded more than 20 people.

Hamzeh Hassan, a local physician, said he treated four people in the town of Arbeen with wounds from suspected incendiary bombs that left deep burns. One of the survivors was a woman who had to have her arms amputated. At least four people died in that attack, he added.

The Syrian American Medical Society said the incendiary bombs have been repeatedly used in Arbeen over the past week.

The Syrian government, meanwhile, said troops had seized control of Qadam after militants and civilians were evacuated from the district south of Damascus. The government-run Central Military Media said buses and vans carrying more than 1,000 people left for the northern province of Idlib as part of a surrender agreement, including more than 300 militants from the extremist Afnad al-Sham group and their families.

The Islamic State group controls two pockets of territory adjacent to Qadam. The Central Military Media said the army launched raids on IS-held areas in Yarmouk and Hajar al-Aswad.

___ Fraser reported from Ankara, Turkey. Associated Press writers Philip Issa and Bassem Mroue in Beirut, Maamoun Youssef in Cairo and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

Russia calls poisoning accusations by Britain 'nonsense'

By GREGORY KATZ and NATALIYA VASILYEVA, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Russia on Tuesday dismissed accusations of any involvement in the poisoning of an ex-spy and his daughter as “nonsense,” saying it will only cooperate with a British investigation if it receives samples of the nerve agent believed to have been used.

Police, meanwhile, said the investigation of who poisoned Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, will last many weeks and that they are not ready to identify any persons of interest in the inquiry. The father and daughter remain in critical condition in a Salisbury hospital.

British Prime Minister Theresa May said Russia’s involvement is “highly likely,” and she gave the country a deadline of midnight Tuesday to explain its actions in the case. She is reviewing a range of economic and diplomatic measures in retaliation for the assault with what she identified as the military-grade nerve agent Novichok.

U.S. and European officials were quick to offer words of support for Britain, which will need the backing of its allies if any new sanctions are to have any impact.

Her Downing Street office said she discussed the Salisbury incident with U.S. President Donald Trump, and that the U.S. was “with the U.K. all the way” in agreeing that Russia “must provide unambiguous answers as to how this nerve agent came to be used.”

They also agreed on the need for “consequences” for those who use “heinous weapons in flagrant violation of international norms,” the White House said.

Earlier, Trump had said: “It sounds to me that they believe it was Russia and I would certainly take that finding as fact.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters in Moscow that his country’s requests to see samples of the nerve agent have been turned down. He insisted that Russia is “not to blame” for the poisoning.

“We have already made a statement to say this is nonsense,” he said. “We have nothing to do with this.”

The Russian Embassy in London tweeted that it will not respond to the ultimatum without the samples.

Russian officials and media have responded with a variety of accusations against Britain in recent days, including suggestions that it was seeking to influence Sunday’s election, which President Vladimir Putin is expected to win easily.

James Nixey, head of the Russia program at the Chatham House think-tank, said May’s response must be more than symbolic.

“Will actions meet with responses which have real-world effects?” he said. “Or are we going to have more fudge?”

Conservative lawmaker Tom Tugendhat, who chairs the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, said financial sanctions would be keys to a strong response.

“Given that the regime is built on money — it’s effectively a flow of money from the Russian people to Putin and from Putin to his acolytes — money matters,” he said.

“We have enormous amounts of control of a lot of people’s assets through various means, and I think it’s important we exercise that,” Tugendhat said. “If you get the right people and you freeze their assets, it can make a lot of difference.”

The cases of other Russians who have died under mysterious circumstances also are being raised. British Home Secretary Amber Rudd said police and the domestic security service will look into 14 deaths in Britain that might be linked to Russia.

“In the weeks to come, I will want to satisfy myself that the allegations are nothing more than that,” Rudd said. “The police and MI5 agree and will assist in that endeavor.”

BuzzFeed News reported in 2017 that 14 deaths in Britain and the U.S. dating to 2006 may have been linked to Russia. Among them are prominent Putin critics, including oligarch Boris Berezovsky and whistleblower Alexander Perepilichny.

The chief of the world’s chemical weapons watchdog also said that those responsible “must be held accountable.”

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In a speech Tuesday to the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Director-General Ahmet Uzumcu said U.K. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson called him Monday evening to inform him of the results of investigations.

"It is extremely worrying that chemical agents are still being used to harm people. Those found responsible for this use must be held accountable for their actions," he said.

Johnson also spoke with his French and German counterparts and to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as Britain sought Tuesday to rally international support. A statement from his office said British officials would brief NATO's political decision-making arm, the North Atlantic Council, on Wednesday.

Stoltenberg and Johnson "agreed that Russian actions repeatedly threaten the security of NATO partners — from the Baltics, Balkans, Ukraine and Georgia — and NATO must stand as an alliance to call out Putin's behavior," the statement said.

Skripal, a former Russian military intelligence officer, was convicted of spying for Britain and then released in a spy swap. He had been living under his own name in Salisbury for eight years before the attack without attracting any public attention.

Police are appealing to the public to come forward if they saw Skripal and his daughter driving in his red BMW in the early afternoon of March 4 in the city located 90 miles (145 kilometers) southwest of London.

New counterterrorism chief Neil Basu, who referred to Skripal as a British subject and his daughter as a Russian national, also said Salisbury residents would see much police activity in the coming days and that they should not be alarmed.

Some 38 people have been seen by medics in connection with the case.

Vasilyeva reported from Moscow. Mike Corder in The Hague, Netherlands, and Jill Lawless and Danica Kirka in London contributed.

Francis marks 5 years as pope amid love, disenchantment

By NICOLE WINFIELD, Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis marked his fifth anniversary as pope Tuesday by receiving votes of confidence from his predecessor and current Vatican No. 2, even as surveys showed his reform-minded papacy was turning off some of the most faithful, church-going Catholics.

First out of the gate to give him thumbs-up was Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, whose historic resignation paved the way for Francis' election on March 13, 2013.

In a letter released on the eve of Francis' anniversary, Benedict publicly dismissed as "foolish prejudice" the opinions of critics who say Francis has no theological heft and represents a rupture from Benedict's papacy.

Benedict said a new Vatican-curated volume of books on Francis' theology "shows Pope Francis is a man of profound philosophical and theological training and helps to see the interior continuity between the two pontificates, with all the differences in style and temperament."

Francis frequently downplays the work of theologians, and his critics have flagged his cautious opening to allowing divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to receive Communion as a sign that dogma under the Church's first Jesuit pope is adrift.

Francis' supporters insist he is in complete harmony with church teaching and Benedict's doctrinaire papacy. They say Francis is merely emphasizing "discernment" to navigate complex pastoral situations.

But the debate is taking its toll. A poll published Tuesday in France's Le Figaro newspaper found a significant drop in the still-high support for Francis among church-going, practicing Catholics. The 86 percent who back him 12 percentage points lower than in 2015.

The poll, conducted by the BVA firm, paralleled the decline among practicing Catholics in the U.S. reported by the Pew Research Center.

The BVA survey said going forward, French Catholics wanted to see Francis better defend Europe's Christian roots amid an influx of refugees, to rethink priestly celibacy and to crack down on clerical sex abuse.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, acknowledged Francis had his critics. But he distinguished between "destructive, aggressive, really bad criticisms" that have to be accepted as a cross to bear and "constructive criticism" that can be helpful.

Francis has come under the most criticism for his handling of clerical sex abuse cases. He has intervened in canonical cases to reduce sentences for priestly offenders, has defended a Chilean bishop accused of ignoring abuse and has dismissed complaints about the bishop by Chilean victims as slander.

The pope also reneged on a plan to create a tribunal to judge negligent bishops, allowed his advisory commission on the issue to lapse and didn't reappoint several of its most outspoken leaders to new terms.

"He has had more difficulty in that issue than he has on being welcoming, being uplifting, being simple, being frugal," said the Rev. Michael Martin, a 77-year-old missionary priest in Manila. But he added that Francis "has brought extraordinary transformation" to the church at a challenging time.

Indeed, in the streets, the pope remains beloved.

"I think he's an extraordinary person," Juliana Galeano, a 46-year-old geographer said while picking up her son at a Catholic school in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Unlike many church leaders who "think it's the Middle Ages," Francis wants to move the church forward, she said.

Gerald Bareebe, a Ugandan academic who described himself as a progressive Catholic, said he wants Francis to push the envelope further on the thorny issue of priestly celibacy and married priests.

"In Uganda, not a year passes without media houses carrying stories of priests who are caught in marital affairs," Bareebe said. "And these cases have become common partly because priests are forced to take mandatory celibacy. The church should save its face and allow priests who want to marry and continue serving God to do so."

The issue is likely to feature in some of Francis' initiatives in the future. A church meeting is scheduled for 2019 on spreading the faith in the Amazon region of South America, where an acute priest shortage has led to calls for married priests.

___ AP writers Rodney Muhumuza in Kampala, Uganda, Jim Gomez in Manila and Sarah DiLorenzo in Sao Paulo contributed.

Palestinian prime minister escapes injury in Gaza bombing

By FARES AKRAM, Associated Press

JABALIYA, Gaza Strip (AP) — A roadside bomb on Tuesday struck the convoy of the Palestinian prime minister during a rare visit to the Gaza Strip, causing no serious injuries but throwing an already troubled reconciliation process between rival factions into deeper turmoil.

Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah had just arrived from his West Bank headquarters to attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new water-treatment plant when the bomb went off. Although there was no claim of responsibility, Palestinian officials accused Gaza militants of trying to assassinate Hamdallah. Gaza's ruling Hamas group denied involvement.

The blast took place at a time of deadlock in reconciliation efforts between Hamdallah's Fatah party and Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since ousting Fatah forces in 2007. It also cast a shadow over a special White House meeting where international donor nations were set to discuss the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Hamdallah, a soft-spoken former university dean appointed by President Mahmoud Abbas five years ago, went on to inaugurate the long-awaited sewage plant project. But he quickly returned to the West Bank, where he vowed to press ahead with reconciliation efforts.

"This will not deter from seeking to end the bitter split. We will still come to Gaza," he said.

He said the attack underscored the need for the Palestinians to unify under a single authority. Hamas has ceded some government functions and control of Gaza's borders, but it has refused calls to disarm and let Palestinian Authority security forces take over.

"How can a government overtake Gaza without maintaining security? We ask Hamas one more time to empower the government," he said. "Without security, there won't be a government or an authority."

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Hamas condemned the attack, calling it a crime and an attempt to "hurt efforts to achieve unity and reconciliation." It promised an "urgent" investigation.

Witnesses said the bomb was planted under an electric pole on Gaza's main north-south road and went off shortly after Hamdallah's 20-vehicle convoy had entered through the Israeli-controlled crossing.

"I could not see anything because smoke and dust filled the air. When the smoke cleared, the explosion was followed by heavy gunfire, apparently from police securing the convoy," said a witness, who declined to be identified because of security concerns. "When the dust cleared, I saw people running everywhere, and police were running around."

Two vehicles were disabled by the blast, while at least four others were damaged, with windows or sun-roofs blown out. One had streaks of blood on the door. Hamdallah said six bodyguards required medical attention.

In the West Bank, Abbas blamed Hamas for the blast. But his security chief, Majed Farraj, who was in the convoy and was another potential target of the blast, said it was "too early" to say who was responsible.

There is a long list of potential attackers. While Hamas officials strenuously denied involvement, there are elements within the group that do not want to cede power and oppose the reconciliation process. More radical militants, inspired by the Islamic State group, also operate in Gaza. Some even suggested that the Palestinian Authority had staged the incident to shore up Hamdallah's calls for Hamas to disarm.

The 2007 Hamas takeover left the Palestinians with two rival governments, Hamas in Gaza and the Western-backed Palestinian Authority governing autonomous enclaves in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Repeated attempts at reconciliation have failed or stalled.

In November, Hamas handed over control of Gaza's border crossings to the Palestinian Authority. It was the first tangible concession in years of Egyptian-brokered reconciliation talks. But negotiations have bogged down since then.

Hamdallah's visit came at a time of crisis in Gaza. The economy has been devastated by three wars between Hamas and Israel and a decade-long blockade by Israel and Egypt meant to weaken the militant group.

Amid warnings of a looming humanitarian catastrophe, the White House was hosting a gathering of international representatives Tuesday to discuss economic development projects and the dire situation. The Palestinian Authority, still angry over the U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, did not attend.

The U.S., Israel and other Western allies consider Hamas a terrorist group and want assurances that any development aid does not bolster Hamas or get diverted for military purposes.

In Washington, White House envoy Jason Greenblatt criticized Hamas for wreaking devastation on the territory through its rule and expressed regret that the Palestinian Authority was not attending.

"This attack, once again, demonstrates that Hamas is profoundly unfit to govern Gaza," he said in Washington. "But we cannot be deterred, and the Palestinian Authority should not be deterred."

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, called the attack a "deliberate attempt" to undermine reconciliation.

"For the European Union it is clear: those who work to exacerbate divisions through violence are working against the interest of the people of Gaza and of all Palestinians," she said.

The United Nations Mideast envoy also condemned the attack. Nickolay Mladenov said until the "legitimate" Palestinian Authority takes power in Gaza, Hamas is responsible for enabling the internationally backed government to work without fear of intimidation, harassment and violence.

The sewage plant was envisioned in 2007 after overburdened sewage reservoirs collapsed, causing a flood that drowned five villagers.

The World Bank, European Union and other European governments have provided nearly \$75 million in funding for the project. The Hamas takeover, the ensuing Israeli-Egyptian blockade, power shortages and conflicts delayed the opening for four years.

Besides the old reservoirs, the plant will receive wastewater from four towns and villages. After treatment, the water will be transferred for irrigation and the remainder will be safely dumped into the sea.

Affleck, Damon's production company to adopt inclusion rider

By LINDSEY BAHR, AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Prominent producers and celebrities like Matt Damon, Ben Affleck and Paul Feig are jumping on the inclusion rider bandwagon following Frances McDormand's best actress Oscar acceptance speech.

Fanshen Cox DiGiovanni said late Monday on Twitter that Damon and Affleck's production company Pearl Street Films would be adopting the inclusion rider in conjunction with USC's Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.

Early Tuesday, "Bridesmaids" director Paul Feig followed suit saying on Twitter that his company is also going forward with the inclusion rider for all film and television productions.

Feig thanked Stacy L. Smith, the director of USC Annenberg's Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative, for her "guidance and inspiration."

"We challenge other companies and studios to do the same," Feig wrote.

"Black Panther" actor Michael B. Jordan was one of the first to lend his public support to the concept after the Oscars for his company Outlier Society, which is developing a sci-fi series for Netflix and other projects.

McDormand brought new attention to contract addendums requiring studios to hire a diverse crew and cast for a project at the Oscars on March 4. The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative explained the concept in a December 2017 paper, crediting Smith as having crafted the rider with employment attorney Kalpana Kotagal.

Pearl Street Films has been working toward addressing the crisis of representation in the entertainment industry with Annenberg's guidance for nearly two years after Damon and his show "Project Greenlight" became embroiled a controversy over the show's choice to spotlight a film by a white, male director. During the production, he clashed with producer Effie Brown in a conversation that was perceived to be racially insensitive.

In response to an outcry for more diversity, Damon told The Associated Press in July 2016 that an idea they were exploring was putting clauses in contracts to promote more inclusive hiring — in what appears to be an early precursor to the inclusion rider. That was around the time when J.J. Abrams and Ryan Murphy began actively trying to diversify their production teams.

But when Pearl Street announced their adoption of the concept Monday, some on social media scoffed. Both Damon and Affleck have in the past five months faced public scrutiny for either comments, in Damon's case, or alleged past behavior, in Affleck's, in the #MeToo era and to some are emblematic of an outmoded entertainment industry. Others called it a step in the right direction.

And not all companies are jumping to embrace the practice of instituting inclusion riders. Netflix CEO Reed Hastings said last week that his company is, "Trying to do things creatively" and not just through "agreements," USA Today reported.

Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter: www.twitter.com/ladbahr

Hillary Clinton: US did not 'deserve' Trump presidency

MUMBAI, India (AP) — Hillary Clinton told an audience in India that the United States did not "deserve" Donald Trump's presidency and these are "perilous times."

The 2016 Democratic presidential candidate spoke over the weekend at India Today Conclave 2018, in Mumbai.

Clinton said the Republican president has "quite an affinity for dictators" and said Trump "really likes their authoritarian posturing and behavior." But she said she thinks it's "more than that" with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia.

Clinton was critical of Trump's reality campaign tactics and questioned whether she should have provided more entertainment to voters who responded to Trump's brash style.

She also believes former FBI director James Comey's Oct. 28, 2016, letter to Congress about her private

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email server cost her support from white women voters.

Clinton had difficulty navigating some stone steps at the Jahaz Mahal palace in Mandu. A viral video was shared widely showing her tripping twice and requiring the aid of two men before kicking off her shoes.

The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Clinton Foundation didn't return a call or email asking about the circumstances.

CBS says work needed on before Stormy Daniels interview airs

NEW YORK (AP) — The head of CBS News said Tuesday that a "60 Minutes" interview with adult film star Stormy Daniels is on its way but that more journalistic work needs to be done on the story.

News President David Rhodes' statement at a conference in Israel Tuesday was the first time CBS publicly confirmed it had interviewed Daniels, who has alleged an extramarital affair with Donald Trump before he became president. Trump has denied this. Michael Avenatti, lawyer for the actress, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, last week tweeted a picture of himself, Clifford and CBS interviewer Anderson Cooper.

No air date has been set for the interview.

Rhodes, in remarks reported by Variety, said he could not imagine what the basis would be for any legal action by Trump's team to prevent the interview from airing. BuzzFeed had reported that Trump's lawyers were considering seeking an injunction to stop it.

"I haven't seen such an injunction, and I can't imagine what the basis for that would be," Rhodes said. "The encounter between Anderson Cooper and (Clifford) was accompanied also by conversations with attorneys, documents were provided, and so we have to run all that down before it runs."

Trump's attorney, Michael Cohen, has not immediately returned messages for comment.

The actress has sought to invalidate a nondisclosure agreement under which she was paid \$130,000 not to give details of her encounters with Trump. Clifford said Monday that she has offered to repay the money as long as she can speak openly about the situation.

Clifford filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles last week that sought to invalidate the agreement so she could "set the record straight."

The lawsuit claimed the "hush agreement" that was signed days before the 2016 presidential election is legally invalid because it was only signed by Clifford and Cohen and not by Trump

Stocks sink as technology rally fades; Qualcomm drops

By MARLEY JAY, AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A seven-day surge in technology stocks ended Tuesday after President Donald Trump blocked Singapore-based chipmaker Broadcom's effort to buy Qualcomm. Trump said he opposed the \$117 billion deal because it could have been detrimental to national security.

The Dow Jones industrial average climbed as much as 197 points in early trading after investors were pleased with a Labor Department report that showed inflation remained in check last month. But the gains soon faded.

Technology stocks were at record highs after a recent rally. While Qualcomm had rejected all of Broadcom's offers, investors are now wondering if other deals might also be blocked or if companies will hesitate before making bids for overseas competitors.

"I don't think we've started to price in protectionism on a broader level," said Gina Martin Adams, chief equity strategist for Bloomberg Intelligence.

The S&P 500 index lost 17.71 points, or 0.6 percent, to 2,765.31. The Dow Jones industrial average slid 171.58 points, or 0.7 percent, to 25,007.03. The Nasdaq composite fell 77.31 points, or 1 percent, to 7,511.01, its first decline after seven straight gains. The Russell 2000 index of smaller-company stocks sank 9 points, or 0.6 percent, to 1,592.05.

Qualcomm is one of the biggest makers of processors that power smartphones and other mobile devices. The deal would have been the largest in the history of the technology industry and Broadcom's offer came as other countries are also getting ready to build faster "5G" wireless networks.

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Trump's decision followed a recommendation from the Committee for Foreign Investment in the U.S., which said Broadcom might cut back on research and development spending.

Qualcomm slid \$3.11, or 5 percent, to \$59.07. Broadcom rose more than 3 percent early on but finished with a loss of \$1.62 to \$261.22. Intel, a competitor, added 26 cents to \$51.78. The Wall Street Journal reported Friday that Intel wanted to stop the deal and might try to buy Broadcom to make that happen.

Trump also cited national security risks this month in announcing tariffs on imported aluminum and steel, and investors appeared to be wondering if at least one other deal will face new obstacles. In November Bermuda-based chipmaker Marvell Technology Group agreed to buy competitor Cavium for \$6 billion. Cavium lost \$4, or 4.4 percent, to \$86.95 while Marvell lost \$1.43, or 5.9 percent, to \$22.94.

The U.S. government has blocked deals by Chinese companies in the last few years under both Barack Obama and Trump, but Adams, of Bloomberg Intelligence, said investors are more focused on the issue now.

"We no longer have tax reform dangling in front of us," she said. "It's adding to an environment in which the market is a bit more nervous."

The government said prices paid by consumers rose 0.2 percent in February, matching estimates. Excluding food and energy costs, prices have risen 1.8 percent in the last year. Prices had jumped in January. Over the last month investors have worried about the prospect of faster inflation, but Tuesday's price report and the monthly jobs report on Friday suggest inflation isn't moving any more rapidly than it did in the recent past.

"If you put the two of them together it paints a very clear picture of an economy that's operating at a very high level, that's showing some inflation, but not overheating inflation," said Rick Rieder, BlackRock's chief investment officer of global fixed income.

Rieder said that in general, service costs are rising and the costs of goods are falling, although clothing prices have bounced back a bit recently.

With investors expecting slower gains in rates, bond yields headed lower. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note slipped to 2.85 percent from 2.87 percent. Faster inflation would likely result in the Fed raising interest rates more quickly. Investors feared that could significantly slow the economy and the market's gains.

Lower yields mean lower interest rates, and that weighed on bank stocks. Bank of America fell 48 cents, or 1.5 percent, to \$32.36.

Companies that are considered bond proxies, like utilities and real estate investment trusts, did better than the rest of the market. They often move in the opposite direction of bond yields because investors seeking income buy them for their big dividend payments.

Benchmark U.S. crude slumped 65 cents, or 1.1 percent, to \$60.71 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price international oils, lost 31 cents to \$64.64 per barrel in London.

Wholesale gasoline fell 1 cent to \$1.89 a gallon. Heating oil rose 1 cent to \$1.87 a gallon. Natural gas gained 1 cent to \$2.79 per 1,000 cubic feet.

Gold added \$6.30 to \$1,327.10 an ounce. Silver rose 9 cents to \$16.63 an ounce. Copper gained 1 cent to \$3.14 a pound.

The dollar rose to 106.61 yen from 106.35 yen. The euro rose to \$1.2397 from \$1.2336.

Germany's DAX shed 1.6 percent. Britain's FTSE 100 lost 1.1 percent while the CAC 40 in France slid 0.6 percent.

The Japanese Nikkei 225 index gained 0.7 percent and the Kospi of South Korea added 0.4 percent. In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng was unchanged.

AP Markets Writer Marley Jay can be reached at <http://twitter.com/MarleyJayAP> . His work can be found at <https://apnews.com/search/marley%20jay> .

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Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 14, the 73rd day of 2018. There are 292 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 14, 1923, President Warren G. Harding became the first chief executive to file an income tax return, paying a levy of \$17,990 on his \$75,000 salary.

On this date:

In 1794, Eli Whitney received a patent for his cotton gin, an invention that revolutionized America's cotton industry.

In 1885, the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera "The Mikado" premiered at the Savoy Theatre in London.

In 1900, Congress ratified the Gold Standard Act.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an executive order designed to prevent Japanese laborers from immigrating to the United States as part of a "gentlemen's agreement" with Japan.

In 1939, the republic of Czechoslovakia was dissolved, opening the way for Nazi occupation of Czech areas and the separation of Slovakia.

In 1951, during the Korean War, United Nations forces recaptured Seoul.

In 1964, a jury in Dallas found Jack Ruby guilty of murdering Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, and sentenced him to death. (Both the conviction and death sentence were overturned, but Ruby died before he could be retried.)

In 1967, the body of President John F. Kennedy was moved from a temporary grave to a permanent memorial site at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

In 1975, "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," a sendup of the legend of King Arthur, had its world premiere in Los Angeles. Academy Award-winning actress Susan Hayward, 57, died in Los Angeles.

In 1980, a LOT Polish Airlines jet crashed while attempting to land in Warsaw, killing all 87 people aboard, including 22 members of a U.S. amateur boxing team.

In 1990, the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies held a secret ballot that elected Mikhail S. Gorbachev to a new, powerful presidency.

In 1998, India's Congress party picked Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of assassinated prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, as its new president.

Ten years ago: Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama denounced inflammatory remarks from his pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, who had railed against the United States and accused its leaders of bringing on the Sept. 11 attacks by spreading terrorism. A tornado ripped into the Georgia Dome during the Southeastern Conference tournament, sending debris tumbling from the ceiling and prompting fans to flee. Protests led by Buddhist monks against Chinese rule in Tibet turned violent, leading to an extensive crackdown by China's military. Lindsey Vonn completed the first American sweep of the overall World Cup titles in 25 years, a day after Bode Miller won his second overall crown in Bormio, Italy.

Five years ago: During his first full day as pontiff, Pope Francis stopped by his Vatican hotel to pick up his luggage and pay the bill himself. Some 10,000 workers from across the European Union protested outside a summit of EU leaders in Brussels, demanding they end years of austerity and focus instead on curbing runaway unemployment with more spending. A nearly 19-hour standoff in Herkimer, New York, came to an end inside a cluttered, abandoned bar as police SWAT teams killed the suspect in four fatal shootings. The NHL's realignment plan was approved by the league's board of governors.

One year ago: A blustery late-season storm plastered the Northeast with sleet and snow, paralyzing much of the Washington-to-Boston corridor but falling well short of predicted snow totals in New York, Boston and Philadelphia. President Donald Trump earned \$153 million and paid \$36.5 million in income taxes in 2005, according to highly sought-after tax documents disclosed by a reporter. Declaring "enough is enough," Gen. Robert Neller, the Marine Corps commandant, told senators that he intended to fix the problem that led to current and former Corps members sharing nude photos of female Marines online.

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and making lewd or threatening comments about them. Mitch Seavey won his third Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, becoming the fastest and oldest champion at age 57. Seavey also set a time record of 8 days, 3 hours, 40 minutes and 13 seconds.

(Stations: "Derrick," one name only, is correct)

Today's Birthdays: Singer Phil Phillips (Song: "Sea of Love") is 92. Former astronaut Frank Borman is 90. Actor Michael Caine is 85. Composer-conductor Quincy Jones is 85. Actor Raymond J. Barry is 79. Movie director Wolfgang Petersen is 77. Country singer Michael Martin Murphey is 73. Rock musician Walt Parazaider (payr-ah-ZAY'-der)(Chicago) is 73. Actor Steve Kanaly is 72. Comedian Billy Crystal is 70. Former Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., is 70. Actor-writer-comedian-radio personality Rick Dees is 67. Country singer Jann Browne is 64. Actor Adrian Zmed is 64. Prince Albert II, the ruler of Monaco, is 60. Actress Laila Robins is 59. Actress Tamara Tunie (tuh-MAH'-ruh TOO'-nee) is 59. Actress Penny Johnson Jerald is 58. Producer-director-writer Kevin Williamson is 53. Actress Elise Neal is 52. Actor Gary Anthony Williams is 52. Actress Megan Follows is 50. Rock musician Michael Bland is 49. Country singer Kristian Bush is 48. Rock musician Derrick is 46. Actress Betsy Brandt is 45. Actress Grace Park is 44. Actor Daniel Gillies is 42. Actor Corey Stoll is 42. Actor Jake Fogelnest is 39. Actor Chris Klein is 39. Actor Ryan Cartwright (TV: "Kevin Can Wait") is 37. Actress Kate Maberly is 36. Singer-musician Taylor Hanson (Hanson) is 35. Actor Jamie Bell is 32. Rock musician Este Haim (HY'-uhm) (Haim) is 32. Actor Ansel Elgort is 24. Olympic gold medal gymnast Simone Biles is 21. Actor James Freedson-Jackson (Film: "The Strange Ones") is 16.

Thought for Today: "The avoidance of taxes is the only intellectual pursuit that still carries any reward."
— John Maynard Keynes, British economist (1883-1946).