

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 25, 2018 ~ Vol. 25 - No. 254 ~ 1 of 33

"TELL ME A FACT AND I'LL
LEARN. TELL ME A TRUTH
AND I'LL BELIEVE.
BUT TELL ME A STORY AND
IT WILL LIVE IN MY HEART
FOREVER"

-INDIAN PROVERB



Easter Egg Hunt Rescheduled

Due to the snow, the Easter Egg hunt that was scheduled for yesterday has been rescheduled for this coming Saturday at the city park.

- 1- Recycling trailers
- 1- Chicken Soup for the Soul
- 1- Dairy Queen Ad
- 1- Bates Township ROW Notice
- 2- Wolves Men Finish Season as NCAA National Finalist, Breaking School Records and Making History
- 3- Obit: Billy Vander Vorst
- 3- Sun Dial Manor Help Wanted
- 3- Help Wanted at Groton Care & Rehab
- 4- Rev. Snyder's Column
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- 6- Sen. Rounds' Weekly Column
- 7- Sen. Thune's Weekly Column
- 8- Rep. Noem's Weekly Column
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Eagle Day Today

Eagle Day 2018 will be held Sunday, March 25, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Come and meet the staff and visit the refuge. Get a tour of the visitor center with a biologist. Climb the fire tower to view the prairie landscape. See the local wildlife and catch the great migration. Auto tour route will be open weather permitting.

The refuge is located eight miles north of Columbia on Brown County 16.

Today's Riddle

When I take five and add six, I get eleven. When I take six and add seven, I get one. What am I?

Answer at end of AP News

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**

Oven Fresh Sandwiches Hot Desserts Snack Melts
11 E Hwy 12, Groton ~ 397-8627

New DQ BAKES! OVEN HOT
DQ Grill & Chill
Orange Julius

Bates Township ROW Notice

Bates Township Board of Supervisors reminds all landowners and tenants that the road right-of-way extends 33 feet from the center of the township road. This ditch is to be maintained and mowed. Any crops planted in the road right-of-way will be mowed and expenses charged to the landowner.

Landowner is responsible for spraying all noxious weeds.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors
Betty Geist
Township Clerk

Wolves Men Finish Season as NCAA National Finalist, Breaking School Records and Making History

Sioux Falls, S.D. – It came down to the final play of the game, as the No. 6 Northern State University men's basketball finished the 2017-18 season as the NCAA National Finalist, falling to Ferris State 71-69 in the national championship. The Wolves finish the season 36-4 overall, after playing in front of a record 3,538 fans at the Sanford Pentagon.

It was about as close as a game could get between the Wolves and the Bulldogs, as Ferris State led 39-37 at the half and both teams tallied 32 points in the second. The second half brought two ties, and left Wolves with opportunities to seal the deal. Northern had the ball on their end of the floor, twice as the clock ticked under 30 seconds, but just did not get the ball to roll in their favor.

Northern out-shot and out-rebounded Ferris in the game, shooting 49.1 percent from the floor and notching 33 boards. The Wolves combined for 11 assists, seven steals, and one block. Northern tallied 52 points in the paint, 14 points off the bench, 11 second chance points, nine points off turnovers, and seven fast break points.

Carter Evans led four Wolves in double figures with 20 points, hitting 10-of-14 from the floor. The senior added five rebounds and two assists in 21 minutes of action. Darin Peterka and Logan Doyle followed with 14 points, while also grabbing a team leading seven rebounds apiece. Peterka shot 50.0 percent from the floor and added two steals and a team high six assists, while Doyle led the team off the bench and recorded one block and one steal, knocking down 4-of-9 from the field.

Ian Smith was the final Wolf in double figures, with 12 points, playing 39 minutes. Smith added two rebounds and two assists, shooting 45.5 percent from the floor. DJ Pollard grabbed the final two points for the team, adding six rebounds, three assists, and two steals.

The Wolves wrap up a storied season where they tied the single season school record with 18 consecutive wins, broke the single season school record for wins with 36, won the NSIC overall and North Division Championships, as well as the NSIC Tournament and NCAA Central Region Championships. Peterka, Evans, and Smith all became members of the NSU 1,000 point club alongside Pollard who reached the feat a season ago. The men reached the NCAA Elite Eight for just the second time in school history (last in 1998), and tallied the first Elite Eight victory against East Stroudsburg.

Northern State seniors DJ Pollard, Darin Peterka, Carter Evans, and Logan Doyle played the final games of their NSU careers, bringing the program to new heights and setting numerous program milestones.

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The Life of Billy Vander Vorst



Services for Billy D. Vander Vorst, 85, of Groton and formerly of Claremont will be 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 28, 2018 at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton. The Rev. Bill Duncan will officiate. Burial will follow in Groton Union Cemetery. There will be a reception following at the Groton Community Center.

Visitation will be held at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel from 5-7 p.m., on Tuesday with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Billy passed away March 21, 2018 at Sun Dial Manor, Bristol, SD.

Billy was born May 25, 1932 at his home near Strasburg, ND, to Edward C. and Minnie (Vander Laan) Vander Vorst. He farmed with his father and then moved and worked as a farmhand on farms in North Dakota and South Dakota. He married Sylvia Corrine Droog on June 10, 1953 in Hull, ND. To this union seven children were born. After moving to Claremont, SD in 1971 he worked for Rodney Barnes for

seven years before seeking employment at Horton's in Britton, SD for nine years. He retired in 2009 after being employed at Doctor's Feed Lot for twenty three years. He and Corrine moved to Groton in 2013.

He could fix anything, no challenge was too big. He enjoyed hunting, playing dominoes and reading Louie L'Amour books. He was patient, kind and always content.

He was a member of the Amherst Reformed Church, his faith was very important to him.

He is survived by his wife of 64 years; his children, Donald (Virgie) Vander Vorst, Claremont, SD; Wynella (Neal) Abeln, Groton, SD; Charlene (Leslie) Erickson, Langford, SD; Darrell (Lori) Vander Vorst, Amherst, SD; Ricky (Bonnie) Vander Vorst, Claremont, SD; Byron Vander Vorst, LaMesa, CA., 18 grandchildren, 30 great-grandchildren, five brothers and two sisters.

He was preceded in death by his parents; a son, Elroy; his sister, Sylvia Nieuwsma; brother-in-laws, Eldon Droog and Ernie Geffre; sister-in-laws, Mary Lou Lamb and Polly Vander Vorst; one niece and two nephews.

Maintenance Supervisor Wanted:

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

Day Shift C.N.A. Wanted

Sign-on Bonus

☆☆☆ **\$1,500 for CNAs** ☆☆☆

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

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



1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton



Sun Dial Manor in Bristol
is accepting applications for
full time and part time CNA's.
12 hr. shifts- days and nights
(SIGN ON BONUS OFFERED)

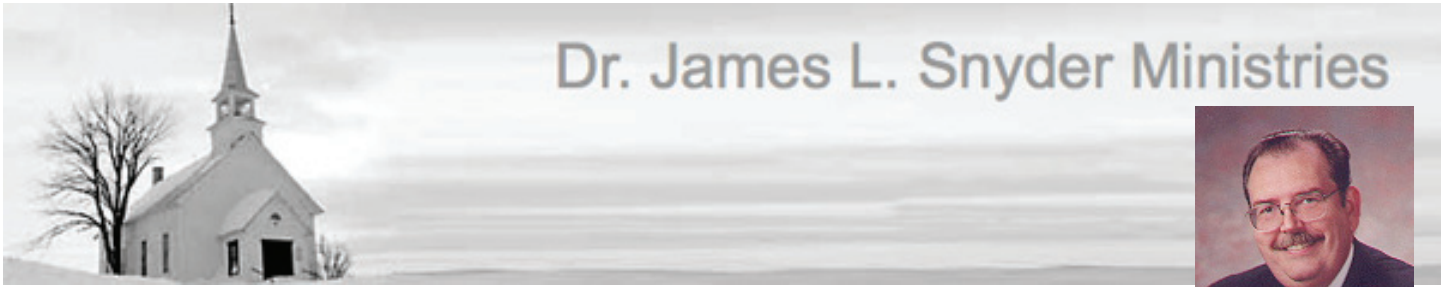
DIETARY OPENINGS
Full time cook, 8 hr. shifts
(WITH SIGN ON BONUS)

Part time Dietary Tech

For more information,
call 605-492-3615

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries



Spring Has Sprung a Leak This Year

It was in the middle of February during a very shivering cold time that the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage said most dramatically, "I can't wait for Spring. When in the world is Spring going to get here?"

As a veteran husband, I knew this was not a question for me to ponder or even to answer. Rather, it was something I needed to ignore completely. I learned these things down the years, which is why I have survived so many years. If silence is golden then I have reached those golden years of life.

I wouldn't say this to her, but I was thinking the same thing myself. When is Spring ever going to get here?

I was counting the days when it would be Spring and we could enjoy some graciously warm weather for a change. This weather has been stinking chilly for a long time and I was getting tired of it. I could tell my wife was getting tired of it too, but I didn't want to go in that direction with any kind of conversation. Sometimes the best thing to do is not do or say anything.

It was unusually cold here in Florida and I was tired of it. Personally, I was looking forward to Spring when things would automatically change and I could put away my sweater.

That magical day arrived. The day before my wife said, "Well, tomorrow is Spring and all this nasty, rainy, chilly weather will be over."

If only my wife was in charge of the weather. That would be a wonderful thing because the weather would be perfect every day. At least according to her calculation.

I remember when I tried to explain to her that we needed change in the weather and we needed rain in order for crops to grow, trees to grow and so forth. After my explanation she put both hands on her hips and stared at me one of those stares that I'm so familiar with. She didn't say anything, she didn't have to.

My wife has relatives up in the state of New York. Not New York City, thankfully. One of the things she enjoys doing during the winter time is to text them and tell them how wonderfully warm and sunny it is down here. This year, however, she wasn't able to do that.

When Spring did arrive, there was no magical change in the weather. In fact, it was the worst rainy weather we had all year. It was rainy and thundering and even in some places there were tornadoes. It didn't look or feel like Spring.

I didn't say anything all morning. I knew no matter what I would say it would get me in trouble. She wasn't in the mood for any joking or jesting on my part.

She didn't say much, but she sighed very deeply all morning long. Fortunately for me, I had work to do and so occupied myself with that work.

Isn't it strange that man, being who he thinks he is has no control of the weather? It rains when it rains and it snows when it snows and there's not a thing man can do about it.

The weatherman is a very strange individual. It doesn't matter if he gets the whether right or wrong, he still has a job. Nobody thinks badly of him because he miscalculated the weather.

Then my wife made a very interesting comment, "Why can't Mother Nature keep to the schedule at hand. Spring is supposed to be nice weather."

It was a good point. We have a date for Spring and Mother Nature should keep that date. We have all year long for rain and tornadoes and lightning and thundering why can't she organize her schedule a little better.

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I might recommend that my wife take over the duties of Mother Nature. If anybody can organize anything, it's her. Well, she hasn't quite organized me, but that's a different story. But she can organize everything right down to the second.

If there was an opening for a new Mother Nature, I think I would recommend my wife. I'm not sure she would have much competition there, and she would win hands down. Then we would have weather organized on a very strict schedule.

Under her supervision, we would have rain when it's scheduled and snow when it's scheduled. The sun would shine, without clouds, at least 90% of the time. I wanted to say 100%, but I'll give her a little leeway in this.

Thinking about this I have come to the conclusion that there are a lot of things in this world and also in my life that I cannot control. The frustration of life is when I try to control things that I can't control. Even though I know I can't control everything, at least I try. And I try to my own failure.

One of my favorite passages of Scripture is, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

One of the hardest things in my life to do is to simply trust God for everything in my life. When I try to control things in my life, I always make a mess. Just ask the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.



All auto owners!
Save \$2-\$4 /tank
& grow your local economy
by choosing low carbon
Super Premium E30's
94 octane, more power,
same mileage, fewer
carbon deposits, lower
maintenance costs,
slashed benzene & related
genotoxic, carcinogenic
tailpipe emissions;
*see sdfu.org's E30 tab for
info, E30 prices\locations.

***Farmers Union's
PSA: Courtesy Merle
Anderson (Merle is 94
year old founder of Ace
and legendary ethanol
supporter... "because it is
the right thing to do")**

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Nobody Wants a Repeat of the 2011 Missouri River Flood

Spring is just around the corner in South Dakota, and many residents are rightfully concerned about the higher-than-normal snowpack levels in the Upper Missouri River Basin, which could cause flooding along the Missouri River in our state.

NOAA, which is the federal scientific agency in charge of weather and climate monitoring, recently released its 2018 spring flood outlook report, which found that through May, moderate flooding is likely in parts of the Lower Missouri River basin. It also says that minor flooding is possible in parts of the Upper Missouri River Basin as above-normal snowpack melts. This reaffirms our belief that the Corps should be taking action sooner rather than later to make sure their plan recognizes flood control as their primary responsibility.

Also this month, the U.S. Federal Claims Court ruled that the Corps' mismanagement of the Missouri River caused a number of floods between the years 2007 and 2014. It was determined that the Corps' management plan was focused less on flood control and more on maintaining ecosystems for certain animals, including the pallid sturgeon, even though flood control is supposed to be their top priority.

As the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Oversight, one of my duties is to oversee the Army Corps of Engineers, which is responsible for properly managing the Missouri River. Over the past three years, I have held multiple hearings on the Corps' management of the river. I recently sent a letter to Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works R.D. James, requesting a briefing on the 2018 Missouri River management plan. High levels of snowpack this early in the season are worrisome, and in my letter I urged the Corps to carefully monitor them, and communicate openly with communities along the river about risks of flooding.

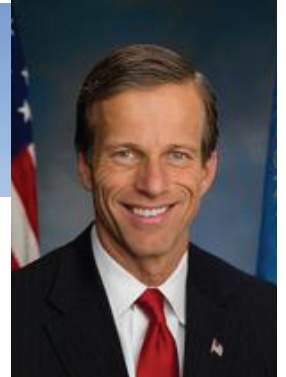
In 2014, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report on the 2011 flood, and recommended a snowpack monitoring system by implemented along the Upper Missouri River Basin so the Corps could make better, more informed decisions with improved forecasting models. Additionally in 2014, a Water Resources Reform bill known as WRDA, was signed into law and it authorized the Corps to create this recommended soil moisture and snowpack monitoring system along the basin. In 2016, I offered an amendment to the Energy and Water appropriations bill that would authorize the use of up to \$2 million within the Corps' existing budget to implement such a system. Still, the system has not been built.

The Corps' has claimed that Congress never authorized this funding, but the reality is that the Corps has never requested additional funding for this program that it has been authorized by Congress to implement. This has been incredibly frustrating, and is a sign that they have not learned from their mistakes of 2011.

If you have been following along on my Facebook or Twitter pages recently, you may have seen that we are posting daily updates of the water levels at each of the dams along the upper Missouri. We'll continue doing this until we are confident that the threat of another major flood has gone away.

The Missouri River plays a vital role in the economy and livelihoods of those living in communities along the river. Proper management of the Missouri requires the Corps to work closely and communicate extensively with stakeholders such as state and local governments and understand the needs of the communities within the Missouri River basin. I will continue to monitor the Corps' actions and will keep South Dakotans updated on any new information I receive.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Number Nine

Agriculture, which is supported by hardworking farmers and ranchers across South Dakota, is the state's top industry. It adds more than \$20 billion to the economy each year, and, according to the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, "98% of farms in South Dakota are family owned and operated – in fact, over 2,500 South Dakota farms have been in the same family for more than 100 years." That's a pretty impressive statistic when you think about it, and it's South Dakotans like them who I'm continually proud to fight for in the U.S. Senate.

More than 90 percent of South Dakota's farms are enrolled in one or more conservation, safety net, or loan program that's been authorized by the farm bill. And I'm no stranger to farm bills, as I've already written three of them during my time in Congress. The 2018 farm bill will be my fourth.

For more than one year now, with the expiration of the current farm bill already in sight, I've been leading by example and introducing numerous individual marker bills containing sound, common-sense policy initiatives. If we really want to get a farm bill to the president's desk on time and avoid an unnecessary extension, we've got to put in the hard work today.

South Dakota farmers and ranchers are dedicated stewards of their land and rely on farm bill conservation programs to build their soil, provide wildlife habitat, and protect our water. One of the greatest challenges with applying the most effective conservation practices, like cover crops on working lands, for example, is measuring the economic value these practices can provide.

With my eighth farm bill proposal – bipartisan legislation I introduced in early March with Sen. Amy Klobuchar, our neighbor to the east – we could help farmers and land-grant universities better utilize the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) massive collection of conservation data and enable them to choose the best conservation practices that would improve productivity on farming operations while protecting individual farmer privacy.

Most recently – during National Agriculture Week, nonetheless – I introduced my ninth farm bill proposal. And there's more to come, I might add.

This legislation, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Improvement and Rural Water System Access Act, would make important changes to the already popular conservation program that provides critical habitat to the state's pheasant population and delivers a large infusion of cash to local economies each year. The bill would also make it less costly for rural water systems that cross U.S. Forest Service land by eliminating a rental fee that is charged when they do.

Many game species' populations, including pheasants, which are economically significant to states like South Dakota, have been on the decline in recent years, and there's an alarming correlation between these population drops and the loss of CRP acres and available habitat. Building on changes to CRP that I've already proposed, my latest legislation would define "species of economic significance" and add declining habitat for those species as a priority for targeting new or expanded CRP acres in South Dakota and other states.

I recently met with USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue and Sen. Pat Roberts, the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and I've made my priorities clear as we approach the release of the Senate farm bill, which could come as early as April. South Dakota farmers and ranchers are lucky to have these two strong advocates for agriculture in their corner, too, and I'm committed to working with them and my colleagues to get this important work completed as soon as possible.



Supporting Moms, Strengthening Families

South Dakota has the nation's highest rate of working moms with 84 percent being employed outside the home. For many families, both parents working is a financial necessity – one that comes with significant child care costs attached. In fact, by some estimates, child care in South Dakota costs about 28 percent of the average household income, or about \$14,700 per year.

Many of these families qualify for the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, which helps defray some child care expenses. During tax reform, however, some in Congress tried to eliminate the benefit. I had to fight hard to maintain the credit, but in the end, we were successful. Additionally, the Child Tax Credit was doubled to \$2,000 per child, a win I worked closely with Ivanka Trump to achieve. These credits can make a real difference in people's lives.

A few weeks ago, I spoke with a single mom who is getting another \$80 every pay check because of tax reform. For her, that meant she had more breathing room and greater financial security. For her son, it meant a new pair of basketball shoes.

I've heard similar reports from others. Let's say you're a family of four making around \$85,000 a year. Because of tax reform, you'll be keeping an additional \$2,400 in your pocket every year. That's a new washing machine, a nice family vacation, or a good chunk of change for the kids' college funds.

Of course, this financial peace of mind helps mitigate only one of the challenges working families face. Flexibility is another issue I've heard a lot about. For years, I've been working to get the Working Families Flexibility Act signed into law to help make balancing the demands of family, personal responsibilities, and the workforce a little easier.

This bill would give employees the opportunity to choose between taking overtime pay or receiving more paid time off. I've led the House in passing this bill multiple times, the most recent being in 2017, but the Senate has yet to consider the bill.

Additionally, in March of this year, I introduced legislation to help give expectant mothers additional flexibility, when needed. In the early 2000's, Peggy Young was working for UPS. She became pregnant and was instructed not to lift anything over 20 pounds. She requested light-duty work, but was told "No," even though accommodations were made for non-pregnant workers that had similar health-related restrictions. She couldn't return to her previous role either, as it was a liability.

As a result, Peggy had to go on unpaid leave and lost her medical coverage. She filed a lawsuit against UPS, which has since changed its policy, but the court's decision left a lot of questions. My bill works to clarify the law. It says a pregnant worker should be treated the same as a non-pregnant worker who may have a temporary disability and is therefore unable to perform certain duties. This bill takes a balanced approach, protecting mothers without imposing duplicative burdens on their employers.

I firmly believe our nation would be a whole lot stronger, if families were a whole lot stronger. Supporting working parents is an important step in achieving that. When we make these investments, we strengthen families and put the next generation on a trajectory toward success.

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Today in Weather History

March 25, 2009: Rapid snowmelt and ice jamming caused the Elm River near Westport to rise -above flood stage on March 20th. The Elm River reached an all-time record level of 22.69 feet on March 25th almost 9 feet above flood stage. The previous record was 22.11 feet set on April 10th, 1969. The flood stage for the Elm River at Westport is 14 feet. The city of Westport was evacuated with the flood waters causing damage to many homes and roads in and around Westport. Also, many other roads and agricultural and pastureland along the river were flooded. The Elm River slowly receded and fell below flood stage on March 30th. The flood waters from the Elm River flowed south and into the northern portion of Moccasin Creek. Subsequently, the Moccasin Creek rose as the water flowed south into the city of Aberdeen. Flooding became a concern for Aberdeen and areas along the creek north of Aberdeen. The Governor signed an emergency declaration which allowed the state to help with flood response efforts, including sending 50,000 sandbags to the area. Also, the National Guard was activated to move a variety of heavy equipment. Some sandbagging and a falling Elm River kept the Moccasin Creek from causing any significant flooding in and north of Aberdeen. The creek flooded some township and county roads.

1843 - A second great snowstorm hit the northeastern U.S. The storm produced snow from Maine all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Natchez MS received three inches of snow, and up to 15 inches buried eastern Tennessee. Coastal Maine received 204 inches of snow that winter. (David Ludlum)

1901: More than 20 people were killed by an estimated F3 tornado that moved across parts of Birmingham, Alabama. The twister cut a 15-mile path from the south side of the city to Avondale and Irondale.

1914 - Society Hill, SC, was buried under 18 inches of snow, establishing a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1934 - A spring storm produced 21 inches of snow at Amarillo TX in 24 hours. However, much of the snow melted as it fell, and as a result, the snow cover was never any deeper than 4.5 inches. (David Ludlum)

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.

1948 - For the second time in less than a week airplanes were destroyed by a tornado at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma City OK. A March 20th tornado destroyed fifty planes at Tinker AFB causing more than ten million dollars damage, and the March 25th tornado destroyed another thirty-five planes causing six million dollars damage. The first tornado struck without warning, and caused more damage than any previous tornado in the state of Oklahoma. The second tornado was predicted by Fawbush and Miller of the United States Air Force, and their accurate tornado forecast ushered in the modern era of severe weather forecasting. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data) (The National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1975 - The town of Sandberg reported a wind gust to 101 mph, a record for the state of California. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Heavy rain left rivers and streams swollen in Kansas and Nebraska, causing considerable crop damage due to flooding of agricultural areas. The Saline River near Wilson Reservoir in central Kansas reached its highest level since 1951. March rainfall at Grand Island NE exceeded their previous record of 5.57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)








1988 - An early season heat wave prevailed in the southwestern U.S. The high of 93 degrees at Tucson, AZ, was a new record for March. Windy conditions prevailed across the central and eastern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Minneapolis MN, and reached 120 mph atop Rendezvous Peak WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A Pacific storm brought wet weather to much of the western third of the country, with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. La Porte CA was drenched with 3.56 inches of rain in 24 hours. Up to 24 inches of snow blanketed the Sierra Nevada Range. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

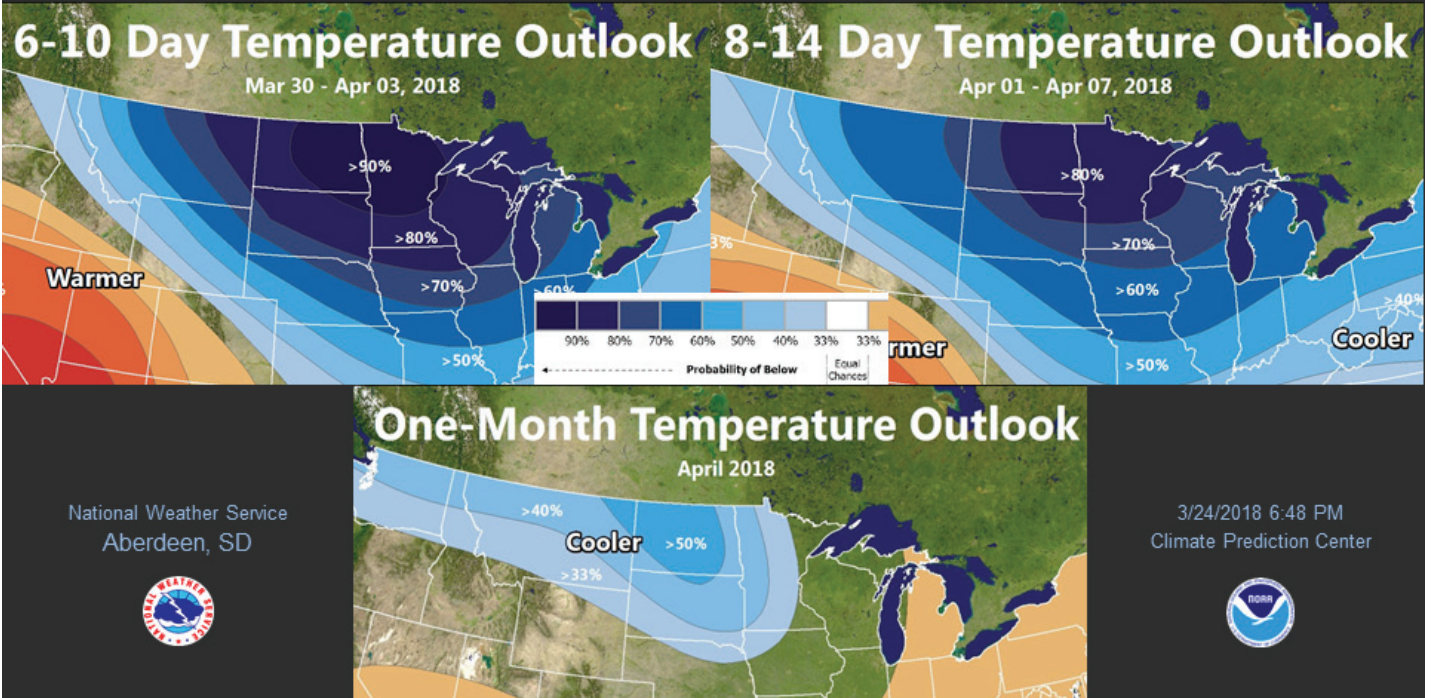
1990 - Temperatures dipped below zero in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. Hardin MT was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 10 degrees below zero. Freezing drizzle was reported in the Southern Plains Region, with afternoon highs only in the 30s from the Southern High Plains to Missouri and Arkansas. (The National Weather Summary)

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Sun Mar 25	Mon Mar 26	Tue Mar 27	Wed Mar 28	Thu Mar 29	Fri Mar 30	Sat Mar 31
						
36°F	37°F	45°F	43°F	37°F	35°F	36°F
30°F	26°F	28°F	22°F	18°F	15°F	14°F
S 19 MPH	ENE 8 MPH	W 8 MPH	SSW 15 MPH	NNW 9 MPH	N 11 MPH	S 10 MPH
Precip 40%	Precip 70%		Precip 20%		Precip 20%	

Spring's On Break Through Early/Mid April



Published on: 03/24/2018 at 6:54PM

The Climate Prediction Center indicates a high likelihood of below average temperatures through at least the beginning of April across the North. Above average precipitation chances continue as well. <http://www.cpc.noaa.gov/>

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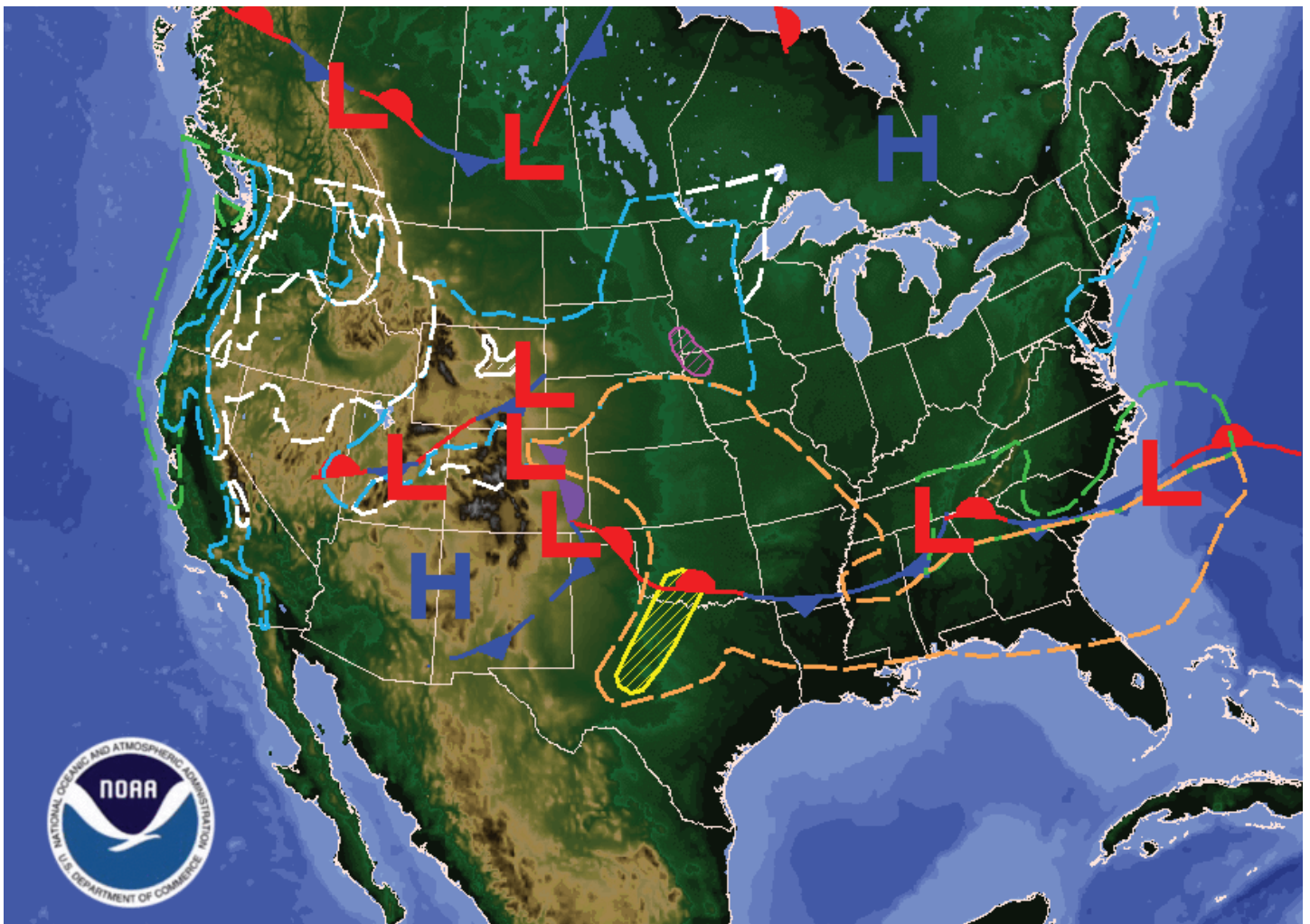
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 34.8 F at 3:39 PM
Low Outside Temp: 29.8 F at 7:17 AM
Wind Chill:
High Gust: 32.0 Mph at 10:10 PM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 81° in 1925
Record Low: -10° in 1894
Average High: 45°F
Average Low: 24°F
Average Precip in March: 0.88
Precip to date in March: 1.14
Average Precip to date: 1.90
Precip Year to Date: 1.55
Sunset Tonight: 7:52 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Sun, Mar 25, 2018, issued 5:53 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Hurley with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain
Rain and T'Storms
Rain and Snow
Snow

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

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"HIS MASTER'S VOICE"

There once was a dog named "Nipper," a terrier who was very devoted to his master, Mark Barraud. The two were best friends and were rarely seen apart from each other. When Mark died, his brother Francis 'adopted' him and after a lengthy period of mourning, "Nipper" became very attached to Francis, an artist. Eventually they too developed a very close relationship.

Mark and Francis lived in the latter 1800s and at that time phonographs with wax cylinders were used for recording voices and music. Some of Francis' cylinders contained recordings of his voice and each time he played one of his recordings "Nipper" would place his head near the phonograph and look intently into it as though he was looking for his new master to appear. "Nipper's" pose inspired the artist and he painted a picture of it that became one of the most famous and recognizable brands in all the world, called "His Master's Voice."

In Psalm 99:7 we read that "He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud." What an unusual means of communication. Imagine walking through a field and suddenly hearing a cloud call you by name and give you a special message. Seems improbable but that's what God did to Moses and Aaron. And He can do that today.

Our God is constantly speaking to us in different ways at different times and from different places. He will do everything He can to get our attention and share His message with us. If we want to hear our Master's voice, we must be open, attentive and waiting to hear Him speak.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to eliminate the unnecessary noise in our lives so we can hear You when You speak. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 99:7 He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them.

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2018 Groton SD Community Events

- Groton Lion's Club Bingo- Wednesday Nights 6:30pm at the Groton Legion (Year Round)
- 11/18/2017-3/31/2018 Groton Lion's Club Wheel of Meat- Saturday Nights 7pm at the Groton Legion (Fall/Winter Months)
- 1/28/2018 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 3/24/2018 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 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)
- 12/01/2018 Olive Grove Golf Course 2018 Holiday Party

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
10-12-14-17-25
(ten, twelve, fourteen, seventeen, twenty-five)
Estimated jackpot: \$31,000

Lotto America
10-28-37-38-49, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 3
(ten, twenty-eight, thirty-seven, thirty-eight, forty-nine; Star Ball: five; ASB: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$2.32 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$458 million

Powerball
10-33-45-53-56, Powerball: 24, Power Play: 3
(ten, thirty-three, forty-five, fifty-three, fifty-six; Powerball: twenty-four; Power Play: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$54 million

Hankins, Ferris State beat Northern State for D-II title

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Zach Hankins led Ferris State to its first NCAA Division II national championship in any sport Saturday, scoring 19 points in the Bulldogs' 71-69 victory over Northern State.

The Bulldogs (38-1) won their final 26 games of the season and set a school-record for wins in a season. Darin Peterka's basket with 4:27 to play gave the Wolves their first lead of the second half at 65-64. Carter Evans hit a jumper and his two-handed alley-oop dunk from Peterka gave them a three-point lead with about three minutes left.

Peter Firlik hit two free throws and Hankins made a layup to give the Bulldogs a 70-69 lead with 90 seconds left and Markese Mayfield's free throws with 10 seconds remaining capped the scoring. Northern State committed three turnovers and went 0 for 2 from the field — including a clean look from 3-point range by Peterka with two seconds left — in the final three minutes.

Firlik, who finished with 12 points, and Mayfield combined to score 19 of their 23 points in the second half. Evans led the Wolves (36-4) with 20 points on 10-of-14 shooting. Peterka added 14 points, seven rebounds, six assists and two steals, Logan Doyle also scored 14 points, and Ian had 12s.

After Evans scored six points during a 9-2 opening run and Smith's layup made it 29-23 with eight minutes left in the half, Ferris State scored 16 of the final 24 first-half points to take a 39-37 lead into the break. The Wolves made just three of their final 12 shots — while Ferris State was 7-of-9 shooting — to close the first.

Same prosecutor assigned to South Dakota official's trial

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A prosecutor will again handle the case of a Pennington County commissioner accused of violating a county zoning ordinance, despite the defendant's objections.

Commissioner George Ferebee was found guilty in September of maintaining a septic system without an operating permit, which violates a county ordinance. The ordinance requires on-site wastewater treatment

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systems to be pumped, inspected and issued permits regularly.

Ferebee appealed the conviction and has been given a new trial, which will again be prosecuted by state Assistant Attorney General Robert Haivala, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Defense lawyer Shawn Tornow objected Tuesday to Haivala serving as the prosecutor again, saying that the South Dakota Attorney General's Office doesn't have jurisdiction over the issue.

The state attorney general's office took over Ferebee's prosecution during the first trial after the county prosecutors' office recused itself, citing conflict of interest prosecuting a commissioner in its own county.

The new trial's presiding judge, John Bastian, denied Tornow's request for a different prosecutor. Bastian said state law and case precedent gave the court authority to appoint an attorney duly licensed in the state, which "certainly includes an assistant attorney general."

Ferebee was charged in October 2015. He has said he's exempt from the septic system ordinance because his land holdings amount to 250 acres, which is greater than the 40 acres required for exemption.

The state says the property is legally made up of four lots and the septic system is on a 12.22-acre lot.

Ferebee was ordered to pay a \$200 fine following his conviction.

His new trial is scheduled for May, but he's due in court April 10. A judge will decide whether to delay the upcoming trial then.

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

South Dakota students redesign Deadwood's vacant spaces

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota State University architecture graduate students have studied vacant spaces in nine buildings on Deadwood's Historic Main Street as part of an effort to identify economic initiatives for the city.

The students scanned empty second-floor spaces on Main Street, recorded existing conditions, produced measured drawings and came up with ideas on how to convert the spaces. They presented concepts and designs to local business owners on March 15, which included a traveler's hostel, art gallery, a museum and loft apartments.

The project was completed in partnership with the Main Street Initiative Economic Initiatives Project, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

Deadwood Historic Preservation Officer Kevin Kuchenbecker said the partnership created an accurate recordation of existing buildings as well as measured drawings that are accurate to one-eighth of an inch. He estimated that the design services were worth more than \$100,000.

"It is Deadwood's goal to bring underutilized and vacant spaces forward, putting them back into productivity as apartments and museums, etcetera," said Kuchenbecker. "It's much more efficient for government to partner in redevelopment of existing spaces than it is to create new spaces."

Student Iman Ebadi Paskiabi said it was a great experience to work on a "real world project" with "real world technology," since most school studio projects are abstract.

Kuchenbecker said the next step will be to meet individually with property owners to determine their interest level on the project.

"It's a real opportunity for the owners of these buildings to see their space and then envision what they could be doing with their space," said Kuchenbecker. "It's spurring on housing, economic development, rehabilitation, and that's our whole focus."

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

China's new central banker pledges to rein in financial risk

By JOE McDONALD, AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's new central bank governor outlined sweeping plans Sunday to rein in rising debt and financial risk, but expressed confidence that Beijing can prevent potential dangers.

High debt levels for Chinese state-owned companies, local governments and households are "still a challenge," Yi Gang said at an economic conference. The appearance marked his first extended public appearance following brief remarks to reporters after his appointment last Monday.

The ruling Communist Party has declared controlling financial risks a priority following a run-up in debt that prompted global rating agencies last year to cut Beijing's credit rating.

Regulators will "deepen regulatory system reform and enhance its resilience against systemic risk," Yi said. He said that will include steps to "impose more financial discipline" on government-owned companies, develop a better financing system for local governments and "create a system to prevent risk in the real estate sector."

"We need to lose no time in adopting guidelines on financial regulation" for specialized entities such as asset management and holding companies that have evolved rapidly, said Yi.

Still, he said, with Beijing's experience and resources, "China is in a good position to mitigate and prevent risks."

Yi, who earned a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Illinois, succeeded Zhou Xiaochuan, who became China's most prominent figure in global finance during a record 15-year term as central bank governor. Yi is a two-decade veteran of the bank and is well-known to foreign investors and regulators as director of China's foreign exchange regulator.

Zhou warned in October that rising debt could have a "severe impact" on the world's second-largest economy, but told reporters this month during the annual meeting of China's ceremonial legislature that regulators believed they had debt under control.

Total debt in China swelled to above the equivalent of 270 percent of annual economic output, nearly the level of developed countries, as Beijing relied on infusions of credit to prop up growth following the 2008 crisis. Financial analysts worry that heavy borrowing by local governments and state companies could threaten the stability of the financial system. Previously low debt owed by Chinese households also has begun to rise.

Beijing has begun trying to clear away debt, including by allowing some state companies to give banks stock. But private sector analysts say regulators are moving too slowly.

In February, regulators seized control of one of China's biggest insurers, Anbang Insurance Group, after its debt load following a multibillion-dollar global spree of asset purchases raised questions about the privately owned company's financial stability.

Authorities said Anbang's founder would be prosecuted but have yet to release details.

Other major companies including Wanda Group, which owns Hollywood studio Legendary Entertainment, and HNA Group face questions about whether they can repay billions of dollars borrowed to finance foreign expansion.

"Currently potential risks in China are still reflected in a number of sectors," said Yi. He cited "persistently high" debt at state companies and said the "surging leverage ratio" among households is a "cause for concern."

Yi also promised more action to promote international use of China's tightly controlled currency, the yuan, though he gave no timeline. He repeated official promises to open the state-dominated financial system and allow foreign ownership of banks, but gave no new details.

Congressman: Bombing suspect called himself a 'psychopath'

By RYAN J. FOLEY, Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The suspected Austin bomber called himself a "psychopath" in a recorded confession and said he felt no remorse for deadly explosions that killed two people and terrorized the city, a U.S. congressman said Saturday.

Investigators are still looking into what motivated 23-year-old Mark Anthony Conditt, but the recording he left on his cell phone shows that he was a "sick individual," U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul said.

"He did refer to himself as a psychopath. He did not show any remorse, in fact questioning himself for why he didn't feel any remorse for what he did," McCaul said.

Conditt makes no mention of a racial motivation on the recording, but investigators are still looking into that as a possibility, he said. The first three victims were minorities.

McCaul, a former federal prosecutor who chairs the House Committee on Homeland Security, spoke at a news conference where he thanked law enforcement officials for bringing the three-week spree to an end. He called the investigation, which included more than 800 officers, a textbook example of how local, state and federal agencies should work together.

Beginning March 2, police say Conditt planted bombs in different parts of Austin, killing two people and severely wounding four others. He began by placing explosives in packages left overnight on doorsteps, killing 39-year-old father Anthony Stephan House and 17-year-old musician Draylen Mason and critically injuring 75-year-old Esperanza Herrera. He then rigged an explosive to a tripwire along a public trail, injuring two young men who crossed it. Finally, he sent two parcels with bombs via FedEx, one of which exploded and injured a worker at a distribution center near San Antonio.

Conditt died after detonating a explosive device early Wednesday as SWAT team officers ran toward his vehicle to arrest him in an Austin suburb. Investigators discovered a roughly 25-minute recording that Conditt had made on his cell phone allegedly confessing to the crimes.

Interim Austin Police Chief Brian Manley said the department will continue withholding the recording from the public as investigators look into Conditt's motive and whether anyone else was involved. He noted that Conditt's two roommates have been questioned and said that several more people will be interviewed. Releasing the recording now could jeopardize any future prosecutions, although no one else has been arrested or charged, Manley said.

For days, Manley has been under fire for calling Conditt "a challenged young man" and not a terrorist. He struck a different note Saturday, saying: "The suspect in this incident reined terror on our community for almost 3 weeks."

Austin Mayor Steve Adler said Herrera, who suffered broken legs and other severe injuries in a March 12 blast, remains hospitalized in critical but stable condition. Herrera's grandson, Josh, wrote on his Facebook page that she has undergone several surgeries and is fighting for her life.

The identification of Conditt as the bomber continued to baffle residents in Pflugerville, the Austin suburb where Conditt had been home-schooled and grew up in a Christian family.

Mark Roessler, 57, lives across the street from where Conditt moved in last year, a mile from his parents. Conditt and his father had purchased the home in a quiet neighborhood known as Old Town, and spent months remodeling it together. Roessler said he got to know Conditt's father, Pat, during the project and said he was "kind of envious" of the time he got to spend working with his son. He said Mark Conditt was "polite, very quiet and respectful."

Roessler said he last saw him some time after the first bomb had exploded, but didn't talk with him. He said he never had any idea his neighbor was allegedly using supplies such as batteries and nails to assemble bombs in his home.

"People died and it's a horrible tragedy. My feelings move from shock and disbelief to going to the 'what-ifs,'" he said. "What if I tried to reach out to him that last time I saw him? 'Hey Mark, how are you doing?'"

This version of the story corrects the spelling of victim Anthony Stephan House's middle name to Stephan.

Heartbroken by gun violence: Rallies across US demand change

By ASHRAF KHALIL and CALVIN WOODWARD, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They came from a place of heartbreak to claim their spot in history: Hundreds of thousands of teenagers and supporters, rallying across the United States for tougher laws to fight gun violence.

The “March for Our Lives” events on Saturday drew massive crowds in cities across the country, marking the largest youth-led protests since the Vietnam War era.

In Washington, D.C., New York City, Denver, Los Angeles and other cities, demonstrators heard from student survivors of last month’s school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

“If you listen real close, you can hear the people in power shaking,” Parkland survivor David Hogg said to roars from protesters packing Pennsylvania Avenue from a stage near the Capitol to a spot many blocks away toward the White House.

“We’re going to take this to every election, to every state and every city. We’re going to make sure the best people get in our elections to run, not as politicians but as Americans.

“Because this,” he said, pointing behind him to the Capitol dome, “this is not cutting it.”

The message at the different rallies was consistent, with demonstrators vowing to vote out lawmakers who refuse to take a stand now on gun control. Many rallies had tables where volunteers helped those 18 or older register to vote while speakers detailed the policies they wanted and the impact gun violence has had on their lives.

The fire alarm at Trenton High School is scary, said 17-year-old Gabrielle James at a march in suburban Detroit.

“We don’t know if it’s an actual drill or if someone’s actually inside the school, going to take your life,” James said at a march in Detroit.

She said government has “extremely failed” to protect students from gun violence and she wants restrictions on automatic weapons.

“I work extremely hard at my studies. Sometimes I just sit in my car before going to school, wondering if I’m going to be home to see my mother after school,” James said.

Some of the young voices were very young. Yolanda Renee King, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 9-year-old granddaughter, drew from the civil rights leader’s most famous words in declaring from the Washington, D.C., stage: “I have a dream that enough is enough. That this should be a gun-free world. Period.”

By all appearances — there were no official numbers — Washington’s March for Our Lives rally rivaled



This satellite image provided by DigitalGlobe shows the “March for Our Lives” rally in Washington, D.C. on Saturday, March 24, 2018. Summoned to action by student survivors of the Florida school shooting, hundreds of thousands of teenagers and their supporters rallied in the nation’s capital and cities across America on Saturday to press for gun control in one of the biggest youth protests since the Vietnam era. (@DigitalGlobe via AP)

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the women's march last year that drew far more than the predicted 300,000.

The National Rifle Association went silent on Twitter as the protests unfolded, in contrast to its reaction to the nationwide school walkouts against gun violence March 14, when it tweeted a photo of an assault rifle and the message "I'll control my own guns, thank you."

President Donald Trump was in Florida for the weekend and did not weigh in on Twitter either.

White House spokesman Zach Parkinson said: "We applaud the many courageous young Americans exercising their First Amendment rights today." He also pointed to Trump's efforts to ban bump stocks and his support for school-safety measures and extended background checks for gun purchases.

Since the bloodshed in Florida, students have tapped into a current of gun control sentiment that has been building for years — yet still faces a powerful foe in the NRA, its millions of supporters and lawmakers who have resisted any encroachment on gun rights.

Organizers are hoping the electricity of the crowds, their sheer numbers and the under-18 roster of speakers will create a tipping point, starting with the midterm congressional elections this fall. To that end, chants of "Vote them out!" rang through the Washington crowd.

Emma Gonzalez, one of the first students from Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School to speak out after the tragedy there, implored those of voting age to cast ballots.

In her speech, she recited the names of the Parkland dead, then held the crowd in rapt, tearful silence for more than six minutes, the time it took the gunman to kill them.

"We will continue to fight for our dead friends," Delaney Tarr, another Parkland survivor, declared from the stage. The crowd roared with approval as she laid down the students' central demand: a ban on "weapons of war" for all but warriors.

Student protesters called for a ban on high-capacity magazines and assault-type weapons like the one used by the killer in Parkland, comprehensive background checks, and a higher minimum age to buy guns.

Gun violence was fresh for some who watched the speakers in Washington. Ayanne Johnson of Great Mills High School in Maryland held a sign declaring, "I March for Jaelynn," honoring Jaelynn Willey, who died Thursday, two days after being shot by a classmate at the school. The gunman also died.

About 30 gun-rights supporters staged a counter-demonstration in front of FBI headquarters, standing quietly with signs such as "Armed Victims Live Longer" and "Stop Violating Civil Rights." Other gun-control protests around the country were also met with small counter-demonstrations.

The president's call to arm certain teachers fell flat at the protest, and among critics as young as Zoe Tate, 11, from Gaithersburg, Maryland.

"I think guns are dumb. It's scary enough with the security guards we have in school," she said. "We don't need teachers carrying guns now. I find it amazing that I have to explain that idea to adults."

Parkland itself was home to a rally as more than 20,000 people filled a park near the Florida school, chanting slogans such as "Enough is enough" and carrying signs that read "Why do your guns matter more than our lives?" and "Our ballots will stop bullets."

Around the country, protesters complained that they are scared of getting shot in school and tired of inaction by grown-ups after a series of mass shootings.

"People have been dying since 1999 in Columbine and nothing has changed. People are still dying," said Ben Stewart, a 17-year-old senior at Shiloh Hills Christian School in Kennesaw, Georgia, who took part in a march in Atlanta.

Callie Cavanaugh, a 14-year-old at a march in Omaha, Nebraska, said: "This just needs to stop. It's been going on my entire life."

Associated Press writers Terry Spencer in Parkland, Florida; Jacob Jordan in Atlanta; Ed White in Detroit; Margery Beck in Omaha, Nebraska; Ben Nadler in Atlanta; and Lynn Berry in Washington contributed to this report.

China warns against 'trade war,' appeals for cooperation

By JOE McDONALD, AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — A top Chinese official warned Sunday a "trade war" would harm all sides but gave no indication of Beijing's possible next move in a spiraling dispute with President Donald Trump over steel and technology.

Speaking to global business leaders at a development forum, Vice Premier Han Zheng appealed for cooperation to make economic globalization "beneficial for all."

"A trade war serves the interests of none," said Han at the China Development Forum. "It will only lead to serious consequences and negative impact."

Han didn't mention Trump by name or refer directly to the dispute with Washington, but the country's newly appointed economy czar warned Saturday that Beijing will defend its interests. The government issued a \$3 billion list on Friday of U.S. goods including pork and stainless steel pipes it said might be hit by higher tariffs.

The Commerce Ministry said those charges were linked to Trump's approval earlier of higher tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. But a bigger battle is brewing over Trump's approval Thursday of a possible tariff hike on \$30 billion of Chinese goods in response to what Washington says is Beijing's improper acquisition of foreign technology.

Global financial markets have sunk on fears Chinese retaliation might prompt other governments to raise import barriers, depressing global trade.

Han appealed to other governments to "cooperate with each other like passengers in the same boat" and "make economic globalization more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial for all."

However, he also emphasized that China's income per person still is low, suggesting Beijing is unlikely to offer significant concessions to Washington.

Han repeated promises that planned Chinese market-opening would create new opportunities for foreign companies. Business groups have welcomed reform pledges but complain Beijing is moving too slowly, making it unclear whether additional promises will mollify Washington, the European Union and other trading partners.

In a phone call Saturday with U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Vice Premier Liu He said Beijing is "ready and capable of defending its national interest and hopes both sides will remain rational," according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

In a speech to the economic forum, Apple CEO Tim Cook acknowledged tensions in Western societies that fuel demands for import controls and said companies must take action to spread the benefits of globalization more widely.

"Not everyone has benefited like all of us in this room have from technology and globalization, and we all must help to address this disparity," said Cook, a co-chairman of the event. "Their cause must become our cause."

The annual forum, which brings together corporate leaders with Chinese economic officials, usually is used to showcase Beijing's plans. This year, those include ambitious promises to open financial markets and give entrepreneurs and foreign companies a bigger role in China's state-dominated economy.

Other business leaders at the event included IBM Corp. Chairwoman Virginia Rometty, CEO Patrick Pouyanne of French oil giant Total SA, Bank of China Ltd. Chairman Chen Siqing and CEO Ulf Mark Schneider of Nestle SA. It also was attended by China's newly appointed central bank governor, Yi Gang, and other Chinese economic leaders.

This year's forum has been overshadowed by the growing rancor between Washington and Beijing over Trump's efforts to redress what he says is an unfair trading relationship. Washington accuses China of flooding global markets with unfairly low-priced steel and other goods and stealing or pressuring foreign companies to hand over technology.

"The business community has always supported the idea that open market foster new ideas and allow entrepreneurship to thrive," said Cook. "The strongest companies and economies are those that are open

— those that thrive on diversity of people and ideas.”

At a conference on “the challenge of global inequality” ahead of the economic forum, the CEO of asset manager BlackRock Inc. pointed to the fall in global financial markets and appealed to the two governments to avoid a “public fight.”

“Dialogue and maybe some adjustment in trade and trade policy can be in order,” said Laurence D. Fink to reporters on Saturday.

“It can be done privately,” said Fink. “The world does not need a public fight in which we reduce mutual opportunity.”

Associated Press writer Ng Han Guan contributed to this report.

Obama: North Korea’s isolation means less leverage in talks

By YURI KAGEYAMA, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Former President Barack Obama said Sunday that negotiations with North Korea on its nuclear weapons program are difficult, partly because the country’s isolation minimizes possible leverage, such as trade and travel sanctions against Pyongyang.

“North Korea is an example of a country that is so far out of the international norms and so disconnected with the rest of the world,” Obama told a packed hall in Tokyo Sunday.

He stressed the effort to get North Korea to give up nuclear weapons remains difficult, but countries working together, including China as well as South Korea and Japan, to combine pressure on North Korea will be better than nations working alone.

He noted that past U.S. efforts on Iran’s nuclear weapons were more successful because there was more leverage, but there’s little commerce and travel with North Korea to being with.

“That makes them less subject to these kinds of negotiations,” he said of North Korea.

Obama was speaking at an event sponsored by a Japanese nonprofit group during his trip to Asia, which included earlier stops in Singapore, New Zealand and Australia. Obama’s work after leaving office has been focused on nurturing young leaders.

Obama, welcomed by a standing ovation, said the U.S.-Japan alliance remained strong, and the U.S. committed to defending Japan.

“North Korea is a real threat,” he said.

“Our view has always been that we would prefer to resolve these issues peacefully,” he said, adding that otherwise “the cost in terms of human life would be significant.”

He acknowledged progress on a nuclear-free world will likely take a long time as long as Russia and the U.S. could not agree to start reducing their stockpiles.

Obama also reflected on his 2016 visit to Hiroshima, one of two Japanese cities where the U.S. dropped atomic bombs in the closing days of World War II. His visit was the first by an American president.

Almost all American presidents tend to be relatively popular in Japan, which views the U.S. as its most important ally. But many Japanese particularly appreciate Obama’s efforts on denuclearization and remember with fondness his trip to Hiroshima and his message of working toward a world without nuclear weapons.

“It was an extraordinarily powerful moment for me,” Obama recalled.

Follow Yuri Kageyama on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

Her work can be found at <https://www.apnews.com/search/yuri%20kageyama>

‘Vote them out!’: Hundreds of thousands demand gun control

By ASHRAF KHALIL and CALVIN WOODWARD, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a historic groundswell of youth activism, hundreds of thousands of teenagers and their supporters rallied across the U.S. against gun violence Saturday, vowing to transform fear and grief into a “vote-them-out” movement and tougher laws against weapons and ammo.

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They took to the streets of the nation's capital and such cities as Boston, New York, Chicago, Houston, Minneapolis, Phoenix, Los Angeles and Oakland, California, in the kind of numbers seen during the Vietnam era, sweeping up activists long frustrated by stalemate in the gun debate and bringing in lots of new, young voices.

They were called to action by a brand-new corps of leaders: student survivors of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 people dead Feb. 14.

"If you listen real close, you can hear the people in power shaking," Parkland survivor David Hogg said to roars from the protesters packing Pennsylvania Avenue from the stage near the Capitol many blocks back toward the White House. "We're going to take this to every election, to every state and every city. We're going to make sure the best people get in our elections to run, not as politicians but as Americans.

"Because this," he said, pointing behind him to the Capitol dome, "this is not cutting it."

Some of the young voices were very young. Yolanda Renee King, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 9-year-old granddaughter, drew from the civil rights leader's most famous words in declaring from the stage: "I have a dream that enough is enough. That this should be a gun-free world. Period."

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Stars affected by violence join students' gun-reform rallies

By LYNN ELBER, AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Paul McCartney, Common, Miley Cyrus, Amy Schumer and other stars played supporting roles at nationwide gun-reform rallies dominated by teenage survivors' emotional speeches.

Still, the protests were deeply personal for some of the celebrities involved.

Jennifer Hudson, who performed "The Times They Are A Changin'" to cap Saturday's March for Our Lives rally in Washington, D.C., alluded to the shooting deaths of her mother, brother and 7-year-old nephew in 2008.

"We've all lost somebody. ... We've all got a purpose. And we want what? We want change," she said, encouraging the vast crowd to join her in song.

McCartney said his decision to take part in the New York City rally was prompted by the 1980 Manhattan shooting death of John Lennon, his former Beatles bandmate.

"One of my best friends was killed in gun violence, right 'round here, so it's important to me," he told CNN.

Asked what he hoped could be accomplished by the event, McCartney opened his jacket to show the slogan emblazoned on his black T-shirt: "We can end gun violence."

Hudson, appearing tearful as she concluded her appearance, was backed by members of a Washington choir and survivors of the Feb. 14 Parkland, Florida, high school shooting. Students from the school led rallies attended by hundreds of thousands of people in the nation's capital and other U.S. cities.

Celebrities attending the Washington event included power couples George and Amal Clooney and Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg, who helped fund the protests with a combined \$1 million donation. Also attending were Kim Kardashian and Kanye West, Glenn Close, Cher, Jimmy Fallon and Dennis Rodman.

Common, Cyrus, Andra Day, Vic Mensa, Demi Lovato, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ben Platt and Ariana Grande performed in Washington, and Rita Ora took the stage in Los Angeles.

"This song is dedicated to Stephon Clark, Decynthia Clements and all the unarmed black men and women killed by police weapons," Mensa said before performing "Now We Could Be Free."

Grande encountered another iteration of violence when her 2017 Manchester, England, concert was bombed, killing 22 people and injuring scores of others.

Schumer, the actress-comedian and cousin of Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, spoke to Parkland survivors attending the Los Angeles rally, telling them the violence they endured has to stop.

Lynn Elber can be reached at lelber@ap.org and on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/lynnelber>.

Survivor marks 6 minutes of strength and silence at rally

By REBECCA BOONE, Associated Press

Chin high and tears streaming, Florida school shooting survivor Emma Gonzalez stood silent in front of thousands gathered for the "March for Our Lives" rally in Washington, D.C.

She continued to stand silently as a few crowd members shouted out support. She remained silent as tentative chants broke out. Her silence continued as those attending also fell quiet, many weeping.

The gripping moment stretched for 6 minutes and 20 seconds, the amount of time Gonzalez said it took a shooter to kill 17 people and wound 15 others at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, last month.

"Everyone who has been touched by the cold grip of gun violence understands," Gonzalez told the hushed crowd, describing the long hours spent waiting for authorities to identify their slain classmates, the horror of discovering many of them had breathed their last breaths before many students even knew a "code red" alert — designed to warn staffers and students of a potential threat — had been called.

"Six minutes and 20 seconds with an AR-15 and my friend Carmen (Schentrup) would never complain to me about piano practice," she said, her voice strong but her throat momentarily catching. "Aaron Feis would never call Kyra 'Miss Sunshine.' Alex Schachter would never walk into school with his brother Ryan."

Gonzalez went on, listing name after name of those killed at the school on Feb. 14.

And then she stopped, her breath heaving but remaining composed, looking straight ahead and silent.

Seemingly unsure what to do, the crowd waited. Some appeared to catch her intent right away, watching with hands covering mouths, foreheads wrinkled and tears falling. Chants of "never again" broke out for a time, and later someone came out from the wings of the stage to put a hand on her shoulder and whisper in her ear.

The silence by now had spread to the thousands thronging Pennsylvania Avenue. Protesters, parents, television news crews waited to see what Gonzalez would do next.

The beeping of a digital alarm broke the silence.

"Since the time that I came out here, it has been six minutes and 20 seconds. The shooter has ceased shooting and will soon abandon his rifle, blend in with the students as they escape and walk free for an hour before arrest," she said, voice clear. "Fight for your lives before it's someone else's job."

Gonzalez is one of several teens from the school to become gun control activists in the wake of the shooting. Their efforts have galvanized youth nationwide, with hundreds of thousands attending similar rallies across the country.

As the three-hour rally wrapped up, Gonzalez assigned some homework for the demonstrators:

"One final push," she said. "Get out there and vote."

Lights go dark for Earth Hour to highlight climate change

LONDON (AP) — In Paris, the Eiffel Tower went dark. In London, a kaleidoscope of famous sites switched off their lights — Tower Bridge, Big Ben, Piccadilly Circus, the London Eye.

That scene was repeated over and over across the world on Saturday night: at Sydney's Opera House; at New Delhi's great arch; at Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers; at Edinburgh Castle in Scotland; at Brandenburg Gate in Berlin; at St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow; at the Empire State Building in New York.

It lasted for just an hour and its power is purely symbolic. But in countries around the world, at 8:30 p.m., people were switching off their lights for Earth Hour, a global call for international unity on the importance of addressing climate change.

Since beginning in Sydney in 2007, Earth Hour has spread to more than 180 countries, with tens of millions of people joining in, from turning off their own porch lights to letting the grand sites like the Opera House go dark.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo said 300 Paris buildings observed the blackout to send a "universal message."

Those 60 minutes are "an opportunity" to shift "the consumption culture and behavior change toward

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sustainability," Indian Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan said.

All this happens and yet many people, of course, barely notice.

Around India Gate, New Delhi's monument to the Indian dead in World War I, thousands embraced the city's nightly warm-weather ritual Saturday. They bought ice cream and cheap plastic trinkets. They flirted. Young children rode in electric carts that their parents rented for a few minutes at a stretch.

But for an hour the arch stayed dark, a silent call for change.

In Jordan, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature arranged 11,440 candles on a hilltop in the capital of Amman, establishing a Guinness World Record for the largest candle mosaic.

The candles spelled the Earth Hour motto of "60+." However, attempts to light the candles largely failed because of wind on the hilltop, which is close to the city's landmark, the Amman Citadel.

7 months after Harvey, flood-control projects' fate unclear

By JUAN A. LOZANO, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Large-scale projects long considered essential to easing Houston's flooding woes went to the top of the area's to-do list after Hurricane Harvey inundated large swaths of the nation's fourth-largest city.

Seven months later, local officials are still looking for funding to undertake plans that include a new reservoir, deeper and wider bayous and a coastal barrier system — all of which have fallen victim to a lack of money or political will in the past.

Yet local leaders insist this time will be different, saying they're committed to making the projects a reality, even as they wait to find out how much money they might get from the state and federal governments and whether local taxpayers will be willing to help out.

"There's been a whole lot of talk over the years, but now it's time to get it done in the post-Harvey era," Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said at a recent community meeting.

One thing that's giving Turner and others hope is that billions of federal dollars have been allocated to pay for flood-mitigation projects. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has promised \$1 billion for areas affected by Harvey, though Houston will be competing with other Texas communities for that funding. Congress in February provided \$15 billion to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood-control projects nationwide, some of which could go to the Houston area.

Houston, which was founded on the banks of the Buffalo Bayou around the mid-1800s and rises barely above sea level, has long been susceptible to flooding. But recent growth has made the problem worse. The area has more pavement, which generates more stormwater runoff, and has lost wetlands that could soak up that runoff.

Big projects Houston-area officials are eying include building a third reservoir for the area, at a cost of about \$500 million. They also want to complete the excavation and widening of six local bayous, a \$1.3 billion project, part of which has proceeded in fits and starts for more than 20 years due to inconsistent funding. And they want to undertake a project known as the coastal spine, which was first proposed after Hurricane Ike in 2008. That \$6 billion to \$10 billion project — also called the "Ike Dike" — proposes barriers to protect the area from storm surge coming into Galveston Bay.

This "will be very different than the last several decades when things were thought of but never actually executed," said Marvin Odum, Houston's Hurricane Harvey recovery czar.

Whichever projects are ultimately funded, they will likely take years to build.

Turner and other Houston-area officials have asked Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to use the state's \$11 billion rainy day fund to help front the cost of building the reservoir and other projects, with the state being repaid once federal dollars are awarded. But that message has "fallen on deaf ears," said Stephen Costello, Houston's chief resilience officer.

However, Ciara Matthews, a spokeswoman for Abbott's office, said Saturday that through the governor's work with Congress, "a record amount of funding is now available to Houston to rebuild and restore the reservoirs and bayous, as well as building the coastal spine.

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"He has also made available a billion dollars in hazard mitigation funding for the city and county right now," Matthews said, referring to the money from FEMA for areas affected by Harvey.

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, the top elected official in the county where Houston is located, said he's not reassured by promises from state officials. He also noted that they've pushed to cut property taxes, which Harris County uses to pay for its flood-control efforts.

"When somebody at the state level tells you that they're going to lower the property tax, what they're telling you is, 'We are not going to build many flood-control projects,'" Emmett said.

Officials are also asking Harris County residents to approve a \$1 billion to \$2 billion bond proposal to help pay for some projects. That will be on the ballot sometime this year.

Texas A&M University at Galveston marine sciences professor Sam Brody cautioned that Houston and the rest of Texas can't engineer their way out of flooding issues by only relying on large-scale projects. Efforts such as buying out homes in flood prone areas and being mindful of future development must play a role in making the area more flood resilient, he said.

Houston remains the only major U.S. city without zoning, but it does have rules about building in the flood plain. The City Council is set to vote in the coming week on stricter rules. Harris County approved new restrictions late last year. Both Houston and Harris County are also pursuing a home buyout strategy.

"There is no one silver bullet that is going to fix this problem," Brody said. "It's a ... multi-strategy issue that people need to recognize," he said.

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter at www.twitter.com/juanlozano70

'He fell a hero:' French praise policeman in hostage swap

By LORI HINNANT, Associated Press

TREBES, France (AP) — The French police officer who swapped places with a female supermarket employee being held hostage had already received a lifetime of accolades by the time he walked unarmed into the store under attack by an extremist gunman.

Known for his courage and sang-froid, Lt. Col. Arnaud Beltrame was acclaimed by neighbors, colleagues and French authorities as a hero Saturday after his death from wounds the day before. President Emmanuel Macron announced plans for a national ceremony to formally honor him.

After agreeing to the hostage swap, Beltrame surrendered his weapon — but kept his cellphone on, allowing authorities outside the Super U market in the southern French town of Trebes to hear what was happening inside.

Thanks to Beltrame's quick thinking, special police units heard gunshots inside the store Friday and stormed the building immediately, killing the attacker.

"Beyond his job, he gave his life for someone else, for a stranger," his brother, Cedric, told RTL radio in France. "He was well aware he had almost no chance. He was very aware of what he was doing ... if we don't describe him as a hero, I don't know what you need to do to be a hero."

"Arnaud Beltrame died in the service of the nation to which he had already given so much," Macron said. "In giving his life to end the deadly plan of a jihadi terrorist, he fell as a hero."

The date of the ceremony for Beltrame wasn't immediately set.

The hostage whose life he saved, an employee named Julie, was in a "catastrophic state," her manager said.

Beltrame's entire career seemed to lead inexorably to the moment when he responded to the attack Friday in Trebes, a 15-minute drive from the gendarme unit he had led since last August.

He joined France's elite police special forces in 2003 and served in Iraq in 2005. A former member of the presidential guard, he earned one of France's highest honors, the Order of Merit, in 2012.

In December, Beltrame organized a counterterrorism training session for just such a hostage situation — down to the location in a supermarket. At the time, he armed his officers with paintball guns, according to the Depeche du Midi newspaper.

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"We want to be as close to real conditions as possible," he said then.

In addition to the four people killed by the gunman Friday, 15 others were injured.

Investigators searched the home of the attacker, Moroccan-born Redouane Lakdim, 25, and found what a judicial official said were notes "that alluded to the Islamic State and appeared like a last testament." They also found a computer and a phone.

Inside the market itself, investigators found three homemade explosive devices, a handgun and a hunting knife, the official said. He wasn't authorized to speak publicly amid the investigation.

The weapons suggested an intent to do further damage.

Macron called a special Defense Council meeting with key ministers Saturday to decide the country's next steps in combating terror. Hundreds of investigators were on the case, pouring into Lakdim's background.

Across the Atlantic, U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted "We are with you @EmmanuelMacron!" and condemned "the violent actions of the attacker and anyone who would provide him support."

French police and soldiers have been a prime target of attacks by extremists, with 10 killed in recent years, including Beltrame. Dozens of others have been wounded.

Beltrame's mother told RTL radio that, for her son, "to defend the homeland" was "his reason to live."

"He would have said to me, 'I'm doing my job, Mom, nothing more,'" she said.

Flowers piled up in front of the Gendarmerie headquarters in the French medieval city of Carcassone to pay tribute to Beltrame. Flags at all gendarmeries were flying at half-staff.

Two people have been detained in the case, one woman close to Lakdim and a 17-year-old male friend.

Lakdim was known to police for petty crime and drug dealing. But since 2014, he was also on the Fichage list, a government register of people suspected of being radicalized but who have yet to perform acts of terror. Despite this, Paris prosecutor Francois Molins said there was "no warning sign" that Lakdim would carry out an attack.

The four-hour drama began at 10:13 a.m. Friday when Lakdim hijacked a car near Carcassonne, killing the passenger and wounding the driver, the prosecutor said. Lakdim then fired six shots at police officers who had just finished jogging, hitting one in the shoulder.

Shouting "Allahu akbar!" — Arabic for "God is great" and declaring he was a "soldier of the Islamic State," he entered the Super U supermarket in Trebes, 60 miles (100 kilometers) southeast of Toulouse, where about 50 people were inside, Molins said. He killed two people in the market and took an unknown number of hostages.

The supermarket's manager, who would identify herself only as Samia, was in her office when she heard the shots.

"Call the gendarmes," she told her employees. "There's a terrorist in the store."

She said she helped evacuate as many people as possible. Other people sought safety in the store's meat locker.

During the standoff, Lakdim requested the release of Salah Abdeslam, the sole surviving assailant of the Nov. 13, 2015, attacks in Paris that left 130 people dead. The interior minister suggested, however, that Abdeslam's release wasn't a key motive.

The IS-linked Amaq news agency said the attacker was responding to its call to target countries in the U.S.-led coalition carrying out airstrikes against IS militants in Syria and Iraq.

Samia was overcome by emotion when asked about the attack.

"I'm utterly devastated. This is really a tragedy. I feel deeply for the victims," she said, adding that Beltrame "is a hero. He saved our colleague - our Julie."

The mayor of Trebes, Eric Menassi, was equally emotional.

"They all looked death in the eye," he said. "There will be a before and an after. I think nothing will ever be the same."

Elaine Ganley and Sylvie Corbet in Paris and Renata Brito in Trebes contributed to this story.

Egypt: Car bomb in Alexandria kills 2 policemen

CAIRO (AP) — A bomb placed under a nearby car exploded Saturday in the coastal city of Alexandria as the city security chief's convoy passed by, killing two policemen and wounding four others, the Interior Ministry said.

Local media reports said Gen. Mostafa al-Nimr survived the explosion and he was seen on a local TV channel in good condition while inspecting the area of the blast shortly after it took place.

The Interior Ministry had earlier reported only one policeman killed in the blast which occurred in the vicinity of a police station in the city's central Roshdi district.

Health Ministry spokesman Khaled Megahed told The Associated Press that two policemen were killed and four others wounded in today's explosion, adding that one civilian was also wounded.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

The attack comes just days ahead of Egypt's presidential election, in which President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi is virtually certain to be re-elected. It also comes during a massive security operation involving land, sea and air forces in areas covering north and central Sinai and parts of Egypt's Nile Delta and the Western Desert, along the porous border with Libya.

The Interior Ministry said the explosive device had been placed under a car and it detonated as the convoy passed by.

State-run MENA news agency said the public prosecutor has ordered an investigation into the incident.

Egypt has for years been struggling to contain an Islamic insurgency spearheaded by a local affiliate of the extremist Islamic State group in the turbulent Sinai region but attacks on the mainland have also occurred.

The country has been under a state of emergency since April 2017, when suicide bombings struck two Coptic Christian churches in Alexandria and Tanta on Palm Sunday in an attack claimed later by the Islamic State group.

Hundreds gather to leave second pocket in Syria's Ghouta

By BASSEM MROUE, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hundreds of members of a rebel group and their relatives boarded Saturday 17 buses in preparation to leave eastern Ghouta to opposition-held areas north of the country Saturday as part of an agreement to evacuate the second of three pockets held by opposition fighters east of the capital Damascus, Syria's state media reported.

State TV and the government-controlled Syrian Central Military Media said more than 500 fighters and their relatives will leave Saturday night toward northern Syria, and hundreds more will evacuate the following day. State TV and SCMM earlier said that a total of 7,000 people will leave four towns in eastern Ghouta before reporting that the number had dropped to just over 3,000, without providing an explanation.

The departure comes a day after an agreement was reached between Faylaq al-Rahman, the second most powerful rebel group in eastern Ghouta, and the Russians to surrender the second of three pockets in eastern Ghouta, where rebels have been holding up over the past years.

Earlier in the day, bulldozers removed giant sand barriers from a main road in the town of Harasta that will be used by the rebels and their relatives to make their way to the country's north. After sunset, several buses carrying evacuees arrived at the edge of the town of Arbeen where they gathered before heading north.

The government-controlled SCMM said a corridor was prepared for Faylaq al-Rahman members and their relatives to leave the towns of Zamalka, Arbeen, Ein Tarma and Jobar.

The evacuations come after thousands streamed out of Harasta, the first pocket after a similar negotiated deal for the evacuation of armed fighters and civilians. On Friday night, Harasta was void of rebels for the first time in six years.

"The city of Harasta in eastern Ghouta is free of terrorism," SCMM said referring to opposition fighters that the government refers to as terrorists.

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Faylaq al-Rahman said in a statement Friday that the deal will lead to the immediate evacuation of sick and wounded people for treatment and to allow aid to enter the besieged area.

The group added that opposition fighters and their relatives who decide to leave eastern Ghouta will head to rebel-held parts of northern Syria while civilians who choose to stay will be guaranteed safety.

It said that Russian military police will deploy in Faylaq al-Rahman-controlled areas including the Arbeen, Zamalka, Ein Tarma and Jobar. A prisoner exchange will take place between the group and the government, the group added.

Eight government supporters released by Faylaq al-Rahman told state TV about the mistreatment they were subjected to while being held underground and given little food and water. One of those released, whose left eye appeared closed in the report, said "they hit me on the eye damaging it."

Another person released said "they used to beat us, keep us hungry and place us underground in the cold and we did not know when they would kill us."

Syrian state TV said Faylaq al-Rahman will hand over maps of underground tunnels as well as others marking mines planted by the group in areas it controlled.

On Feb. 18, a concerted military offensive, backed by Russian airstrikes, squeezed the rebels and civilians in the area under an intense bombing campaign and tightened the siege. The U.N. estimated that nearly 400,000 people remained in the enclave before the latest offensive began.

The government assault triggered a mass movement of people trying to escape the violence in the Damascus suburbs. Some have moved deeper into the rebel-held enclave, while 105,000 others have crossed the front lines toward government-controlled areas or left to rebel-held parts in northern Syria, according to state news agency SANA.

The government's crushing offensive killed nearly 1,500 people and wounded more than 5,000, according to opposition activists.

After the departure of Faylaq al-Rahman fighters, the only rebel-held pocket in eastern Ghouta will be the town of Douma which is controlled by the powerful Army of Islam group.

On Saturday, hundreds more left Douma to government-controlled areas including 700 government supporters that the rebel group had been holding for years, according to SCMM.

In the rebel-held northwestern city of Idlib, a car bomb exploded near a court building killing at least six people and wounding 25, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the opposition's Syrian Civil Defense.

In the capital Damascus, a mortar shell hit the Fayhaa soccer stadium, killing footballer Samir Massoud, who used to play for the Army Club, and wounding six other people.

The French Presidency said in a statement Saturday that President Emmanuel Macron spoke by phone with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan the day before and French leader said he "had very clearly expressed" his concerns as soon as the Turkish military operation in the Kurdish Syrian enclave of Afrin started.

"Nothing must lead to weakening the pressure" on what is left of the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, Macron said.

Turkey launched an operation in Afrin to clear it of Syrian Kurdish militia, which Turkey considers to be a security threat, on Jan. 20. It captured the town of Afrin in a major phase of the offensive on Sunday.

Turkey's official Anadolu news agency cited the army Saturday, saying "complete control" has been established in the Afrin region. It said the military was continuing its sweep for mines and explosives to allow Afrin's residents to return.

Macron agreed with Erdogan to pursue "deep and intense" discussions in coming days about Syria, the French presidency's statement added.

Associated Press writers Sylvie Corbet in Paris and Zeynep Bilginsoy in Istanbul contributed to this report.

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Trump order would ban most transgender troops from serving

By KEN THOMAS, Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump released an order Friday night banning most transgender troops from serving in the military except under “limited circumstances,” following up on his calls last year to ban transgender individuals from serving.

The White House said retaining troops with a history or diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” — those who may require substantial medical treatment — “presents considerable risk to military effectiveness and lethality.”

Trump surprised the Pentagon’s leadership in a 2017 tweet when he declared he would reverse an Obama-era plan to allow transgender individuals to serve openly. His push for the ban has been blocked by several legal challenges, and four federal courts have ruled against the ban. The Pentagon responded by allowing those serving to stay in the military, and began allowing transgender individuals to enlist beginning Jan. 1.

“This new policy will enable the military to apply well-established mental and physical health standards — including those regarding the use of medical drugs — equally to all individuals who want to join and fight for the best military force the world has ever seen,” White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Friday.

The new policy was promptly assailed by congressional Democrats and civil rights groups. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi tweeted, “No one with the strength & bravery to serve in the U.S. military should be turned away because of who they are. This hateful ban is purpose-built to humiliate our brave transgender members of the military who serve with honor & dignity.”

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest LGBT civil rights organization, accused the Trump administration of pushing “anti-transgender prejudices onto the military.”

“There is simply no way to spin it, the Trump-Pence Administration is going all in on its discriminatory, unconstitutional and despicable ban on transgender troops,” said HRC President Chad Griffin.

Joshua Block, a senior staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union LGBT & HIV Project, said the policy “effectively coerces transgender people who wish to serve into choosing between their humanity and their country, and makes it clear that transgender service members are not welcome.”

Trump received recommendations from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in February for dealing with transgender individuals serving in the military. The White House said Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen agreed with the policy.

Earlier Friday, Maj. David Eastburn, a Pentagon spokesman, said the announcement of a new policy would have no immediate practical effect on the military because the Pentagon is obliged to continue to recruit and retain transgender people in accordance with current law.

The Justice Department said in a statement late Friday that it would defend the Pentagon’s authority to “implement personnel policies they have determined are necessary to best defend our nation” and would ask the courts to lift all related preliminary injunctions.

The issue has become mired in a complicated string of political statements, court decisions and policy reviews since Trump first stunned his administration with his tweets last July. It’s unclear how much impact the court decisions will have on Trump’s decision. Activist groups had worried the administration could enact such strict enlistment and health care restrictions that it would become all but impossible for transgender troops to join or continue serving.

Under guidelines presented in December, the Pentagon could disqualify potential recruits with gender dysphoria, those with a history of medical treatments associated with gender transition and those who underwent reconstruction. Such recruits could be allowed in if a medical provider certified they’ve been clinically stable in the preferred sex for 18 months and are free of significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas.

Transgender individuals receiving hormone therapy must be stable on their medication for 18 months.

The requirements make it challenging for a transgender recruit to pass. But they mirror conditions laid out by President Barack Obama’s administration in 2016, when the Pentagon initially lifted its ban on transgender troops serving openly in the military.

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China tells US it will defend interests after Trump tariffs

BEIJING (AP) — China's newly appointed economic czar told U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on Saturday that Beijing is ready to defend its interests after President Donald Trump announced plans to slap tariffs on nearly \$50 billion in Chinese imports.

Vice Premier Liu He told Mnuchin in a phone call that the order Trump signed Thursday violates international trade rules, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The White House says the planned tariffs are aimed at punishing Beijing for allegedly stealing American technology and pressuring U.S. companies to hand it over.

Xinhua cited Liu as saying that China is "ready and capable of defending its national interest and hopes both sides will remain rational."

China said Friday that it planned to raise tariffs on a \$3 billion list of U.S. goods, including pork, apples and steel pipes in response to the steel and aluminum duties earlier announced by Trump.

The Chinese move appeared to be a warning shot aimed at increasing domestic U.S. pressure on Trump by making clear which exporters, including farm areas that voted for the president in 2016, might be hurt.

On Friday, American farmers from hog producers in Iowa to apple growers in Washington state and winemakers in California expressed deep disappointment over being put in the middle of a potential trade war with China by the president many of them helped elect.

China's Commerce Ministry said Beijing was considering a tariff increase of 25 percent on pork and aluminum scrap, mirroring Trump's 25 percent charge on steel. A second list of goods, including wine, apples, ethanol and stainless steel pipe, would be charged 15 percent, mirroring Trump's tariff hike on aluminum.

Overall, the nation's farmers shipped nearly \$20 billion of goods to China in 2017. The American pork industry sent \$1.1 billion in products, making China the No. 3 market for U.S. pork.

"No one wins in these tit-for-tat trade disputes, least of all the farmers and the consumers," said National Pork Producers Council President Jim Heimerl, a pig farmer from Johnstown, Ohio.

The U.S. has complained for years about China's sharp-elbowed trading practices, accusing it of pirating trade secrets, manipulating its currency, forcing foreign companies to hand over technology, and flooding world markets with cheap steel and aluminum that drive down prices and put U.S. manufacturers out of business.

The spiraling trade dispute between the world's two largest economies has spurred concerns among companies and investors that global commerce could be depressed.

This story corrects Liu He's title.

Today in History By The Associated Press.

Today in History

Today is Palm Sunday, March 25, the 84th day of 2018. There are 281 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 25, 1965, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led 25,000 people to the Alabama state capitol in Montgomery after a five-day march from Selma to protest the denial of voting rights to blacks. Later that day, civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo, a white Detroit homemaker, was shot and killed by Ku Klux Klansmen.

On this date:

In 1634, English colonists sent by Lord Baltimore arrived in present-day Maryland.

In 1776, Gen. George Washington, commander of the Continental Army, was awarded the first Congressional Gold Medal by the Continental Congress.

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In 1865, during the Civil War, Confederate forces attacked Fort Stedman in Virginia but were forced to withdraw because of counterattacking Union troops.

In 1911, 146 people, mostly young female immigrants, were killed when fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. in New York.

In 1918, French composer Claude Debussy (dehb-yoo-SEE') died in Paris at age 55.

In 1924, the Second Hellenic Republic was proclaimed in Greece.

In 1931, in the so-called "Scottsboro Boys" case, nine young black men were taken off a train in Alabama, accused of raping two white women; after years of convictions, death sentences and imprisonment, the nine were eventually vindicated.

In 1947, a coal-dust explosion inside the Centralia Coal Co. Mine No. 5 in Washington County, Illinois, claimed 111 lives; 31 men survived.

In 1957, a signing ceremony was held for the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community.

In 1975, King Faisal (FY'-suhl) of Saudi Arabia was shot to death by a nephew with a history of mental illness. (The nephew was beheaded in June 1975.)

In 1988, in New York City's so-called "Preppie Killer" case, Robert Chambers Jr. pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter in the death of 18-year-old Jennifer Levin. (Chambers received 5 to 15 years in prison; he was released in 2003 after serving the full sentence.)

In 1990, 87 people, most of them Honduran and Dominican immigrants, were killed when fire raced through an illegal social club in New York City.

Ten years ago: The Pentagon said it had mistakenly shipped electrical fuses for an intercontinental ballistic missile to Taiwan in fall 2006. (When the error was recently discovered, the military quickly recovered the four fuses.) Oscar-winning screenwriter Abby Mann ("Judgment at Nuremberg") died in Beverly Hills, California, at age 80. Herb Peterson, the inventor of McDonald's Egg McMuffin, died in Santa Barbara, California, at age 89.

Five years ago: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Afghan President Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeye) made a show of unusual unity between their two nations in Kabul as the U.S. military ceded control of its last detention facility in Afghanistan, ending a long-standing irritant in relations. Anthony Lewis, 85, a prize-winning columnist for The New York Times who championed liberal causes for three decades, died in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

One year ago: A man sitting at the back of a public bus on the Las Vegas Strip opened fire for what authorities called "no apparent reason" as passengers got off at a stop in the heart of the tourism corridor; one man was killed. (A judge later declared the suspect unfit to face trial.) A scuffle broke out at Bolsa Chica State Beach in Southern California where supporters of President Donald Trump were marching when counter-protesters doused organizers with pepper spray. Stars and fans gathered for a public memorial to honor late actresses Debbie Reynolds and Carrie Fisher.

Today's Birthdays: Movie reviewer Gene Shalit is 92. Former astronaut James Lovell is 90. Feminist activist and author Gloria Steinem is 84. Singer Anita Bryant is 78. Singer Aretha Franklin is 76. Actor Paul Michael Glaser is 75. Singer Sir Elton John is 71. Actress Bonnie Bedelia is 70. Actress-comedian Mary Gross is 65. Actor James McDaniel is 60. Former Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., is 60. Movie producer Amy Pascal is 60. Rock musician Steve Norman (Spandau Ballet) is 58. Actress Brenda Strong is 58. Actor Fred Goss is 57. Actor-writer-director John Stockwell is 57. Actress Marcia Cross is 56. Author Kate DiCamillo is 54. Actress Lisa Gay Hamilton is 54. Actress Sarah Jessica Parker is 53. Baseball Hall of Famer Tom Glavine is 52. TV personality Ben Mankiewicz is 51. Olympic bronze medal figure skater Debi Thomas is 51. Actor Laz Alonso is 47. Singer Melanie Blatt (All Saints) is 43. Actor Domenick Lombardozzi is 42. Actor Lee Pace is 39. Actor Sean Faris is 36. Comedian-actor Alex Moffat (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 36. Auto racer Danica Patrick is 36. Actress-singer Katharine McPhee is 34. Comedian-actor Chris Redd (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 33. Singer Jason Castro is 31. Rapper Big Sean is 30. Rap DJ-producer Ryan Lewis is 30. Actor Matthew Beard is 29. Actress-singer Aly (AKA Alyson) Michalka (mish-AL'-kah) is 29. Actor Kiowa Gordon is 28. Actress Seychelle Gabriel is 27.

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Thought for Today: "It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for something you are not." — Andre Gide (zheed), French author and critic (1869-1951).

Riddle Answer: A Clock