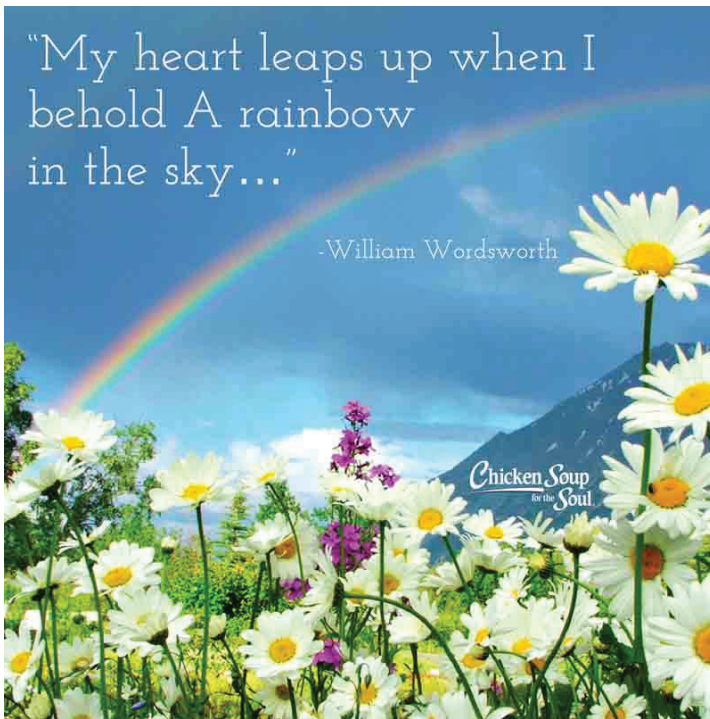


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- 1- Kristi Peterson Bookkeeping Ad
- 1- Blood Drive Ad
- 1- Chicken Soup for the Soul
- 2- A blizzard may be coming
- 2- Kindergarten Screening Ad
- 3- Vold Auctioneers Ad
- 3- Freeland's 50th Anniversary
- 3- Help Wanted at Langford's Front Porch
- 3- Carlson Bridal Shower
- 4- Record cold first week of April
- 5- Conde National League Bowling
- 5- Jency Agency Ad
- 5- Vold Auctioneers Ad
- 6- Farmers Union PSA ad
- 6- Areas out west already under Winter Storm Watch
- 7- Today in Weather History
- 8- Today's Forecast
- 9- Yesterday's Weather
- 9- National Weather map
- 9- Today's Weather Almanac
- 10- Daily Devotional
- 11- 2018 Groton Community Events
- 12- News from the Associated Press

The JH Track Meet scheduled for Thursday at Sisseton has been Postponed.

Kristi Peterson Bookkeeping
Simple Solutions for YOU
605/216-4474 ~ peterson4@nvc.net

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

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



Blood Drive!
Monday, April 16
Noon to 6 p.m.
Groton American Legion

To make an appointment, call
Carol Osterman: 397-8498
or June Ackman: 397-8369

JUST
1 DONATION
SAVES
3 LIVES

A blizzard may be coming!

The weather is going to take a turn for the worse. But how bad remains to be seen. Already, the Moberidge Police Department issued the following statement yesterday:

"The National Weather Service has issued a severe weather alert for Moberidge and the surrounding area. The City of Moberidge could get up to 14" of snow and winds gusting to 55 mph. The system will move into our area starting late Thursday night and continue into Saturday morning. The emergency routes will be plowed and kept open. Remember there is no parking on all emergency routes during a snow alert. All vehicles parked on the emergency routes during the storm will be towed. The Moberidge Police Department will keep citizens updated on all other plowing efforts once they begin. Please remove your vehicles from the streets and avenues during this time. If your vehicle is plowed around you will be ticketed and your vehicle towed. Stay safe, this could be a very dangerous storm. Do not travel unless it is necessary."

It's also a good time to remind Groton City residents to begin preparing to have your vehicles moved off the streets. If we get the anticipated snow fall, having your vehicles off the streets will make it easier for the city public works department to remove the snow off the street. In addition, if you keep your vehicle on the street, you may end up digging your vehicle out of a 2-3 feet windrow and that will be no fun. Strong winds are expected with the storm which will cause large drifts in and around your vehicles.

Many events scheduled for the weekend are putting their messages out there that they may have to postpone them. Some are already postponed.

2018 Groton Area Elementary

Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning

5 on or before September 1, 2018

When: Friday, April 20

Parents of children who will be turning 5 on or before September 1, 2018, in the Groton Area School District are asked to contact Heidi Krueger at the Groton Area Elementary School during school hours at 397-2317 to set up a screening time or to confirm their screening time.

***Students currently attending Junior Kindergarten will not be screened at this time.**

Packets will be sent home shortly with a scheduled time and additional paperwork that will need to be completed.

Kindergarten Roundup will take place at the Groton Area Elementary School. Please check in at the office.



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Freeland's 50th Anniversary

John and Shari Freeland of Houghton celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on March 22, 2018. They will be honored with an open house celebration on Saturday, April 21, 2018 from 4-8 pm at the American Legion in Claremont. The honorees request no gifts.

Help Wanted

Full-time and Part-time cook positions available at The Front Porch in Langford. Day and evening hours available. Apply in person or call 605-493-6570, ask for Suzie. (0411.0418)

Bridal Shower

A bridal shower for Holly Carlson, bride-to-be of Tyler Candor, will be held Saturday, April 14, 2018, from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton.

CONSIGNMENT AUCTION

Sat. April 28, 2018 10:00 am
Trucks-N-Tractors
14069 434th Ave.
Webster, SD 57274

Now taking Consignments
Tractors, Combines, all types of
Farm & Haying Equipment, Vehicle,
Recreational, Sporting,
& Construction Equipment
To consign you equipment, call our
office at 605-448-0048 or

Bill Jensen 605-848-0943
Don Wolter 605-881-6789
Larry Lekness 605-880-5933
Jan Vold 605-228-4250

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Farm & Personal Property Auctions



Record Cold First Week of April 15-20 degrees below average

City	Average Temp April 1-7, 2018	Record Coldest	When records begin
Aberdeen	17.6°	17.6° (2018)	1893
Watertown	18.4°	18.4° (2018)	1893
Pierre	24.3°	20.9° (1936)	1933
Sisseton	20.4°	19.4° (1936)	1900
Mobridge	20.4°	19.1° (1936)	1911



weather.gov/Aberdeen



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen

The first 7 days of April have never been as cold (since records began) as they were this year in Aberdeen and Watertown.

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Conde National League

April 9 Team Standings: Pirates 31, Mets 30, Colts 26, Braves 26, Cubs 24, Giants 19

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 222, Lance Frohling 192, Topper Tastad 183

Men's High Series: Lance Frohling 520, Butch Farmen 516, Russ Bethke 515

Women's High Games: Joyce Walter 200; Mary Larson 169, 169; Nancy Radke 164

Women's High Series: Joyce Walter 505, Mary Larson 478, Nancy Radke 467

Groton Home for Sale



\$299,900

304 N State Street, Groton

Enjoy this summers sunsets overlooking your large fenced backyard. This beautiful home sits on just under 1 Acre of land. 5 bedrooms, office, Media room , large rec room, surround sound, built-ins & plenty of storage. Not to mention 3 stall garage + new shed. All kitchen appliances to stay + washer & dryer.

www.flexmls.com/share/1NpDJ/304NSTATEStGrotonSD57445

JENCY AGENCY

◆ Real Estate ◆ Property Management ◆

614 South Main Street, Aberdeen ~ 605-725-3130

Brittany Smart: 605/290-1487

REMINDER

RETIREMENT FARM AUCTION

Saturday, April 14, 2018 10AM

Location: 11701 403rd Ave., Houghton, SD 57449

Online Bidding Available during the Auction!

Register to bid at Ag4bid.com

This auction features a well maintained line of Farm Equipment, Tractors, Harvest, Planting, Tillage, Trucks, Livestock & Haying Equipment to include: JD 9610 combine ▪ JD 930 platform flex head ▪ 2004 international eagle 9400i Semi ▪ 1973 GMC 13sp. tandem truck ▪ 1991 cornhusker grain trailer, ▪ JD 1980 4440 ▪ Versatile 875 ▪ Case IH 9150, Summers 30' Super coulter ▪ JD EO400 Rotary Hoe ▪ IHC 496 30' disk ▪ Kilbros 490 grain cart.

For full sale bill go to www.voldrealty.com for pictures & full listing.

Owners: Terry & Marcia Haaland

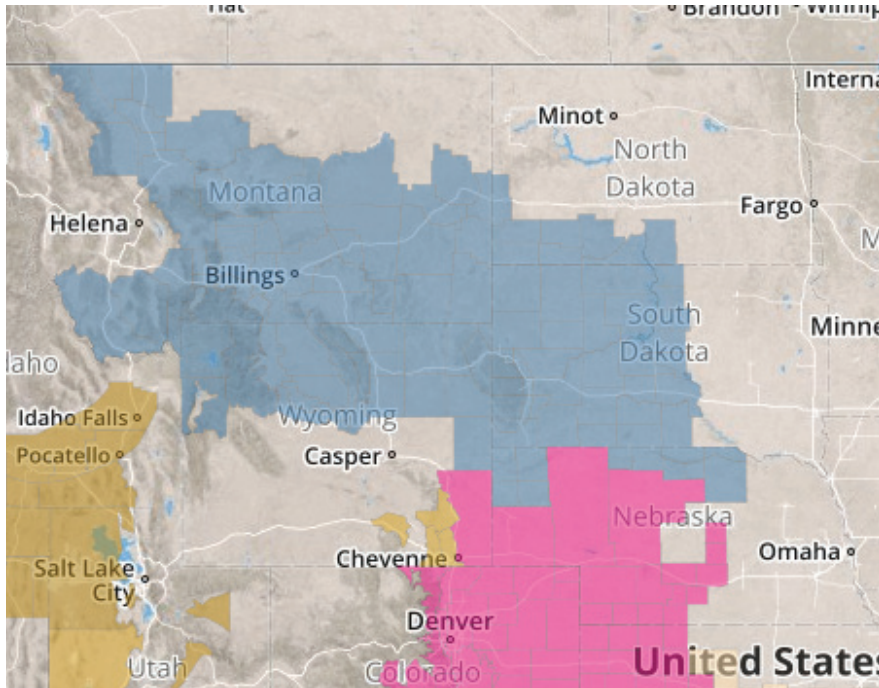
www.voldrealty.com ▪ voldauctions@ag4bid.com

VOLD AUCTIONEERS & REALTY

BRITTON, SD ▪ 605-448-0048

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A large part of the upper plains is already under a winter storm watch (blue shaded area). The storm is expected to trek east and its movement will be slower than the last storm that hit the area last weekend.



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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Today in Weather History

April 11, 1993: Heavy wet snow fell over a portion of northeast South Dakota, mainly east of Aberdeen and north of Watertown. The snowfall began on the 10th and carried into the 11th. 2 to 6 inches were reported across the area. However, 8 inches were reported near Summit and 7 inches near Sisseton.

April 11, 2007: A large upper-level low-pressure area wrapped snow into far northeast South Dakota. Snow covered and slushy roads resulted from the heavy wet snow making travel tough. Some schools and events postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Sisseton and Milbank, 7 inches at Castlewood, 8 inches at Bryant, 9 inches at Toronto and Clear Lake, and 12 inches at Summit.

April 11, 2008: An intense area of low pressure moving northeast across the Central Plains brought widespread heavy snow and strong winds to parts of central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 3 to 16 inches combined with north winds of 30 to 45 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with blizzard conditions and heavy drifting affecting much of the area. A few thunderstorms also occurred, bringing rapid snowfall rates to some areas. Many vehicles went into the ditch with many other accidents occurring. Most roads became nearly impassable with no travel advised for parts of central and much of northeast South Dakota. There were many people stranded to wait out the storm. Also, many schools and businesses were closed on Friday the 11th. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Faulkton, Ree Heights, Kidder, and Hayti, 7 inches at Garden City, Castlewood, Miller, Britton, and near Stephan, 9 inches at Waubay, Bryant, and Roy Lake, 10 inches at Big Stone City and Milbank, 11 inches at Wilmot, Watertown, and Victor, 15 inches at Summit, and 16 inches at Clear Lake.

1965: Severe thunderstorms in the Upper Midwest spawned fifty-one tornadoes killing over 250 people and causing more than 200 million dollars damage. Indiana, Ohio and Michigan were hardest hit in the "Palm Sunday Tornado Outbreak". Although no F5's were officially reported, at least 22 were rated as F3 or F4. This is the third deadliest day for tornadoes on record, behind the Super Outbreak of 4/3/1974, and the outbreak that included the Tri-State Tornado of 3/18/1925. Dr. Ted Fujita discovered suction vortices during the Palm Sunday tornado outbreak. It had been believed the reason why tornadoes could hit one house and leave another across the street completely unscathed was because the whole tornado would "jump" from one house to another. However, the actual reason is because most of the destruction is caused by suction vortices: small, intense mini-tornadoes within the main tornado.

1988: Sixteen cities in the western U.S., nine in California, reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 95 degrees at Sacramento and 96 degrees at Bakersfield, California were the warmest of record for so early in the season.

1989: Forty-four cities in the south central and eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 25 degrees at Conway Arkansas, 29 degrees at Dallas/Fort Worth Texas, and 22 degrees at Ozark Arkansas, were April records. Lows of 26 degrees at Hot Springs Arkansas and 31 degrees at Shreveport Louisiana equaled April records.

2012: The deluge began around 3:30 a.m. Over the next few hours, fast-moving hailstones pummeled the area north of Amarillo, Tex., which had lately been sitting in dust due to a lack of precipitation, according to the news organization. The hail mixed with melting hail turning the dust to mud and the mix create four-foot high mounds that shut down a major highway for the next 18 hours.

Broton Daily Independent

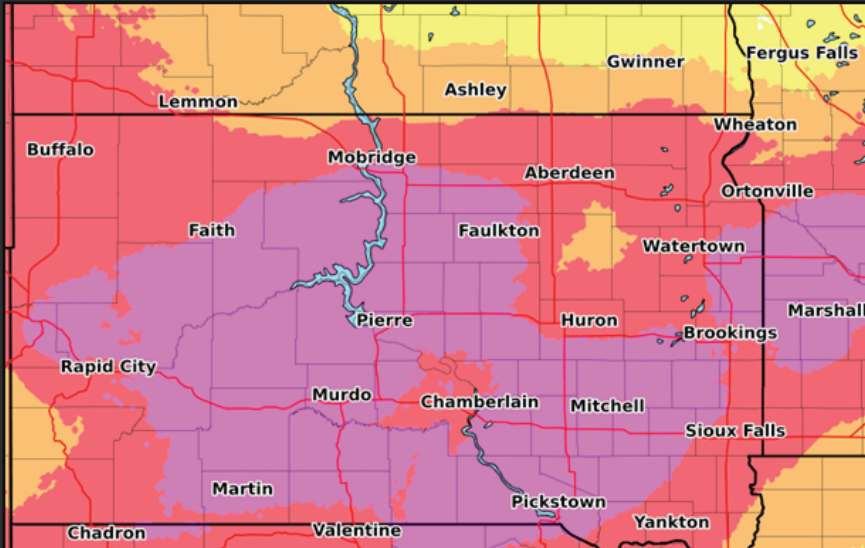
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Wed Apr 11	Thu Apr 12	Fri Apr 13	Sat Apr 14	Sun Apr 15	Mon Apr 16	Tue Apr 17
46°F	43°F	35°F	33°F	34°F	40°F	39°F
31°F	32°F	25°F	16°F	19°F	25°F	24°F
ENE 13 MPH	W 12 MPH	NE 31 MPH	N 29 MPH	N 13 MPH	NE 14 MPH	ESE 18 MPH
Precip 50%	Precip 10%	Precip 80%	Precip 80%			Precip 20%



Heavy Snow & Blowing Snow Threat

Impact Outlook: *Friday - Saturday*



None
No impacts are expected at this time

Minor ❄️
Light accumulations with minor road impacts possible

Moderate ❄️❄️
Slippery roads and low visibility are possible

Significant ❄️❄️❄️
Snow over roads and greatly reduced visibilities are possible

Extreme ❄️❄️❄️❄️
Major impacts are possible, travel may be impossible

What you should know

We continue to monitor the development of a significant storm system.

Confidence is increasing for major impacts from both heavy snow and blowing snow.

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 4/11/2018 5:25 AM Central

Published on: 04/11/2018 at 5:40AM

Light rain is possible today as a low pressure system crosses the region. A significant winter storm will then impact the region Friday through Saturday. The storm system will have the potential to bring heavy snow, along with very strong northerly winds to the area. Stay tuned to future forecasts regarding this upcoming storm.

Groton Daily Independent

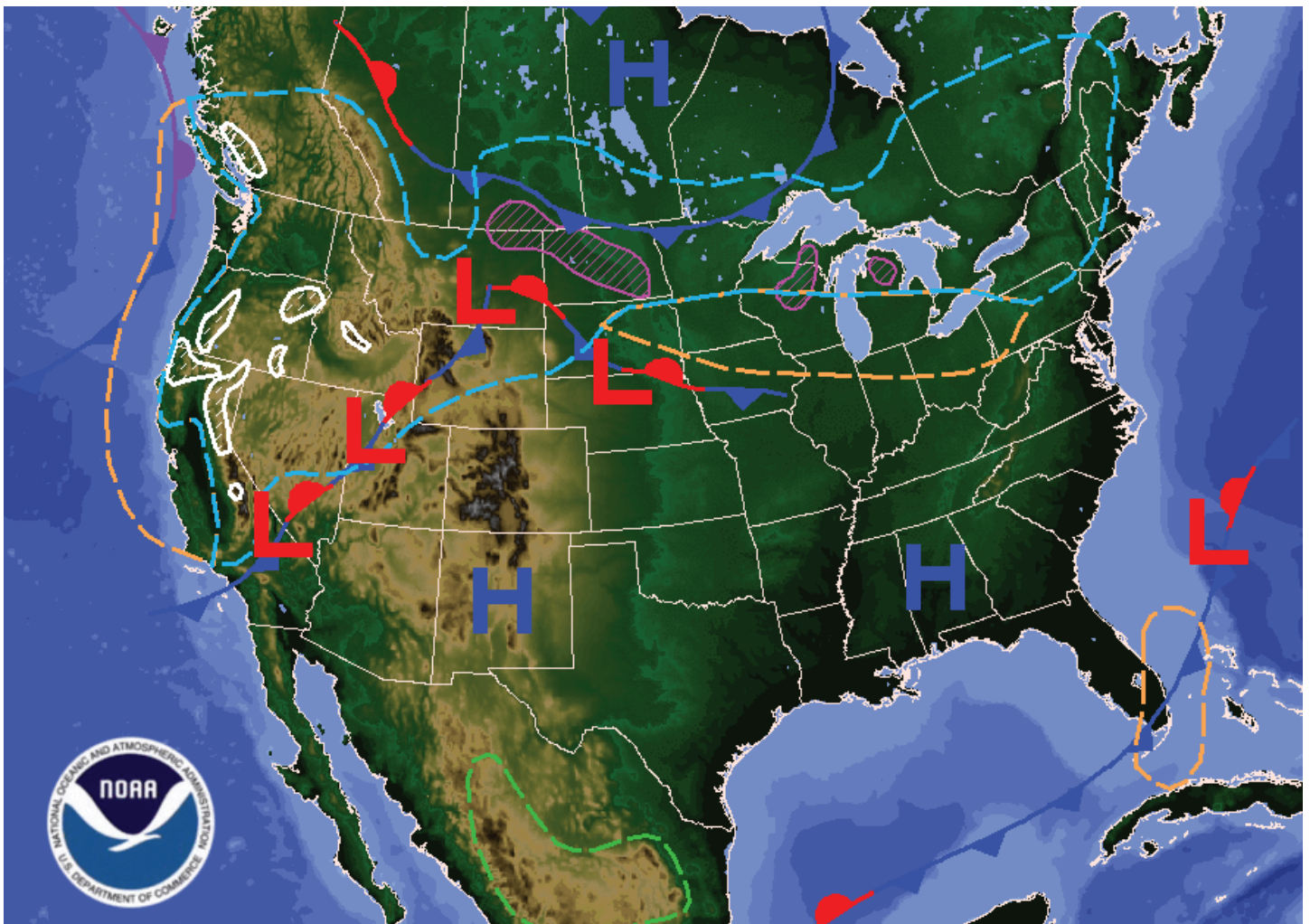
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 46.5 F at 4:58 PM
Low Outside Temp: 30.2 F at 12:20 AM
Wind Chill:
High Gust: 17.0 Mph at 8:51 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 86° in 1910
Record Low: 8° in 1939
Average High: 55°F
Average Low: 30°F
Average Precip in April: 0.52
Precip to date in April: 0.61
Average Precip to date: 2.70
Precip Year to Date: 2.68
Sunset Tonight: 8:14 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:53



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Wed, Apr 11, 2018, issued 4:59 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

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



CROWNS AND COMPASSION

He "crowns you with love and compassion," wrote David. What an amazing statement. Is it possible for us to understand what this means? Is God Himself crowning us with His love and compassion? What might our author have had in mind when he wrote this? Could it mean that we are kings in God's eyes?

Not really. It means that when we became His children, He crowned us with His loyal, never-ending, steadfast love. We are His now, and we will be His forever throughout eternity, and nothing will ever separate us from Him or His love.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote that "If we die with Him we will also live with Him, and if we endure hardship we will also reign with Him."

Although we may suffer great hardships in this life, God assures us that someday we will live eternally with Him. So, it's worth it. And when we live in Christ's Kingdom, we will share His eternal reign with Him.

There may be times when our suffering may cause us to doubt God's love. When these doubts arise, we must never forget that we have been crowned with His love and compassion. "Our present sufferings," said Paul, "are not worth comparing with the incredible glory that will be revealed in us." The assurance of His love gives us hope.

Once crowned with His love and compassion we need to remember that we will, as Paul also said, "see the incredible wealth of His grace and kindness." When we are crowned by God Himself, what more can we ask?

Prayer: Father, Your love is beyond our understanding. But we accept it with grateful hearts and rejoice. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 103:4b and crowns you with love and compassion,

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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)
- 1/27/2019 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

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Mega Millions

05-13-31-43-53, Mega Ball: 20, Megaplier: 2

(five, thirteen, thirty-one, forty-three, fifty-three; Mega Ball: twenty; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$89 million

Authorities arrest suspect in fatal stabbing in Watertown

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have arrested a 38-year-old man in the fatal stabbing of a Watertown man.

Deputies with the Codington County Sheriff's Office were called to the stabbing at a mobile home court about 9:30 p.m. Monday. The victim, 28-year-old Kristopher Spotts, was taken to a hospital, where he died.

The Watertown Public Opinion reports the suspect, who is from Watertown, is being held on \$750,000 bond. He faces charges of second-degree murder and aggravated assault.

Sheriff Brad Howell says the stabbing is an isolated incident and there is no danger to the public.

2 South Dakota senior volunteer programs lose main sponsor

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Two senior volunteer programs in eastern South Dakota are in limbo after their primary sponsor announced it will no longer administer them.

Volunteers of America will stop facilitating the Foster Grandparents and Retired Senior Volunteer programs in eastern and northeastern South Dakota by the end of May, the Aberdeen American News reported. The organization has served as the two programs' primary local sponsor for nearly a decade.

Both service programs are available to people ages 55 or older. Foster Grandparents participants receive a stipend based on logged volunteer hours. The program requires participants to meet certain income guidelines and log a minimum of 15 hours a week.

Retired Senior Volunteer, or RSVP, connects seniors to service opportunities like mentoring children or participating in Meals on Wheels, which delivers meals to people unable to buy or prepare their own food.

The sponsor organization decided not to reapply for federal funding because of fiscal and program restrictions, said Stephanie Monroe, managing director for children, youth and family services programs for Volunteers of America of the Dakotas.

Local seniors can still directly contact school districts or other agencies to continue volunteering, Monroe said.

"If they can continue to serve in that capacity, we absolutely encourage that," she said.

More than 700 individuals have volunteered at 200 sites in Aberdeen, Brookings and Watertown through Volunteers of America since 2009.

The programs were receiving funding from their federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service.

There haven't been any recent changes to the program's federal funding on a national level, said Samantha Warfield, a spokeswoman for the agency. Another group could tap into the federal money to administer the programs in the area, though it couldn't be immediate.

Warfield said the next round of applications will be announced after fiscal year 2019.

Information from: Aberdeen American News, <http://www.aberdeennews.com>

Authorities ID victims of Lyman County rollover crash

PRESHO, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified a Rapid City man who died in a one-vehicle crash in Lyman County that also seriously injured two boys.

The Highway Patrol says the three were in a sport utility vehicle that went into the ditch off Interstate 90 and rolled west of Presho on Thursday morning.

Fifty-seven-year-old Bill Holt died at the scene. Two teenage boys were flown to a Sioux Falls hospital with what authorities say are life-threatening injuries. Their names weren't released. The patrol says they're from Greenwood, Indiana.

Tribal economic summit focuses on youth

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — More than 150 tribal leaders from the Great Plains to the Rocky Mountains are gathered in Rapid City for an economic summit with a focus on youth.

The second annual Great Plains Tribal Leader's Economic Summit includes students from Pine Ridge schools. KOTA-TV reports organizers say they want to get the leaders of tomorrow involved today.

Oglala Sioux President Scott Weston says economic development in Indian Country is key to the future as well as giving tribal members the opportunity to think for themselves.

The conference runs all day Tuesday and Wednesday at the Ramkota Hotel.

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

Aberdeen businessman sentenced to prison on drug charges

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — An Aberdeen businessman who admitted to keeping methamphetamine in the basement of his downtown pawn shop has been sentenced to serve five years in prison.

Police in October 2016 raided what was then called Aberdeen Pawn and seized about 5 ½ ounces of meth. Prosecutors say that's about a 70-day supply of the drug. Judge Tony Portra said that indicated an intent to distribute.

Fifty-one-year-old store owner Silas Wilson pleaded guilty earlier this year to possessing meth and ingesting the drug. He said he is an addict, and not a dealer.

The American News reports that Wilson was sentenced Monday. In addition to the prison time he was ordered to pay \$208 in fines and fees.

The business has since changed its name to Aberdeen Retail.

Information from: Aberdeen American News, <http://www.aberdeennews.com>

Business owner sues over collapsed Sioux Falls building

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The owner of a smoke shop adjacent to a building that collapsed in Sioux Falls has filed a lawsuit claiming he was wrongly evicted.

Tim Kant operated Eastwold Smoke Shop which was next to the Copper Lounge that collapsed in December 2016 and killed construction worker Ethan McMahon.

The Argus Leader says Kant is suing Legacy Developments and the owners of the former Copper Lounge, saying he was forced out of Eastwold in violation of his lease. The lawsuit says Kant suffered damages that include lost income, inventory losses, and business interruption expenses.

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

South Dakota winter wheat crop in good shape

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's winter wheat crop remains mostly in fair condition as spring progresses.

The federal Agriculture Department says in its weekly crop report that 62 percent of the wheat crop is rated fair, with another 22 percent in good condition. Only 16 percent is rated poor or very poor.

Topsoil moisture supplies statewide are rated about three-fourths adequate to surplus, with subsoil moisture approaching two-thirds in that category.

Algerian military plane crashes in field, killing 257 people

By AOMAR OUALI, Associated Press

ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — A military plane carrying soldiers and their families crashed soon after takeoff in a farm field in northern Algeria on Wednesday, killing 257 people in what appeared to be the worst plane crash in the North African nation's history.

Algeria's Defense Ministry said that those killed included 247 passengers and 10 crew members.

The cause of the crash was unclear, and an investigation has been opened, the ministry said.

The ministry said that most of the victims were soldiers and their relatives and that the victims' bodies were transported to the Algerian army's central hospital in the town of Ain Naadja for identification.

Local media reported that the plane crashed just after taking off. Emergency services converged on the area near the Boufarik military base after the crash. Footage from the scene showed thick black smoke coming off the field, as well as ambulances and Red Crescent vehicles arriving at the site.

It was the first crash of an Algerian military plane since February 2014, when a U.S.-built C-130 Hercules turboprop slammed into a mountain, killing at least 76 people and leaving just one survivor.

In 2003, 10 people died when an Algerian Air Force C-130 crashed after an engine caught fire shortly after it took off from the air base near Boufarik, according to the Aviation Safety Network's database.

The previous deadliest crash on Algerian soil occurred in 2003, when 102 people were killed after a civilian airliner crashed at the end of the runway in Tamanrasset. There was a single survivor in that crash.

The flight had just taken off from Boufarik, about 30 kilometers (20 miles) southwest of the capital Algiers, for a military base in Bechar in southwest Algeria, according to Farouk Achour, chief spokesman for the civil protection services. It was scheduled to make a layover in Tindouf in southern Algeria, home to many refugees from the neighboring Western Sahara, a disputed territory annexed by Morocco.

The Soviet-designed Il-76 military transport plane crashed in an agricultural zone with no residents, Achour said.

The Il-76 model has been in production since 1970s and has an overall good safety record. It is widely used for both commercial freight and military transport. The Algerian military operates several of the planes.

Samuel Petrequin in Paris contributed to this report.

This story corrects the first name of civil protection official, Farouk Achour.

Sessions to address immigration at border sheriffs meeting

LAS CRUCES, N.M. (AP) — As thousands of National Guard troops deploy to the Mexico border, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions plans to bring his firm stance on immigration enforcement to New Mexico where a group of Southwest border sheriffs are meeting Wednesday.

Sessions will speak in Las Cruces at the Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition Annual Spring Meeting with the Southwestern Border Sheriff's Coalition, which is made up of 31 sheriff's departments from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.

Their counties are located within 25 miles (40 kilometers) of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Immigrant rights activists promised to protest Sessions' visit on Wednesday, as they rejected his past

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characterization of the border region during a 2017 visit to El Paso, Texas, as "ground zero" in the Trump administration's fight against cartels, and human traffickers.

"He treated our home like a war zone, referring to it as 'ground zero,'" said Fernando Garcia, executive director of the Border Network for Human Rights in El Paso. "He was wrong then, and he is wrong now."

El Paso is some 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Las Cruces.

Sessions' trip to Las Cruces, a city about an hour north of the border, comes as construction begins nearby on 20-miles (32-kilometers) of steel fencing that officials say is a part of President Donald Trump's promised wall.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have described the new, heightened barrier as a structure that will be harder to get over, under and through than the old post and rail barriers that has lined the stretch of the border's El Paso sector.

Sessions has issued an order directing federal prosecutors to put more emphasis on charging people with illegal entry, citing a "crisis" on the border.

A 37 percent increase in illegal border crossings in March brought more than 50,000 immigrants into the United States, which was triple the number of reported illegal border crossings in the same period last year. It was still far lower, however, than the surges during the last years of the Obama administration and prior decades.

The attorney general's "zero-tolerance" for border-crossing prosecutions calls for taking action against people who are caught illegally entering the United States for the first time. In the past, such offenses have been treated as misdemeanors.

He also recently set quotas for immigration judges to reduce enormous court backlogs, saying they must complete 700 cases a year to earn a satisfactory grade. The quotas take effect Oct. 1.

As Russia warns against US strike, Trump threatens missiles

By **ROBERT BURNS, JOSH LEDERMAN and CATHERINE LUCEY, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Responding to Russian warnings to the U.S. against military strikes in Syria, President Donald Trump said Wednesday that missiles "will be coming" in response to Syria's suspected chemical attack that killed at least 40 people.

"Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria," Trump tweeted. "Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and 'smart!' You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!"

Trump did not detail what a strike would look like, or whether these would be U.S. missiles. The tweet came as Trump administration officials have consulted with global allies on a possible joint military response to Syria's alleged poison gas attack. Trump canceled a foreign trip in order to manage a crisis that is testing his vow to stand up to Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Russian lawmakers have warned the United States that Moscow would view an airstrike on Syria as a war crime, saying it could trigger a direct military clash between the two former Cold War adversaries. Russia's ambassador to Lebanon said any missiles fired at Syria would be shot down and the launching sites targeted — a stark warning of a potential major confrontation in Syria.

The U.S., France and Britain were in extensive consultations about launching a military strike as early as the end of this week, U.S. officials have said. None of the three countries' leaders had made a firm decision, according to the officials, who were not authorized to discuss military planning publicly.

A joint military operation, possibly with France rather than the U.S. in the lead, could send a message of international unity about enforcing the prohibitions on chemical weapons and counter Syria's political and military support from Russia and Iran.

President Emmanuel Macron said France, the U.S. and Britain will decide how to respond in the coming days. He called for a "strong and joint response" to the attack in the Syrian town of Douma on Saturday, which Syrian activists and rescuers say killed 40 people. The Syrian government denies responsibility.

The French president does not need parliamentary permission to launch a military operation. France is

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already involved in the U.S.-led coalition created in 2014 to fight the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq. Multiple IS attacks have targeted French soil, including one last month.

Trump suggested Monday he had little doubt that Syrian government forces were to blame for what he said was a chemical attack, but neither he nor other administration officials have produced hard evidence. Officials suggested such evidence was lacking, or at least not yet at hand. This is in contrast to an incident one year ago in which U.S. intelligence agencies had video and other evidence of certain aspects of the actual attack, which involved the use of Sarin gas. Trump responded by launching Navy cruise missiles at a Syrian airfield.

One official said the U.S., France and Britain were considering military options that would be more extensive than the punitive, one-day strike last April. That strike did not appear to have had the desired effect of deterring Assad from further use of chemical agents. So the three countries are discussing a range of options, including preventing Assad from conducting future attacks by striking military capabilities involved in carrying out such attack, the official said.

Asked whether France would take military action, Macron said his country will continue discussing technical and strategic information with U.S. and British allies and "in the coming days we will announce our decision." He said any action would "target chemical weapons" stocks. Under a 2013 agreement for which Russia was a guarantor, Syria was to have eliminated all its chemical weapons, but it has used chlorine and perhaps other chemicals since then.

Trump spoke by phone with British Prime Minister Theresa May. A British government statement said the two agreed the attack in Syria was "utterly reprehensible" and that the international community must respond "to uphold the worldwide prohibition on the use of chemical weapons." Trump met at the White House with the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who told reporters that he and Trump "see eye to eye" on the Syria problem.

"We cannot tolerate with a war criminal," the emir said, adding, "This matter should end immediately." Qatar hosts the United States' main air operations center for the Middle East, which would coordinate any American air attack in Syria.

A watchdog agency, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, announced that it will send "shortly" a fact-finding mission to Douma, after receiving a request from the Syrian government and its Russian backers to investigate the allegations. It was not immediately clear whether that visit would delay or avert U.S. or allied military action.

The Russian military, which has troops in Syria, said on Monday that its officers had visited the site of the alleged attack and found no evidence to back up reports of poison gas being used.

CEO Zuckerberg apologizes for Facebook's privacy failures

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, BARBARA ORTUTAY and DAVID HAMILTON, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under fire for the worst privacy debacle in his company's history, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg batted away often-aggressive questioning from lawmakers who accused him of failing to protect the personal information of millions of Americans from Russians intent on upsetting the U.S. election.

During some five hours of Senate questioning Tuesday, Zuckerberg apologized several times for Facebook failures, disclosed that his company was "working with" special counsel Robert Mueller in the federal probe of Russian election interference and said it was working hard to change its own operations after the harvesting of users' private data by a data-mining company affiliated with Donald Trump's campaign.

Seemingly unimpressed, Republican Sen. John Thune of South Dakota said Zuckerberg's company had a 14-year history of apologizing for "ill-advised decisions" related to user privacy. "How is today's apology different?" Thune asked.

"We have made a lot of mistakes in running the company," Zuckerberg conceded, and Facebook must work harder at ensuring the tools it creates are used in "good and healthy" ways.

The controversy has brought a flood of bad publicity and sent the company's stock value plunging, but

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Zuckerberg seemed to achieve a measure of success in countering that: Facebook shares surged 4.5 percent for the day, the biggest gain in two years.

In all, he skated largely unharmed through his first day of congressional testimony. He'll face House questioners Wednesday.

The 33-year-old founder of the world's best-known social media giant appeared in a suit and tie, a departure from the T-shirt he's famous for wearing in public as well as in private. Even so, his youth cast a sharp contrast with his often-elderly, gray-haired Senate inquisitors. And the enormous complexity of the social network he created at times defeated the attempts of legislators to hammer him on Facebook's specific failures and how to fix them.

The stakes are high for both Zuckerberg and his company. Facebook has been reeling from its worst-ever privacy failure following revelations last month that the political data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica, which was affiliated with Trump's 2016 campaign, improperly scooped up data on some 87 million users. Zuckerberg has been on an apology tour for most of the past two weeks, culminating in his congressional appearance Tuesday.

Although shaky at times, Zuckerberg seemed to gain confidence as the day progressed. An iconic figure as a billionaire entrepreneur who changed the way people around the world relate to each other, he made a point of repeatedly referring back to the Harvard dorm room where he said Facebook was brought to life.

At times, he showed plenty of steel. After aggressive questioning about Facebook's alleged political bias from Sen. Ted Cruz, for instance, Zuckerberg was asked if he was ready to take a break.

No need. "That was pretty good," he said of the exchange with Cruz.

For the most part, his careful but generally straightforward answers, steeped in the sometimes arcane details of Facebook's underlying functions, often deflected aggressive questioning. When the going got tough, Zuckerberg was able to fall back on: "Our team should follow up with you on that, Senator."

As a result, he found it relatively easy to return to familiar talking points: Facebook made mistakes, he and his executives are very sorry, and they're working very hard to correct the problems and safeguard the users' data.

As for the federal Russia probe that has occupied much of Washington's attention for months, he said he had not been interviewed by special counsel Mueller's team, but "I know we're working with them." He offered no details, citing a concern about confidentiality rules of the investigation.

Earlier this year Mueller charged 13 Russian individuals and three Russian companies in a plot to interfere in the 2016 presidential election through a social media propaganda effort that included online ad purchases using U.S. aliases and politicking on U.S. soil. A number of the Russian ads were on Facebook.

Much of the effort was aimed at denigrating Democrat Hillary Clinton and thereby helping Republican Trump, or simply encouraging divisiveness and undercutting faith in the U.S. system.

Zuckerberg said Facebook had been led to believe Cambridge Analytica had deleted the user data it had harvested and that had been "clearly a mistake." He said Facebook had considered the data collection "a closed case" and had not alerted the Federal Trade Commission. He assured senators the company would handle the situation differently today.

Separately, the company began alerting some of its users that their data was gathered by Cambridge Analytica. A notification that appeared on Facebook for some users Tuesday told them that "one of your friends" used Facebook to log into a now-banned personality quiz app called "This Is Your Digital Life." The notice says the app misused the information, including public profiles, page likes, birthdays and current cities, by sharing it with Cambridge Analytica.

In the hearings, Zuckerberg is trying to both restore public trust in his company and stave off federal regulations that some lawmakers have floated.

Democrat Bill Nelson of Florida said he believes Zuckerberg was taking the congressional hearings seriously "because he knows there is going to be a hard look at regulation."

Republicans have yet to get behind any legislation, but that could change.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., asked Zuckerberg if he would be willing to work with lawmakers to examine

what "regulations you think are necessary in your industry."

Absolutely, Zuckerberg responded, saying later in an exchange with Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, that "I'm not the type of person who thinks that all regulation is bad."

Ahead of the hearing, John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, said, "This is a serious matter, and I think people expect us to take action."

At the hearing, Zuckerberg said: "We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility, and that was a big mistake. It was my mistake, and I'm sorry. I started Facebook, I run it, and I'm responsible for what happens here."

He outlined steps the company has taken to restrict outsiders' access to people's personal information. He also said the company is investigating every app that had access to a large amount of information before the company moved to prevent such access in 2014 — actions that came too late in the Cambridge Analytica case.

Associated Press writers Richard Lardner and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report. Ortutay and Hamilton reported from New York.

For complete coverage of the Facebook privacy scandal, visit <https://apnews.com/tag/FacebookPrivacyScandal>

Russia issues more warnings against airstrikes on Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — Russian lawmakers have warned the United States that Moscow would view an airstrike on Syria as a war crime, saying it could trigger a direct military clash between the two former Cold War adversaries.

Russia's ambassador to Lebanon went even further, saying any missiles fired at Syria would be shot down and the launching sites targeted — a stark warning of a potential major confrontation in Syria.

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened military action after last weekend's suspected chemical attack on a rebel-held town near Damascus, which activists and rescuers say killed at least 40 people. The Syrian government and its ally Russia deny that such an attack happened.

Asked about Moscow's reaction to a possible U.S. strike on Syria, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia still hopes that all parties in the conflict will refrain from taking "steps that could gravely destabilize the fragile situation in the region."

State news agency RIA Novosti on Wednesday quoted Andrei Krasov, deputy chairman of the State Duma's defense committee, as saying that Russia will treat a U.S. airstrike on Syria "not just as an act of aggression but a war crime of the Western coalition."

Vladimir Shamanov, a retired general who heads the defense affairs committee in the lower house of parliament, said in televised remarks Tuesday that a U.S. strike in Syria could hurt Russian servicemen and trigger retaliation.

He said that Russia has "the necessary means for that, and the Americans and their allies know that quite well."

Shamanov emphasized that a retaliatory Russian strike could target U.S. navy ships and aircraft. He added that the use of nuclear weapons is "unlikely."

Russian Ambassador to Lebanon Alexander Zasytkin, meanwhile, told Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV station that any missiles fired at Syria would be shot down. He said he was referring to a statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian armed forces chief of staff.

"If there is a strike by the Americans, then... the missiles will be downed and the source of the missiles targeted," Zasytkin said.

Meanwhile, European airspace authorities warned aircraft to be careful over the coming days when flying close to Syria because of possible military action against President Bashar Assad's forces.

The Eurocontrol airspace organization said that the European Aviation Safety Agency had sent a "Rapid

Alert Notification" that flight operators needed to consider the possibility of air or missile strikes into Syria. U.S. officials have consulted with global allies on a possible joint military response to Syria's alleged poison gas attack.

In a notice posted to Eurocontrol's website, EASA said: "Due to the possible launch of air strikes into Syria with air-to-ground and/or cruise missiles within the next 72 hours, and the possibility of intermittent disruption of radio navigation equipment, due consideration needs to be taken."

Trump seethes over FBI raid, ponders firing those he blames

By CATHERINE LUCEY, ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump was so incensed by the FBI's raid of his personal attorney's office and hotel room that he's privately pondered firing Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and publicly mused about ousting special counsel Robert Mueller.

The raid, in which agents seized attorney Michael Cohen's records on topics including a \$130,000 payment to a porn actress who alleges she had sex with Trump, left the president more angry than advisers had seen him in weeks, according to five people familiar with the president's views but not authorized to discuss them publicly.

Trump tweeted Tuesday that "Attorney-client privilege is dead!" Nervous White House aides expressed new fears about the president's unpredictability in the face of the Cohen raid, which he viewed as an assault on a longtime defender and a sign that Mueller's probe into potential ties between Russia and the Trump campaign was "going too far."

Trump also announced Tuesday he was cancelling plans to attend the Summit of the Americas over the weekend as well as an overnight visit to Colombia.

The president had been telling confidants for weeks that he was not eager to make the three-day trip, which had already been shortened from original plans, according to two people who have discussed it with him in recent weeks but were not authorized to disclose the private conversations. His decision not to travel was publicly tied to the need to monitor the situation in Syria, but privately Trump said he didn't want to be away from the White House amid developments in the China trade dispute and in the Mueller investigation.

Trump also expressed confidence in the loyalty displayed by Cohen, his longtime personal and professional fixer, who ascended to one of the most powerful roles at the Trump Organization not filled by a family member. Cohen has steadfastly denied wrongdoing in his \$130,000 payment to adult-film actress Stormy Daniels and has publicly defended Trump, but he has confided in associates that he is fearful of being a fall guy, according to a person familiar with his thinking but not authorized to speak publicly about private discussions.

Cohen has said he took out a personal line of credit on his home to pay Daniels days before the 2016 election and without Trump's knowledge. The raid of his office was overseen by the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan and based in part on a referral from Mueller.

Press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders made clear that White House officials have explored Trump's authority to fire Mueller.

"He certainly believes that he has the power to do so," she said at Tuesday's press briefing.

Under Justice Department regulations, only Rosenstein, who oversees the Russia investigation, can fire Mueller.

On Capitol Hill, a bipartisan group of four senators moved to protect Mueller's job.

Republican Sens. Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Democratic Sens. Chris Coons of Delaware and Cory Booker of New Jersey planned to introduce legislation Wednesday that would give any special counsel a 10-day window in which he or she could seek expedited judicial review of a firing, according to two people familiar with the legislation. They were not authorized to discuss the bill ahead of its release and requested anonymity.

Trump spent Monday evening calling associates to vent and gauge their reaction to the news. He bitterly

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complained that the raids were meant to ruin Cohen's life and expressed frustration that it was another front from which to attack his presidency, according to a person familiar with the conversations but not permitted to discuss them publicly.

Trump also revived his broadsides on Rosenstein as well as Rosenstein's boss, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, whom he belittled to confidants for recusing himself from the investigation and, in turn, delivering him to Mueller.

The White House insisted Trump was focused on the response to Syria following the country's apparent use of chemical weapons on civilians over the weekend, killing more than 40 people. A military strike would mark Trump's second retaliatory strike against Syrian President Bashar Assad's government at a time when Trump is seeking to reduce the U.S. footprint in Syria.

The discussions come as Trump's newest national security adviser, John Bolton, stepped into the job this week. He encouraged Trump to skip the trip to South America to manage the Syria strategy.

Bolton, a seasoned bureaucratic operator, has been expected to put his stamp on the National Security Council staff. NSC spokesman Michael Anton resigned over the weekend, with two people familiar with the situation saying Anton resigned after learning he would be fired. Trump's homeland security adviser, Thomas Bossert, exited Tuesday. Bossert had overseen the administration's response to the 2017 hurricane season and was credited by his colleagues for leading the administration's efforts to bolster cybersecurity resiliency across government and private industry.

Asked if Bolton forced Bossert out, Sanders said: "I'm not going to get into specific details about the ongoings of personnel, but I can tell you that he resigned. The president feels he's done a great job and wishes him the best."

The mood at the NSC this week was described as grim, with aides fearful over Bolton's plans. More senior-level departures are expected in the coming weeks, said two people familiar with the dynamic but not authorized to discuss it publicly.

Trump's administration has set records for turnover in his 15 months in office at all levels, with Bossert marking at least the 13th official who held the rank of assistant to the president at the start of the administration to depart.

There is growing concern in Trump's orbit that the turmoil will only continue following the release next week of former FBI director James Comey's book, which promises to reveal new details about his conversations with the president and the Russia probe. An administration official said the White House would largely defer to outside surrogates to push back on Comey, but there was concern as to how the director's interviews could rile up the president.

Lemire reported from New York City. Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Jazz in position to claim 3 seed after beating Warriors

By JOHN COON, Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah has a chance to write one more chapter to an improbable comeback story. The Jazz put themselves in position to claim the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference after cruising to a 119-79 victory over the Golden State Warriors on Tuesday night. Utah did not waste time taking control of the game and led by double digits over the final 3 1/2 quarters.

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points and set an NBA rookie record for 3-pointers. Mitchell went 4 of 5 behind the arc and has made 186 3-pointers this season, breaking Damian Lillard's record for a first-year player. "I am actually thrilled for him that he did that," Jazz coach Quin Snyder said. "He has been our guy, offensively, all year who we have relied on. He's unselfish, which makes the guys around him better."

Derrick Favors added 16 points and nine rebounds. Jonas Jerebko scored 14 points, and Rudy Gobert

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and Ricky Rubio added 13 points apiece for the Jazz.

Utah (48-33) won its sixth straight game and went 3-1 in the season series with Golden State. Now the Jazz are tied with Portland in the standings and can claim the No. 3 seed with a win over the Blazers on Wednesday night.

"What makes it a story is no one expected it," Mitchell said. "But the thing I've said all year is we knew we were going to be good. I don't think we knew we were going to be 3 seed good, but we knew we were going to be good."

It is a surprising position for a Utah team that lost last season's top scorers Gordon Hayward and George Hill to free agency over the summer and was nine games below .500 at one point in mid-January.

The Jazz believed all along they could climb back into the playoff picture and make serious noise in the Western Conference.

"Guys took it upon themselves to just get better in the offseason," Favors said. "We just stuck with the plan throughout the whole season and right now we're fighting for the third spot. Gotta give credit to everybody on this team."

Even with a loss to the Blazers, Utah is assured of falling no lower than the No. 5 seed.

Klay Thompson scored 23 points and Kevin Durant added 13 for the Warriors, who finished the season at 58-24. Golden State, the No. 2 seed in the West, never led in the game and shot just 35 percent from the field.

The 40-point loss is the largest margin of defeat for the Warriors under coach Steve Kerr.

"We need the competitive spirit," Kerr said. "We need the juice. We need the joy, and we haven't had much of that. So we got to get our minds right."

Utah dominated on both ends of the court during the first quarter. The Jazz used an 18-3 run to stake out a 24-9 lead. Rubio took a steal in for a layup and Favors scored on a pair of dunks to ignite the run.

Mitchell scored on back-to-back possessions and then followed with a 3-pointer to help push the lead to 33-14. The rookie totaled 12 points on 5-of-7 shooting in the first quarter alone.

Golden State appeared it might rally after Durant scored back-to-back baskets to cut Utah's lead to 35-22. That's as close as the Warriors got. Jerebko and Royce O' Neale combined to score three straight baskets to push the lead to 43-24.

"We got to be better," Durant said. "We couldn't really get a rhythm or a groove out there with the way we go down so early. We started pressing a bit and trying to get it all back at once."

Utah led by as many as 45 points in the second half. The Jazz took their largest lead at 103-58 when Jerebko buried a pair of 3-pointers and Dante Exum added a dunk to polish off a 10-2 run to open the fourth quarter.

TIP-INS

Warriors: Thompson and Durant combined to shoot just 14 of 39 from the field. ... Golden State scored a season-low 33 first-half points. ... The Warriors fell by an average margin of 29.6 points in three losses to the Jazz this season.

Jazz: Utah scored 25 points off 16 turnovers. ... The Jazz had a 19-6 edge on fastbreak points and out-scored Golden State 62-38 in the paint.

HOODIE STATEMENT

As the Rookie of the Year debate between Mitchell and Ben Simmons continues to heat up, the smack talk is following suit. Mitchell wore a black hoodie into Vivint Smart Home Arena before tipoff on Tuesday that contained the dictionary definition of a rookie on the front.

It offered a lighthearted jab at Simmons' status as a "redshirt rookie" after he spent what would have been his original rookie season sidelined with an injury. Adidas approached Mitchell about wearing the hoodie and he went along with the joke.

"We just wanted to all have fun with it," Mitchell said. "That's all it is, having fun and just enjoying it."

Mitchell reiterated he's not worried about the award and would rather see Gobert and Snyder earn Defensive Player of the Year and Coach of the Year honors respectively.

QUOTEABLE

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"We need to put things into perspective. When I was a rookie, we only won 23 games. And now some people say winning 58 is kind of a down year. That's incredible." —Thompson, on Golden State finishing 58-24 in the regular season.

UP NEXT

Warriors: Will learn their first round opponent on Wednesday.

Jazz: They travel to Portland to face the Blazers on Wednesday.

It's the last day of the NBA season, with much to decide

By **TIM REYNOLDS, AP Basketball Writer**

MIAMI (AP) — The end has arrived.

Actually, for Atlanta, Phoenix, Dallas and Charlotte, the end came in their season finales Tuesday. There are nine teams who know Wednesday is the last day of their season. Another 15 teams have already clinched playoff berths.

Then there's Minnesota and Denver.

Game 82 for both teams will have a Game 7 feel, which is a fitting way to transition from the regular season to the postseason. Nuggets at Timberwolves, winner to the playoffs, loser to the offseason. It's the first time since 1997 — and only the third time since the NBA went to this postseason format in 1983 — that two teams will play on the season's final day in such a situation.

"It's bigger than all of us," Minnesota star Karl-Anthony Towns said.

Minnesota is trying to get into the playoffs for the first time since 2004 — the longest current drought in the NBA. Denver — winner of six straight to give itself this chance — is trying to get to the postseason for the first time since 2013.

So there's only one spot left in the 16-team tournament that will decide whose fingerprints get to put the smudge of a championship celebration on the Larry O'Brien Trophy in June.

Much like the race between Minnesota and Denver, the entire tournament bracket itself is going down to the wire. There will be eight first-round matchups, and every single one of those pairings will be decided on Wednesday. So, too, will 11 of the 16 seeds. Portland and Utah will play for the No. 3 seed in the West, in one of the few cut-and-dry matchups.

The only order of business that was cleared up Tuesday was the No. 2 overall seed, with Toronto now assured of finishing with the NBA's second-best record.

Here's 10 other things to note going into the last day of the regular season:

A FIRST FOR LEBRON

It's really, really, really hard to find something that LeBron James hasn't done in his career. But if he appears for Cleveland against New York on Wednesday night, it will mark the first time in James' 15 seasons that he plays in all 82 regular-season games. He will lead the NBA in minutes played, field goals made and total points this season — at 33 years old.

PHILLY RECORD

Philadelphia would be the No. 3 seed in the East if it beats Milwaukee, and a franchise that knew nothing but losing (OK, "process" losing) in recent years will set a record — for winning. If the 76ers prevail, it would be their 16th consecutive victory and that would top the record for longest winning streak to end any NBA season.

SCORING TITLE

Houston's James Harden has the scoring crown wrapped up. He'll be the first player to win back-to-back scoring titles since his former Oklahoma City teammate Kevin Durant won three straight from 2009-10 through 2011-12.

MORE POINTS

Once again, the NBA will see more points than ever (in terms of total, not average per game). There were 259,753 points in the regular season a year ago; that will be surpassed Wednesday night, and the league is on pace to reach somewhere around 261,000 by the time the final whistle blows.

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TRIPLE-DOUBLE RUSS

Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook needs 16 rebounds against Memphis to average exactly 10.0 per game this season. If he gets there, he'll average a triple-double for the second consecutive year. Westbrook has six games this season with at least 16 rebounds, including a season-high, 18-board effort at Miami on Monday night. Westbrook will also lead the NBA in assists per game.

STRUGGLING WARRIORS

Golden State lost 10 of its final 17 games this season. The Warriors' regular season ended Tuesday with a blowout loss at Utah. Klay Thompson isn't worried, and he knows the defending champions — who have dealt with many injuries, most recently Stephen Curry out with a knee issue — have plenty of doubters. "We're ready to prove people wrong," Thompson said.

TOP SHOOTER

The field-goal percentage race between Houston's Clint Capela and the Los Angeles Clippers' DeAndre Jordan might look closer than it really is. Capela is shooting 65.3 percent, Jordan 64.3 percent — but if Jordan is going to catch Capela, he'll have to shoot 15 for 15 on Wednesday (assuming Capela doesn't take any shots). Jordan was trying to be the first player to lead the league in shooting for six straight seasons, but it seems like he'll merely have to settle for tying Wilt Chamberlain and Shaquille O'Neal with five straight crowns.

TOP REBOUNDER

Another category where Jordan will finish second. Detroit's Andre Drummond will lead the league's rebounding race for the second time in three years.

WILD NORTHWEST

The Northwest Division this season will go down as the most competitive in the current six-division format — and it's not even close. The team that finishes last in the Northwest this season will be only three games behind the team that wins the division crown. There's never been a last-place team within less than 11 games of the winner in this current format, which has been in play for 14 seasons.

ROOKIE WATCH

There have been 116 rookies in the NBA this season, up 28 from last season, and the latest addition is noteworthy. Andre Ingram is a 32-year-old who debuted Tuesday for the Los Angeles Lakers against Houston. He's the oldest rookie this season and he more than paid his dues, having logged 384 games in what's now called the G League — where he's the career leader in 3-pointers (713). This year's rookie class is the largest since 1949-50, when 120 players made their debuts.

Gradual deployment of US troops to Mexico border underway

By JOHN L. MONE and PAUL J. WEBER, Associated Press

ROMA, Texas (AP) — The deployment of National Guard members to the U.S.-Mexico border at President Donald Trump's request was underway Tuesday with a gradual ramp-up of troops under orders to help curb illegal immigration.

The Trump administration also announced that Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen will visit this week a stretch of new border wall breaking ground in New Mexico, putting additional focus on what Trump has called a crisis of migrant crossings and crime.

The construction and commitment of at least 1,600 Guard members from Arizona, New Mexico and Texas provoked fresh condemnation from immigrant activists and praise from border-state Republican governors, who will retain command-and-control of their state's Guard during a mission that for now has no firm end date.

The only holdout border state was California, led by Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown, who has not announced whether troops from his state's National Guard will participate and has repeatedly clashed with Trump over immigration policy. The state was still reviewing Tuesday whether it will join the effort, said Lt. Tom Keegan, a spokesman for the California National Guard.

In Texas, where Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has pledged to put more than 1,000 Guard members into

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action, military officials said Tuesday that 300 troops would report to armories this week for preparation and training. Texas has previously kept about 100 Guard members stationed on the border for years as part of its own border security efforts.

"What is different now it is happening in a different context and a different narrative," said Fernando Garcia, director of the Border Network for Human Rights, an immigrant advocacy group.

Speaking from the Rio Grande Valley where immigrant crossings are the highest along the 2,000-mile (3,200-kilometer) U.S.-Mexico border, Garcia said, "When you hear the narrative of the president, it seems to him the enemy is the immigrant family."

Abbott said in a statement Tuesday that the Guard has "proven to have a meaningful impact" in reducing immigration and crime.

In the Texas border town of Roma, about a half-dozen uniformed Guard members were seen Tuesday near an international bridge along the Rio Grande. Children played just across the river in Mexico, and it wasn't clear whether the Guard members were new or part of Texas' earlier observe-and-report missions.

One Guard member was armed with an M4 rifle and used binoculars to peer across the river. Pickup trucks with Guard members inside circled the town square along with border patrol vehicles. Mexican children who had attended school on the U.S. side of the border showed their passports and paid a toll to cross a bridge over the river and walk home to the Mexican community of Ciudad Miguel Aleman.

Trump said last week he wants to send 2,000 to 4,000 National Guard members to the border, issuing a proclamation citing "the lawlessness that continues at our southern border."

Trump administration officials have said that rising numbers of people being caught at the southern border, while in line with seasonal trends in recent years, require an immediate response.

Monthly border arrests surpassed 50,000 in March for the first time since December 2016. The Border Patrol, which polices between but not at official crossings, made more than 37,000 of those arrests, including more than 14,000 in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, nearly 6,000 in its Tucson, Arizona, sector and more than 4,000 in San Diego.

Inspectors at official crossings made nearly 13,000 arrests in March, led by the Laredo, Texas, field office with more than 4,800 and the San Diego field office with about 3,800.

Apprehensions are still well below their historical trends during the terms of former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, both of whom also deployed the Guard to the border.

Some Guard members will be armed if they are placed in potential danger, Abbott said, adding he wanted to downplay speculation that "our National Guard is showing up with military bayonets trying to take on anybody that's coming across the border, because that is not their role."

There is no end date for the deployment, Abbott said: "We may be in this for the long haul."

Trump has said he wants to use the military at the border until progress is made on his proposed border wall, which has mostly stalled in Congress. Defense Secretary James Mattis last Friday approved paying for up to 4,000 National Guard personnel from the Pentagon budget through the end of September.

Mexico's foreign relations secretary said his government is evaluating its cooperation with the United States.

Weber reported from Austin, Texas. Associated Press Writer Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Asian shares meander following gains on upbeat trade talk

By ELAINE KURTENBACH, AP Business Writer

Shares were mixed in Asia on Wednesday, trading in a narrow range after overnight gains following conciliatory comments on trade by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi's pledge to cut tariffs on imported cars and improve intellectual property protection was seen as a step toward easing trade tensions.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's Nikkei 225 stock index lost 0.2 percent to 21,750.92 and the Kospi in South Korea was flat at 2,450.82. Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 0.8 percent to 30,960.72 and the Shanghai

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Composite index surged 0.9 percent to 3,219.07. Australia's S&P ASX 200 dipped 0.3 percent to 5,340.70. Shares rose in Taiwan and in most Southeast Asian markets.

WALL STREET: Facebook, Twitter and Snap rallied as senators questioned Mark Zuckerberg about the Cambridge Analytica privacy scandal that has engulfed the company over the last four weeks. Technology companies have stumbled as investors wondered if the government will implement tighter regulations on technology companies, and those worries eased Tuesday. Zuckerberg will testify before the House of Representatives later Wednesday. The S&P 500 index surged 1.7 percent to 2,656.87. The Dow gained 1.8 percent to 24,408. The Nasdaq composite added 2.1 percent to 7,094.30 and the Russell 2000 index of smaller-company stocks advanced 1.9 percent, to 1,543.43.

ANALYST VIEWPOINT: "The market's increasing expectation is that the two sides will sit down now," said Paul Christopher, head of global market strategy for Wells Fargo Investment Institute, although stocks could bounce around as those negotiations proceed. "There's still a lot at stake because you have a global supply chain that could be interrupted because of tariffs."

CHINA FACTOR: General Motors, which has major manufacturing operations in China, rose 3.3 percent after Chinese President Xi Jinping promised changes in some areas that the U.S. has identified as priorities. He didn't address other thorny topics including requirements for foreign companies to give technology to potential local competitors. So far the U.S. has proposed tariffs on \$50 billion worth of products made in China, and China has said it could put tariffs on an equivalent amount of goods imported from the U.S. Also, President Donald Trump has directed his trade representative to look into targeting another \$100 billion in Chinese goods.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude shed 16 cents to \$65.35 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It rose 3.3 percent to \$65.51 a barrel on Tuesday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, lost 23 cents to \$70.76 per barrel. It had added 3.5 percent to \$71.04 a barrel in London. Oil prices have yoyo'd recently as investors wonder if the trade dispute will hamper global economic growth.

CURRENCIES: The dollar slipped to 107.06 yen from 107.20. The euro rose to \$1.2365 from \$1.2357.

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

AP sources: Raid on Trump lawyer about payments to women

By CHAD DAY, ERIC TUCKER and TOM HAYS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal agents who raided the office of President Donald Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, were looking for information about payments to a former Playboy playmate and a porn actress who claim to have had affairs with Trump, two people familiar with the investigation said.

Public corruption prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's office in Manhattan are trying to determine if there was any fraud related to the payments to Karen McDougal and Stormy Daniels, according to one of the people. McDougal, a former playmate, was paid \$150,000 by the parent company of the National Enquirer for her story, though the magazine never published it. Cohen paid \$130,000 to Daniels as part of an agreement, made before the 2016 election, to keep her from going public with her allegations.

A warrant used in the raid Monday specifically authorized agents to seize records related to McDougal, said one of the people, who demanded anonymity to discuss the confidential details.

The payments appear to be part of a pattern of Trump's self-described fixer trying to shield the businessman-turned-politician from embarrassing press by buying women's silence.

The new details on the Cohen raid, first reported by The New York Times, emerged as the president boiled over on Twitter about it and evidence that investigators are zeroing in on his inner circle. The raid on Cohen was not carried out by special counsel Robert Mueller's team.

But the president's ire has been directed at Mueller and his boss, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. On Monday, Trump called Mueller's investigation "an attack on our country" and suggested he was considering firing the special counsel.

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The White House remained defiant that the president has the power to directly fire Mueller — despite Justice Department regulations saying otherwise. The regulations say only Rosenstein, who appointed Mueller last May, has the authority to fire him and only for specific cause. Rosenstein has repeatedly said that he has not seen any reason to dismiss Mueller.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday that Trump “certainly believes he has the power” to fire Mueller, though he isn’t taking that step now. She echoed Trump’s frustration, saying he believes federal authorities have “gone too far” by seizing communication between a lawyer and his clients.

The furious president himself blasted out his displeasure early Tuesday, saying on Twitter: “Attorney-client privilege is dead!”

In fact, attorney-client privilege is not absolute and can’t be invoked when the discussion was part of an effort to commit a crime. The search was authorized by a judge and no evidence suggests it was carried out improperly.

The search did not appear related to allegations of Russian election interference or possible coordination with the Trump campaign, the main focus of Mueller’s probe. But the raid was prompted, at least in part, by evidence or allegations uncovered by Mueller’s team.

Under Justice Department regulations, Mueller must consult with Rosenstein when his investigators uncover new evidence that may fall outside his original mandate. Rosenstein then determines whether to allow Mueller to proceed or to assign the matter to another U.S. attorney or another part of the Justice Department.

FBI agents searched Cohen’s office, apartment and a hotel room where he’s been staying while his home is under renovation, looking for documents related to Daniels and McDougal.

McDougal has said she carried on an affair with Trump in 2006 after the birth of his son. The Enquirer’s publisher, American Media Inc., said they paid McDougal for details of the alleged affair, but they never appeared in print. AMI has said she was paid to become a fitness columnist.

Cohen’s attorney, Stephen Ryan, did not respond to questions about McDougal on Tuesday.

Agents also seized records related to a \$130,000 payment made to Daniels, who says she had sex with Trump the same year as McDougal. Daniels’ team has had extensive communications with federal investigators, said a third person familiar with the investigations, who demanded anonymity to discuss the confidential matter.

Cohen has said he paid Daniels out of his own pocket shortly before the 2016 presidential election, but has not explained why.

Several former officials at the Federal Election Commission have said the payment could have violated campaign finance laws, because it may amount to an unreported campaign donation.

Cohen has said neither the Trump Organization nor the Trump campaign was involved in the transaction with Daniels and he was not reimbursed for the payment. Trump has said he didn’t know about the payment. The White House has consistently said Trump denies the affair.

In his first public comments since the raid, Cohen told CNN on Tuesday that he is rethinking how he handled the payment to Daniels because of what it’s done to his family. He also praised the FBI agents who carried out the search as “professional, courteous and respectful.”

Asked if he was worried, Cohen told CNN: “I would be lying to you if I told that I am not. Do I need this in my life? No. Do I want to be involved in this? No.”

Hays reported from New York. Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles, Jake Pearson in New York and Tom LoBianco and Catherine Lucey in Washington contributed to this report.

Cosby prosecutors line up accusers after 'con-artist' attack

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, Associated Press

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (AP) — Prosecutors are rallying from a blistering defense attack on Bill Cosby's chief accuser with a parade of women who say the comedian drugged and attacked them long before he met Andrea Constand.

The first of the five women, Heidi Thomas, returns to the witness stand on Wednesday after telling jurors that Cosby knocked her out with wine and forced her to perform oral sex in Reno, Nevada, in 1984.

Thomas, who was a 24-year-old aspiring actress, said her agent had arranged for Cosby to give her acting tips and that Cosby gave her the wine as they rehearsed a scene in which she was portraying a drunken woman.

She said she remembered she felt sick and wondered, "How did I get here?"

Prosecutors are lining up the additional accusers to make the case that Cosby, once revered as "America's Dad," was a big Hollywood predator who is only now facing a reckoning after allegedly violating Constand at his suburban Philadelphia home in 2004.

The women also could help prosecutors insulate Constand from the defense's contention that she is a "con artist" who preyed on Cosby's vulnerability after the 1997 killing of his son, Ennis, and then framed him to score a big payday via a \$3.4 million civil settlement.

Tom Mesereau, delivering his opening statement a day after prosecutors took their turn, said the financially troubled Constand "hit the jackpot" when Cosby paid her in 2006. The settlement included a provision that she keep quiet about the alleged encounter.

"What did she want from Bill Cosby?" Mesereau said. "You already know the answer: money, money and lots more money."

Constand outlined her scheme to a Temple colleague, Marguerite Jackson, Mesereau said. The defense plans to call Jackson as a witness, and Mesereau said she will testify that Constand mused about setting up a celebrity so she could sue and get money.

"A con artist is what you get, ladies and gentlemen of the jury," he said. "A con artist. And we'll prove it."

The defense fought for the chance to tell jurors about the previously secret settlement. Gloria Allred, the lawyer for several accusers testifying, said she would put that move "under the heading of be careful what you wish for" because jurors could wonder why Cosby paid so much when he has denied wrongdoing.

Mesereau's attack on Constand was a striking departure from the more subdued tone that Cosby's previous lawyer took at the first trial, which ended in a hung jury last spring. The jury that time was not permitted to hear about the settlement, nor was Jackson allowed to take the stand.

It also was a likely glimpse of what is to come when the former Temple University basketball administrator takes the stand to say Cosby, an alumnus and former university trustee, made her woozy with pills and then penetrated her with his fingers.

Cosby, 80, is charged with three counts of aggravated indecent assault, each punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

As they began building their case against Cosby, prosecutors chose Thomas, now a Colorado music teacher, as their first substantive witness.

Thomas testified she blamed herself for what happened, thinking she must have said or done something that led Cosby to believe she would be open to his advances. She never told her agent or her parents about the alleged assault.

"I was pretty sure whatever I did was my fault," Thomas testified, adding: "I was just going to move on. And I did."

Thomas, who went public with her allegations in 2015, has teamed with other Cosby accusers to lobby for longer statutes of limitations for sex crimes, including a successful effort to double Colorado's to 20 years.

Under cross-examination, Thomas testified that she chronicled her trip to Reno in a scrapbook and recorded a cassette tape at the home where she had the encounter with Cosby. She said she wanted to recount the trip for her mother and agent but destroyed it years later after seeing a psychiatrist.

It made no mention of the alleged assault, Thomas said, because she had planned to give it to her mom. Both sides have been instructed not to talk about the first trial, but Cosby lawyer Kathleen Bliss slipped up while questioning a prosecution psychiatrist on Tuesday, prompting Judge Steven O'Neill to briefly halt testimony so he could speak to the lawyers behind closed doors.

The Associated Press does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they grant permission, which Constand and Thomas have done.

Follow Mike Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak

For more coverage visit apnews.com/tag/CosbyonTrial

AP sources: Raid related to payments to women accusing Trump

By CHAD DAY, ERIC TUCKER and TOM HAYS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal agents who raided the office of President Donald Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, were looking for information about payments to a former Playboy playmate and a porn actress who claim to have had affairs with Trump, two people familiar with the investigation said Tuesday.

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The payments appear to be part of a pattern of Trump's self-described fixer trying to shield the businessman-turned-politician from embarrassing press by buying women's silence.

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Hays reported from New York. Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles, Jake Pearson in New York and Tom LoBianco and Catherine Lucey in Washington contributed to this report.

Hardly 'friends': Zuckerberg fends off senators on privacy

By **MARY CLARE JALONICK, BARBARA ORTUTAY and DAVID HAMILTON, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under fire for the worst privacy debacle in his company's history, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg batted away often-aggressive questioning Tuesday from lawmakers who accused him of failing to protect the personal information of millions of Americans from Russians intent on upsetting the U.S. election.

During some five hours of Senate questioning, Zuckerberg apologized several times for Facebook failures, disclosed that his company was "working with" special counsel Robert Mueller in the federal probe of Russian election interference and said it was working hard to change its own operations after the harvesting of users' private data by a data-mining company affiliated with Donald Trump's campaign.

Seemingly unimpressed, Republican Sen. John Thune of South Dakota said Zuckerberg's company had a 14-year history of apologizing for "ill-advised decisions" related to user privacy. "How is today's apology different?" Thune asked.

"We have made a lot of mistakes in running the company," Zuckerberg conceded, and Facebook must work harder at ensuring the tools it creates are used in "good and healthy" ways.

The controversy has brought a flood of bad publicity and sent the company's stock value plunging, but Zuckerberg seemed to achieve a measure of success in countering that: Facebook shares surged 4.5 percent for the day, the biggest gain in two years.

In all, he skated largely unharmed through his first day of congressional testimony. He'll face House questioners Wednesday.

The 33-year-old founder of the world's best-known social media giant appeared in a suit and tie, a de-

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parture from the T-shirt he's famous for wearing in public as well as in private. Even so, his youth cast a sharp contrast with his often-elderly, gray-haired Senate inquisitors. And the enormous complexity of the social network he created at times defeated the attempts of legislators to hammer him on Facebook's specific failures and how to fix them.

The stakes are high for both Zuckerberg and his company. Facebook has been reeling from its worst-ever privacy failure following revelations last month that the political data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica, which was affiliated with Trump's 2016 campaign, improperly scooped up data on some 87 million users. Zuckerberg has been on an apology tour for most of the past two weeks, culminating in his congressional appearance Tuesday.

Although shaky at times, Zuckerberg seemed to gain confidence as the day progressed. An iconic figure as a billionaire entrepreneur who changed the way people around the world relate to each other, he made a point of repeatedly referring back to the Harvard dorm room where he said Facebook was brought to life.

At times, he showed plenty of steel. After a round of aggressive questioning about Facebook's alleged political bias from Sen. Ted Cruz, for instance, Zuckerberg grinned and almost chuckled. "That was pretty good," he said of the exchange with Cruz.

For the most part, his careful but generally straightforward answers, steeped in the sometimes arcane details of Facebook's underlying functions, often deflected aggressive questioning. When the going got tough, Zuckerberg was able to fall back on: "Our team should follow up with you on that, Senator."

As a result, he found it relatively easy to return to familiar talking points: Facebook made mistakes, he and his executives are very sorry, and they're working very hard to correct the problems and safeguard the users' data.

As for the federal Russia probe that has occupied much of Washington's attention for months, he said he had not been interviewed by special counsel Mueller's team, but "I know we're working with them." He offered no details, citing a concern about confidentiality rules of the investigation.

Earlier this year Mueller charged 13 Russian individuals and three Russian companies in a plot to interfere in the 2016 presidential election through a social media propaganda effort that included online ad purchases using U.S. aliases and politicking on U.S. soil. A number of the Russian ads were on Facebook.

Much of the effort was aimed at denigrating Democrat Hillary Clinton and thereby helping Republican Trump, or simply encouraging divisiveness and undercutting faith in the U.S. system.

Zuckerberg said Facebook had been led to believe Cambridge Analytica had deleted the user data it had harvested and that had been "clearly a mistake." He said Facebook had considered the data collection "a closed case" and had not alerted the Federal Trade Commission. He assured senators the company would handle the situation differently today.

Separately, the company began alerting some of its users that their data was gathered by Cambridge Analytica. A notification that appeared on Facebook for some users Tuesday told them that "one of your friends" used Facebook to log into a now-banned personality quiz app called "This Is Your Digital Life." The notice says the app misused the information, including public profiles, page likes, birthdays and current cities, by sharing it with Cambridge Analytica.

In the hearings, Zuckerberg is trying to both restore public trust in his company and stave off federal regulations that some lawmakers have floated.

Democrat Bill Nelson of Florida said he believes Zuckerberg was taking the congressional hearings seriously "because he knows there is going to be a hard look at regulation."

Republicans have yet to get behind any legislation, but that could change.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., asked Zuckerberg if he would be willing to work with lawmakers to examine what "regulations you think are necessary in your industry."

Absolutely, Zuckerberg responded, saying later in an exchange with Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, that "I'm not the type of person who thinks that all regulation is bad."

Ahead of the hearing, John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, said, "This is a serious matter, and I think people expect us to take action."

At the hearing, Zuckerberg said: "We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility, and that

was a big mistake. It was my mistake, and I'm sorry. I started Facebook, I run it, and I'm responsible for what happens here."

He outlined steps the company has taken to restrict outsiders' access to people's personal information. He also said the company is investigating every app that had access to a large amount of information before the company moved to prevent such access in 2014 — actions that came too late in the Cambridge Analytica case.

Associated Press writers Richard Lardner and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report. Ortutay reported from New York. Hamilton reported from San Francisco.

For complete coverage of the Facebook privacy scandal, visit <https://apnews.com/tag/FacebookPrivacyScandal>

Ex-rebel leader's arrest puts Colombia peace process on edge

By CHRISTINE ARMARIO, Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — When Colombia's largest rebel army turned over its weapons as part of a 2016 peace deal, its leaders vowed to walk away from a lucrative cocaine business that had fueled its war on the state decades after similar leftist insurgencies elsewhere in Latin America died off.

But the arrest of a high-ranking rebel leader on a U.S. drug trafficking warrant has many Colombians wondering whether the former guerrillas have betrayed their pledge.

A day after the arrest of Seuxis Hernandez, best known by his alias Jesus Santrich, conservative opponents of the peace accord, including the front-running presidential candidate, urged authorities to investigate other members of the disbanded FARC rebel army for any continued involvement in the drug trade.

"The message should be clear: Those with criminal ties should pay," presidential hopeful Ivan Duque said.

Meanwhile, ex-FARC combatants accused U.S. and Colombian officials of orchestrating a set-up against Santrich and warned it likely will sow further skepticism among former rebels already doubtful that the government will follow through on its end of the peace accord.

"It generates alarm," said FARC leader Griselda Lobo, alias Sandra Ramirez. "But we are calling on people to think with a cool head."

A U.S. indictment accuses Santrich and three others of conspiring to distribute 10 metric tons of cocaine with a wholesale value of \$15 million in the United States and purporting to have access to drug labs and U.S.-registered planes for transport. U.S. officials allege the criminal activity began last year, after the established cutoff date giving most rebels immunity from war crimes.

The arrest makes Santrich the first high-ranking leader in the peace process to be charged with criminal activity, and analysts said it is likely to have a range of implications for the nation's already fragile implementation of the historic accord. Some worry Santrich's potential extradition could push already hesitant rank-and-file ex-combatants into the hands of criminal gangs.

"Some of them feel abandoned," said Juan Carlos Garzon, a research associate at the Ideas for Peace Foundation, a Colombia think tank. "This reinforces a message that there is some uncertainty going ahead."

Dissident rebels still operating in FARC zones where the state has little presence are continuing to operate drug routes and are believed to be cooperating with Mexican drug cartels as Colombia's coca production skyrockets. There has long been speculation about whether former FARC have continued communication with dissident factions, though no evidence has been presented publicly to support it.

Jeremy McDermott, the Medellin-based executive director of InSight Crime, a group that studies organized crime in Latin America, said many ex-guerrillas may fear a repeat of what happened to demobilized paramilitary commanders a decade ago, when more dozen leaders were extradited on drug charges by former President Alvaro Uribe after reaching a peace accord with the government.

"The guerrillas may well fear this is a potential future scenario for them," he said.

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The FARC long funded their insurgency by leveling a "war tax" on cocaine moving through territory it dominated, and 50 members of its leadership structure — though not Santrich — were indicted in 2006 in the U.S. on charges of running the world's largest drug cartel.

But the rebels always denied direct involvement in the business itself and rebel peace negotiators in 2013 denounced drug trafficking as a "scourge" that has "contaminated" the international financial system and generated a global health crisis. The government has also credited them with implementing a crop substitution program aimed at providing an alternative livelihood to poor peasants growing coca.

The U.S. hasn't been so forgiving, however. Last year, it exposed 21 suspected drug traffickers wanted for extradition who had been put on the FARC's list of rebel fighters and sympathizers entitled to benefits under the peace deal. The rebels called it an error but never said how the alleged criminals ended up on their rolls, although many Colombians suspect they paid for the privilege.

Santrich, the son of two teachers, was one of the first rebel leaders to bet on peace, making his arrest all the more surprising. He went to Norway in 2012 to begin negotiations with Colombia's government and then participated in talks that continued the next four years in Cuba, where he earned a reputation as being a hard-line ideologue.

In recent months, Santrich had campaigned for a seat in congress and lived in a residence filled with his paintings. Despite being blinded by a hereditary illness, he had become a prolific artist, putting tacks in his canvases to guide the direction of his brush. Many of his paintings depicted FARC guerillas still being kept behind bars after the peace accord.

Despite the FARC's belief that Santrich is being wrongly victimized by U.S. and Colombian authorities, the group's leaders said they were committed to continuing the terms of the accord.

Nonetheless, they warned, it has left many ex-combatants wondering who might be next.

"This is grave for the implementation," Ramirez said. "And this is grave for our reincorporation."

Oklahoma Republicans refuse to bow to teachers' demands

By SEAN MURPHY, Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A top Republican lawmaker said Tuesday that the Oklahoma Legislature has no plans to bow to striking teachers' demand to eliminate a capital gains tax break as a way to end a walkout now in its second week.

Rep. John Pfeiffer, a House majority floor leader, also said lawmakers are unlikely to consider any other major revenue bills this session. Gov. Mary Fallin also defied striking teachers on Tuesday, signing a bill to repeal a tax on hotel stays that teachers had called on her to veto. Fallin encouraged lawmakers to turn their attention to other issues.

The actions of the governor and Legislature appeared to indicate that the confrontation has reached a stalemate. The state's largest teachers union has called for the walkout to continue until the Legislature comes up with more money for schools. Several districts have announced plans to close Wednesday for an eighth consecutive day.

Teachers descended on the Capitol again Tuesday, but the crowds were notably smaller. The House and Senate this week returned to more routine work, holding committee meetings and considering bills unrelated to revenue or education.

The Republican-led Legislature has approved tax increases on cigarettes, motor fuel and oil and gas production to generate about \$450 million, with the bulk going to teacher raises. Pfeiffer said many House Republicans agreed to vote for the package only if the capital gains tax deduction remained.

"As far as this year, we've accomplished a whole lot, and I just don't know how much more we can get done this session," said Pfeiffer.

The Legislature approved \$2.9 billion for public schools, an increase of nearly 20 percent over last year's spending. Much of the new money was earmarked for teacher raises of about \$6,100 on average. But teachers say the increase is not enough after a decade without raises.

Oklahoma is one of eight states that has some sort of preferred tax treatment of capital gains, among

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them Oklahoma neighbor Arkansas, according to Scott Drenkard of the Washington-based Tax Foundation, a nonpartisan think tank that promotes simple and transparent tax policies. Most states tax capital gains at the general income tax rate, he said.

Approved by Oklahoma voters in 2004, the capital gains deduction has become a target for teachers in large part because it benefits relatively few Oklahomans and would generate about \$120 million annually. The deduction applies to gains from the sale of Oklahoma-based property, stocks and businesses, and was claimed on about 18,500 tax returns in 2014 for a total of \$105 million, according to the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

An analyst hired by a state commission looking into Oklahoma's variety of tax incentives for businesses and industries recommended last year that the deduction be eliminated.

"The incentive overall cannot, with the data available, be credibly shown to have significant economic impact or a positive return on investment for the state," the analyst wrote.

Still, it is strongly supported by groups such as chambers of commerce, realtors and agricultural producers.

"Eliminating the state capital gains tax deduction could threaten many of our state's family farms and ranches by forcing them to pay an additional tax on the sale of property they've worked hard for," said Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel.

Follow Sean Murphy at www.twitter.com/apseanmurphy

Trump and allies mull possible joint response in Syria

By **ROBERT BURNS** and **JOSH LEDERMAN**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Trump administration officials consulted with global allies Tuesday on a possible joint military response to Syria's alleged poison gas attack, as President Donald Trump canceled a foreign trip in order to manage a crisis that is testing his vow to stand up to Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Trump spoke with other world leaders, and other U.S. officials said the U.S., France and Britain were in extensive consultations about launching a military strike as early as the end of this week. None of the three countries' leaders had made a firm decision, according to the officials, who were not authorized to discuss military planning by name.

A joint military operation, possibly with France rather than the U.S. in the lead, could send a message of international unity about enforcing the prohibitions on chemical weapons and counter Syria's political and military support from Russia and Iran.

President Emmanuel Macron said France, the U.S. and Britain will decide how to respond in the coming days. He called for a "strong and joint response" to the attack in the Syrian town of Douma on Saturday, which Syrian activists and rescuers say killed 40 people. The Syrian government denies responsibility.

The French president does not need parliamentary permission to launch a military operation. France is already involved in the U.S.-led coalition created in 2014 to fight the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq. Multiple IS attacks have targeted French soil, including one last month.

Trump suggested Monday he had little doubt that Syrian government forces were to blame for what he said was a chemical attack, but neither he nor other administration officials have produced hard evidence. Officials suggested such evidence was lacking, or at least not yet at hand. This is in contrast to an incident one year ago in which U.S. intelligence agencies had video and other evidence of certain aspects of the actual attack, which involved the use of Sarin gas. Trump responded by launching Navy cruise missiles at a Syrian airfield.

One official said the U.S., France and Britain were considering military options that would be more extensive than the punitive, one-day strike last April. That strike did not appear to have had the desired effect of deterring Assad from further use of chemical agents. So the three countries are discussing a range of options, including preventing Assad from conducting future attacks by striking military capabilities involved in carrying out such attack, the official said.

Asked whether France would take military action, Macron said his country will continue discussing tech-

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nical and strategic information with U.S. and British allies and "in the coming days we will announce our decision." He said any action would "target chemical weapons" stocks. Under a 2013 agreement for which Russia was a guarantor, Syria was to have eliminated all its chemical weapons, but it has used chlorine and perhaps other chemicals since then.

Trump spoke by phone with British Prime Minister Theresa May. A British government statement said the two agreed the attack in Syria was "utterly reprehensible" and that the international community must respond "to uphold the worldwide prohibition on the use of chemical weapons." Trump met at the White House with the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who told reporters that he and Trump "see eye to eye" on the Syria problem.

"We cannot tolerate with a war criminal," the emir said, adding, "This matter should end immediately." Qatar hosts the United States' main air operations center for the Middle East, which would coordinate any American air attack in Syria.

A watchdog agency, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, announced that it will send "shortly" a fact-finding mission to Douma, after receiving a request from the Syrian government and its Russian backers to investigate the allegations. It was not immediately clear whether that visit would delay or avert U.S. or allied military action.

The Russian military, which has troops in Syria, said on Monday that its officers had visited the site of the alleged attack and found no evidence to back up reports of poison gas being used.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis canceled plans to travel to California this week, indicating his focus on Syria. He was expected at a White House meeting Wednesday for further consultations on Syria.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said that Trump will not attend the 8th Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru, or travel to Bogota, Colombia, as planned. She said he will stay home to "oversee the American response to Syria and to monitor developments around the world."

The president's new national security adviser, John Bolton, urged Trump to skip the trip, an official said. This reflects a view in the White House that deeper Russian and Iranian involvement in Syria have complicated calculations about a response to any U.S. military attack, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. Moscow has cautioned the U.S. not to launch a military attack.

Amid the tough talk from the White House, the U.S. military appeared to be in position to carry out any attack order. A Navy destroyer, the USS Donald Cook, got underway in the eastern Mediterranean on Monday after completing a port call in Cyprus. The guided missile destroyer is armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, the weapon of choice in a U.S. attack one year ago on an airfield in Syria following an alleged sarin gas attack on civilians.

Also, the Navy said the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier and its strike group will depart Norfolk, Virginia, on Wednesday for a regularly scheduled deployment to Europe. The Navy does not currently have a carrier in the Persian Gulf.

Associated Press writers Angela Charlton in Paris, Edith M. Lederer in New York and Jill Colvin, Ken Thomas, Catherine Lucey and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

Yulia Skripal, poisoned daughter of ex-spy, out of hospital

By GREGORY KATZ, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The spy saga that set off international tumult last month took a positive turn Tuesday as Yulia Skripal was released from a British hospital more than a month after she and her father were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent.

"This is not the end of her treatment, but marks a significant milestone," Salisbury District Hospital medical director Christine Blanshard said after the 33-year-old Skripal was discharged and taken to a secure location.

Blanshard would not provide details about Yulia Skripal's condition for reasons of patient privacy. Sergei

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Skripal, 66, the apparent target of the March 4 attack, is recovering more slowly than his daughter but continues to improve, she said.

No date has been set for his discharge, the doctor said.

"Both patients have responded exceptionally well to the treatment we've been providing. But equally, both patients are at different stages in their recovery," she said.

The father and daughter were found unconscious on a bench and remained in critical condition for several weeks. Their poisoning has revived Cold War tensions between Russia and the West.

The British government is likely to keep details about Yulia Skripal's location secret, given the sensitivity of the case. It accuses Russia of carrying out the attack, which Moscow vehemently denies.

If she is well enough, she is likely to be extensively questioned by British security officials and police about her recollection of events leading up to her poisoning.

The Russian Embassy in London tweeted its congratulations to Yulia Skripal, but said pointedly that Russia needs "urgent proof" that "what is being done to her is done on her own free will."

The embassy accused British authorities of "concealing important evidence and blocking an impartial and independent investigation" by isolating the woman.

It reaffirmed its request for consular access to her. She is a Russian citizen.

It is not clear where the Skripals will live if they recover enough to resume normal activities. British officials may feel Sergei Skripal would not be safe to live openly in England any longer.

Bob Ayers, a security analyst who used to work with the CIA, said it is possible the Skripals would be given new identities in Britain or the United States under a program like those used to protect witnesses in high-profile criminal trials.

They could also choose to live in the open under the assumption that Russia would not attack a second time, he said.

"They may not want to go into hiding," Ayers said. "Now that the assassination attempt has been uncovered, the odds are pretty good the Russians won't take another run at them. They'll be under surveillance, the cops will put cameras up, they'll keep good track of the Skripals."

He said he would not expect Yulia Skripal to return to Russia despite her Russian nationality.

In a later tweet, the Russian Embassy said any attempt to settle her in another country would be regarded as "abduction."

British police say the lethal nerve agent Novichok was placed on the door handle of Sergei Skripal's house in Salisbury, an English city 100 miles (160 kilometers) west of London.

The nerve agent also sickened Nick Bailey, a police detective who came to their aid. He was the first of the three to be released from the hospital.

Yulia Skripal arrived in England from Moscow the day before the attack to spend Easter with her father

Sergei Skripal is a former Russian military intelligence officer who was convicted in Russia of spying for Britain.

He was imprisoned in Russia and eventually settled in England after a 2010 "spy swap."

He was living under his own name in Salisbury, apparently believing he would be safe because there was no known history of Russia attacking former spies who had been part of exchanges.

The British government maintains the Skripals were poisoned by a military-grade nerve agent that could only have been made in Russia. Russia has denied the allegation.

The incident has led to a mass expulsion of Russian diplomats from countries aligned with Britain. Russia in turn retaliated by expelling diplomats from countries that sided with Britain.

There are still many unanswered questions about the brazen attack.

If Britain is correct that the Russian government is to blame, it is not clear why Sergei Skripal was poisoned now, some eight years after his swap.

Some analysts believe Russian President Vladimir Putin wanted to send a message to others who had betrayed Russia that they are not safe anywhere in the world. Others believe Sergei Skripal might have been involved in some private business that made Russian officials uneasy.

British officials have also not revealed how the Novichok was brought into Britain.

China president's conciliatory trade gesture raises optimism

By PAUL WISEMAN and JOE McDONALD, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Investors and China watchers welcomed President Xi Jinping's pledge Tuesday to open his country's market wider to foreign competition, hoping it will ease a trade dispute with Washington that has unsettled financial markets and could jeopardize a global economic expansion.

Xi's vow to cut Chinese auto tariffs, allow more competition in banking and better protect intellectual property calmed investors who have been on edge since the world's two biggest economies last week announced plans to slap tariffs on \$50 billion worth of each other's products.

Stock markets rallied worldwide on optimism for relief from what has become the most high-stakes trade confrontation since World War II. The Dow Jones industrial average was up more than 400 points in early afternoon trading.

"This is a promising signal that there can be a path forward to address (America's) concerns without a full-on trade war emerging," said Stephen Ezell, vice president of global innovation policy at the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, a think tank that has criticized both China's aggressive trade practices and President Donald Trump's confrontational response to them.

At the same time, Ezell and other longtime China observers cautioned that Beijing has promised in the past to open its market and curb hardball tactics to acquire foreign technology without following through on those pledges.

"This is positive, but we need to see action," Ezell said.

Speaking at a business conference Tuesday, Xi didn't directly mention either Trump or the trade standoff with the United States. He promised progress on areas that are U.S. priorities, including opening China's banking industry and boosting imports to China. He did not, however, address some key irritants for Washington, including a requirement that foreign companies work through joint ventures that require them to give technology to potential local competitors.

Last week, the Trump administration unveiled plans to impose tariffs on 1,300 Chinese products, worth about \$50 billion a year in imports to the United States. It characterized those tariffs as a penalty for Beijing's forcing American companies to hand over technology to gain entry to China's market.

Within hours, Beijing counterpunched with similar plans to impose tariffs on \$50 billion in American products, including soybeans and small aircraft. Then, Trump ordered the U.S. trade representative to consider another \$100 billion in Chinese imports to tax.

David Dollar, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, noted that the United States won't impose its tariffs until after it gives the American public weeks to comment on the plans. That leaves time for the two countries to negotiate.

"You hope that reason prevails," said Dollar, a former official at the World Bank and U.S. Treasury Department. "Every time the administration talks tough, the market drops. And every time the administration says 'We're going to negotiate' the market goes back up."

"The Chinese are not going to make overwhelming changes in the next 60 days," Dollar added. "But maybe the Chinese will agree to a few things, and the Trump team will be able to declare victory."

Trump himself tweeted Tuesday that he was "very thankful" for Xi's comments and praised the Chinese president's "enlightenment."

"We will make great progress together," Trump added.

Still, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary, told reporters that "we want to see concrete actions from China, and we're going to continue moving forward in the process and in the negotiations until those happen."

With his promises Tuesday, Xi sought to position China as a defender of free trade and cooperation despite its being the world's most-closed major economy. He hopes to contrast his softer stance with Trump's "America First" approach, which has focused on restricting imports and renegotiating trade agreements to win better terms for the United States.

"China's door of opening up will not be closed and will only open wider," Xi said at the Boao Forum for Asia on the southern island of Hainan.

Xi said Beijing will “significantly lower” tariffs on auto imports this year and ease rules that limit foreign global automakers to owning no more than 50 percent of joint ventures in China.

He promised to encourage “normal technological exchange” and “protect the lawful ownership rights of foreign enterprises.”

Rajiv Biswas, an economist at IHS Markit, said, “This would be a victory for the world trading system and an important step away from the abyss of rising global protectionism.”

The dispute is likely to end “with a concession from China,” said Larry Hu of Macquarie Group in a report. Skeptics pointed out that China has made promises before and then not adhered to them.

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative noted in a report in January that “China repeatedly failed to follow through” on commitments it made in U.S.-China dialogues. In 2010 and 2012, for instance, China declared that foreign companies were free to decide for themselves when to share technology with Chinese partners or other businesses. Instead, the report found, Chinese regulators “continue to require or pressure foreign companies to transfer technology as a condition for securing investment or other approvals.”

Also Tuesday, China filed a challenge with the World Trade Organization against Trump’s earlier tariff increase on steel and aluminum in a separate dispute. Beijing, which has issued a \$3 billion list of U.S. goods including pork and apples for possible retaliation, requested 60 days of consultations. If that fails, China can ask for a ruling from a WTO panel.

But the stakes are higher in the dispute over China’s aggressive technology policies. Chinese officials deny that they compel foreign companies to hand over technology. But business groups from outside China argue that joint venture and licensing rules make coerced transfers of technology unavoidable.

Xi gave no details on how conditions might change, leaving unclear how he intends to mollify Washington.

Still, Ezell said he thought Xi’s speech suggests that Trump’s aggressive moves might be working. Trump has “demonstrated a resoluteness, and that signals to China’s leaders that we’re serious.”

Ken Thomas in Washington contributed to this report.

Wiseman reported from Washington.

Chemical weapons experts to inspect attack site in Syria

By **BASSEM MROUE** and **ZEINA KARAM**, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The international chemical weapons watchdog said Tuesday it was sending a fact-finding mission to the Syrian town where a suspected chemical gas attack took place over the weekend, following a request from the Syrian government and its Russian backers that appeared to be aimed at averting punitive Western military action.

It was not immediately clear whether the announcement would delay or prevent a U.S. strike in Syria. President Donald Trump has vowed to respond “forcefully” to Saturday’s attack on civilians in the town of Douma, and warned that Russia — or any other nation found to share responsibility — will “pay a price.”

In a statement, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said a fact-finding mission was “preparing to deploy to Syria shortly,” though it did not give a more precise timetable on when the inspectors would arrive.

Trump on Tuesday cancelled plans to travel to South America later this week, choosing to stay in the United States to manage the response to the events in Syria. The White House said he later spoke with British Prime Minister Theresa May and the two “agreed not to allow the use of chemical weapons to continue.”

Trump also discussed Syria with French President Emmanuel Macron, who said Tuesday that France would decide in the coming days on “a strong and joint response” with the U.S. and Britain to the suspected attack.

The incident has sparked international outrage and ratcheted up tensions in the already volatile Mideast, raising the specter of possible imminent American retaliation amid Russia’s warnings against any such action, and denials that any chemical weapons attack took place.

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Adding to the tensions, Iran, a strong ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad, threatened to respond to an airstrike on a Syrian military base on Monday that the Syrian government, Russia and Iran blamed on Israel.

Seven Iranians were among the estimated 14 people killed in the missile strike, and a senior Iranian official visiting Damascus said the attack "will not remain unanswered." Ali Akbar Velayati, an aide to Iran's supreme leader, spoke upon arrival in the Syrian capital on Tuesday.

The Syrian air base was struck by missiles a little more than 24 hours after the alleged chemical attack. Israel does not typically comment on its operations in Syria, and it is unclear whether the missile attack was linked to the alleged use of chemical weapons.

Iran is one of Assad's strongest backers and has sent thousands of troops and allied militiamen to support his forces.

Syrian government forces were on high alert and taking precautionary measures Tuesday at military positions across the country amid fears of a U.S. strike in the aftermath of the attack near Damascus.

At the United Nations, meanwhile, Russia vetoed a U.S.-drafted U.N. resolution that would have condemned the suspected gas attack and established a new body to determine responsibility for Syrian chemical weapons attacks. The vote Tuesday in the 15-member Security Council was 12 in favor, with Bolivia joining Russia in voting "no," and China abstaining.

Chemical weapons attacks have killed hundreds of people since the start of Syria's conflict, with the U.N. blaming four attacks on the Syrian government and a fifth on the Islamic State group.

The OPCW, in its statement, said its technical Secretariat has asked the Syrian government to make the necessary arrangements for the deployment of a fact-finding mission. The group is the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1997, which has been signed by 192 member states.

Syria became a member in 2013 as part of a deal brokered by the U.S. and Russia after a chemical attack in eastern Ghouta killed hundreds of people. That attack was widely blamed on government forces, who denied responsibility.

Syrian opposition activists and paramedics said more than 40 people were killed in last weekend's suspected chemical attack and blamed the government. The Syrian government and its Russian backers strongly deny the allegations, and questioned whether a chemical weapons attack even took place.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Tuesday he was outraged by the reported attack, and that the use of chemical weapons would be a violation of international law. He also reaffirmed his support for an OPCW investigation.

A senior Russian lawmaker said Tuesday that Moscow is willing to help arrange an OPCW visit to the site of the suspected attack. Yevgeny Serberennikov, from the defense committee at the Federation Council, told the RIA Novosti news agency that Russia is eager for the OPCW to "finally start carrying out the functions it was created for."

Thousands of opposition fighters, along with tens of thousands of civilians, are still in Douma. The rebels agreed to surrender the town to government forces after the suspected gas attack, and have been evacuating in batches to rebel-held areas in the north. Russian military police have since entered parts of the town.

Asked in Berlin about the Russian proposal that OPCW experts visit Douma, German Chancellor Angela Merkel responded unenthusiastically, saying that "the evidence that chemical weapons were used there is very, very clear."

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that Syrian government troops were on a 72-hour alert and were fortifying their positions. The Observatory's chief, Rami Abdurrahman, said the alert includes all army positions and bases from the southern province of Sweida all the way to Aleppo province in the north, the Mediterranean coast in the west to Deir el-Zour province in the east, along the Iraqi border.

The Sound and Picture Organization, an activist collective in eastern Syria, said that Iranian fighters and members of Lebanon's Hezbollah group had evacuated their positions in the Boukamal area, near the Iraqi border, which was recently retaken from the Islamic State group.

Associated Press writer Nataliya Vasilyeva in Moscow, Nasser Karimi in Tehran, Iran, and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this report.

Free-range parenting laws letting kids roam could catch on

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — After Utah passed the country's first law legalizing so-called free-range parenting, groups in states from New York to Texas are pushing for similar steps to bolster the idea that supporters say is an antidote for anxiety-plagued parents and overscheduled kids.

Free-range parenting is the concept that giving kids the freedom to do things alone — like explore a playground or ride a bike to school — makes them healthier, happier and more resilient.

It surfaced nearly a decade ago, when Lenore Skenazy touched off a firestorm with a column about letting her then-9-year-old son ride the New York City subway alone. Since then, she's become a vocal advocate for free-range parenting.

Critics say letting kids strike out on their own can expose them to serious dangers, from criminals to cars. Parents have been investigated by child-welfare authorities in several high-profile cases, including a Maryland couple who allowed their 10- and 6-year-old children to walk home alone from a park in 2015.

But lawmakers and policy groups in several states say the protective pendulum has swung too far, and it's time to send a message that parents who raise their children in a healthy environment can grant them more freedom.

Utah's new law specifies that it isn't neglectful to let well-cared-for children travel to school, explore a playground or stay in the car alone if they're mature enough to handle it.

Free-range parenting differs from the concept of latchkey kids, or those who take care of themselves after school, in that it generally emphasizes getting kids outside in the neighborhood as a way to develop independence, Boston-based clinical psychologist Bobbi Wegner said.

Fears about letting kids make their own way date at least in part to cases like Etan Patz, who was among the first missing children pictured on milk cartons after disappearing while he walked to his New York City bus stop alone in 1979.

Meanwhile, as education has become more essential in the workforce, parents are increasingly eager to give their kids a leg up with lessons in everything from coding to cello.

"We sign our kids up for all these activities — tutoring, different things — to create this perfect resume from a very young age, but it's really at a detriment to the kid's mental health," Wegner said.

While giving kids independence with parent oversight helps, it's hard for adults to escape pressure to hover, she said.

"Parents need permission to do this," Wegner said. A self-avowed free-range parent, she said a police officer once knocked on her door and threatened to call child services after seeing her then-3-and-a-half-year-old son standing at the end of the driveway talking to neighborhood kids. She'd like to see Massachusetts follow Utah's lead.

In New York, Democratic state Assemblyman Phil Steck said he's gearing up to introduce a similar proposal.

"When I was a child, you let your dogs and your children out after breakfast and ... they had to be home for dinner," he said. "I felt I gained a lot more from just playing on the street than my children did from being in organized sports activities."

It's an idea that cuts across the ideological spectrum. Brandon Logan with the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation is working with lawmakers for a bill next year.

"We expect adults to be independent, and we expect parents to raise their children to be independent, and you can't do that whenever children are being micromanaged," Logan said.

A conservative group is also pushing for a bill in Idaho, and an Arkansas lawmaker whose effort failed plans to bring it back again.

They're all taking a close look at Utah's law, which sailed through the Legislature and was signed by the

governor of the majority-Mormon state known for big families and wide-open spaces. It doesn't specify how old kids should be to do things alone, which lawmakers say will allow authorities to weigh each case separately.

Discretion like that is important, said Stephen Hinshaw, a University of California, Berkeley psychology professor. Not every child is ready to ride their bike alongside busy roads, and participating in things like music lessons can teach them important skills.

"Parents have to be smart about what is helping foster self-reliance and what is putting kids in a dangerous spot," he said.

Amy Coulter, a stay-at-home Utah mom of four girls and a boy, said she doesn't call herself a free-range parent. But she does avoid intervening with teachers on her older kids' grades and encourages her kids use their own money to buy things at the grocery store.

"I want them to know that they're capable," she said of her children, who range in age from 5 to 14.

In her Lehi neighborhood, kids often roam the block "snack-hopping" at different homes.

Recent Utah transplant Krista Whipple said she's liked the concept of free-range parenting for years, but it was tough to practice it in her old Los Angeles neighborhood when most kids stayed behind fences.

"I didn't want to raise my kids all cooped up, but it always made me think twice," said Whipple, a program manager at a St. George youth homeless shelter who has two boys and a girl who are 6, 4 and 3.

"Kids are not in constant danger, and it's OK to let them outside, and it's OK ... to let them get lost," she said. "They'll find their way home."

Trump threatens Syria strike, cancels summit travel

By **ROBERT BURNS, ZEKE MILLER and MATTHEW LEE, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — After threatening a military strike against Syria, President Donald Trump on Tuesday cancelled plans to travel to South America later this week, choosing to stay in the United States to manage the response to an apparent chemical weapons attack.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday that Trump will not attend the 8th Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru or travel to Bogota, Colombia as planned, remaining in the United States to "oversee the American response to Syria and to monitor developments around the world."

The decision marks the first time an American president has not attended the summit. Vice President Mike Pence will travel in Trump's place.

Trump on Monday promised a decision on Syria within hours, declaring that Russia or any other nation found to share responsibility for Saturday's apparent chemical weapons attack on civilians will "pay a price."

The White House sharply rejected any suggestion that Trump's own words about pulling U.S. troops out of Syria had opened the door for the attack, which killed more than 40 people, including children.

Trump, asked whether Russian President Vladimir Putin bore any responsibility, responded, "He may, yeah, he may. And if he does it's going to be very tough, very tough." He added, "Everybody's gonna pay a price. He will. Everybody will."

Amid the tough talk from the White House, the U.S. military appeared to be in position to carry out any attack order. A Navy destroyer, the USS Donald Cook, was underway in the eastern Mediterranean after completing a port call in Cyprus. The guided missile destroyer is armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, the weapon of choice in a U.S. attack one year ago on an airfield in Syria following an alleged sarin gas attack on civilians.

The Russian military, which has a presence in Syria as a key Assad ally, said its officers had visited the weekend site in a suburb of Damascus, the Syrian capital, and found no evidence to back up reports of poison gas being used. Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, accused Washington of deliberately stoking international tensions by threatening Russia in a tone "beyond the threshold of what is acceptable, even during the Cold War."

Trump said there was little question that Syria was responsible for the apparent weekend attack, although the government of President Bashar Assad denied it. "To me there's not much of a doubt, but the

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generals will figure it out," Trump said.

He promised a decision on a possible military response within 24 to 48 hours, "probably by the end of today."

Emphatic in his condemnation of the apparent gas attack, Trump noted graphic pictures of the dead and sickened, calling the assault "heinous," "atrocious," "horrible" and "barbaric."

Fielding questions at the White House, Trump press secretary Sarah Sanders said it would be "outrageous" to say that Trump's recent announcement that he intends to remove all U.S. forces from Syria in the coming months had emboldened Assad. "I think that it is outrageous to say that the president of the United States green-lit something as atrocious as the actions that have taken place over the last several days," she said.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, in separate remarks at the Pentagon, also suggested Moscow bore some blame. He criticized Russia for what he suggested was its failure to ensure the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal under terms of a 2013 agreement.

Trump was to meet late in the day with senior national security aides, and no action was "off the table," the president said. Monday was the first day on the job for his new national security adviser, John Bolton, who has previously advocated military action against Syria.

Trump said, "If it's Russia, if it's Syria, if it's Iran, if it's all of them together, we'll figure it out."

The United States, meanwhile, urged the U.N. Security Council to adopt a resolution that would condemn the continuing use of chemical weapons in Syria "in the strongest terms" and establish a new body to determine responsibility for chemical attacks. The draft resolution, obtained by The Associated Press, was circulated ahead of an emergency Security Council meeting.

An American official said the U.S. was discussing with allies whether they would participate in a retaliatory strike. If Trump decides to proceed quickly, the most likely partner would be France rather than Britain, because of concerns about obtaining permission from Parliament, said the official, who wasn't authorized to discuss the planning publicly and requested anonymity.

As U.S. officials consider whether and how to respond, they are looking at what type of chemical agent might have been used. When Trump ordered airstrikes last year after a chemical weapons attack, it was a response to the use of sarin gas, which is banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention that Syria has signed. An attack with chlorine, which can be used as a weapon but is not outright banned by the treaty, could raise precedent issues, as there have been numerous recent allegations of chlorine attacks in Syria that have drawn no response from the Trump administration.

AP writers Catherine Lucey, Josh Lederman, Edie Lederer and Jonathan Lemire contributed.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire>

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, April 11, the 101st day of 2018. There are 264 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 11, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which included the Fair Housing Act, a week after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

On this date:

In 1689, William III and Mary II were crowned as joint sovereigns of Britain.

In 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht was signed, ending the War of the Spanish Succession.

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln spoke to a crowd outside the White House, saying, "We meet this evening, not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart." (It was the last public address Lincoln would deliver.)

In 1921, Iowa became the first state to impose a cigarette tax, at 2 cents a package.

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In 1945, during World War II, American soldiers liberated the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald in Germany.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers played in an exhibition against the New York Yankees at Ebbets Field, four days before his regular-season debut that broke baseball's color line. (The Dodgers won, 14-6.)

In 1951, President Harry S. Truman relieved Gen. Douglas MacArthur of his commands in the Far East.

In 1953, Oveta Culp Hobby became the first Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

In 1970, Apollo 13, with astronauts James A. Lovell, Fred W. Haise and Jack Swigert, blasted off on its ill-fated mission to the moon.

In 1974, Palestinian gunmen killed 16 civilians, mostly women and children, in the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shemona.

In 1988, the hijackers of a Kuwait Airways jetliner killed a second hostage, dumping his body onto the ground in Larnaca, Cyprus. "The Last Emperor" won best picture at the 60th annual Academy Awards ceremony; Cher won best actress for "Moonstruck," Michael Douglas best actor for "Wall Street."

In 1998, the executive committee of the Ulster Union Party voted 55-23 to support the Northern Ireland peace accord and its leader, David Trimble, who had outmaneuvered rebels in his ranks.

Ten years ago: Group of Seven financial officials meeting in Washington pledged to strengthen their regulation of banks and other financial institutions while anxiously hoping the credit crisis in the United States would be a short one. French troops captured six pirates after the pirates released 30 hostages who were aboard the French luxury yacht Le Ponant when it was seized off Somalia's coast.

Five years ago: Congress' most serious gun-control effort in years cleared its first hurdle as the Senate pushed past conservatives' attempted blockade, rebuffing 68-31 an effort to keep debate from even starting. (However, proposals for tighter background checks for buyers as well as bans on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines went down to defeat six days later.) Comedian Jonathan Winters, 87, died in Montecito, California.

One year ago: In Dortmund, Germany, three explosions went off near Borussia Dortmund's team bus ahead of a Champions League quarterfinal match, injuring one of the soccer team's players. (Prosecutors alleged that the suspected bomber bet that Borussia Dortmund's shares on the stock exchange would drop in value and tried to disguise the attack as Islamic terrorism.) Guitarist J. Geils, founder of The J. Geils Band, died in his Massachusetts home at age 71. David Letterman's mother, Dorothy Menger, a Midwestern homemaker who became an unlikely celebrity on her son's late-night talk show, died at age 95.

Today's Birthdays: Ethel Kennedy is 90. Actor Joel Grey is 86. Actress Louise Lasser is 79. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Ellen Goodman is 77. Movie writer-director John Milius is 74. Actor Peter Riegert is 71. Movie director Carl Franklin is 69. Actor Bill Irwin is 68. Country singer-songwriter Jim Lauderdale is 61. Songwriter-producer Daryl Simmons is 61. Rock musician Nigel Pulsford is 57. Actor Lucky Vanous is 57. Country singer Steve Azar is 54. Singer Lisa Stansfield is 52. Montana Gov. Steve Bullock is 52. Rock musician Dylan Keefe (Marcy Playground) is 48. Actor Johnny Messner is 48. Actor Vicellous (vy-SAY'-luhs) Shannon is 47. Rapper David Banner is 44. Actress Tricia Helfer is 44. Rock musician Chris Gaylor (The All-American Rejects) is 39. Actress Kelli Garner is 34. Singer Joss Stone is 31. Actress-dancer Kaitlyn Jenkins is 26.

Thought for Today: "If you want to conquer fear, don't sit at home and think about it. Go out and get busy." — Dale Carnegie, American writer-lecturer (1888-1955).