

Groton Daily Independent

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BLOCKER CONSTRUCTION NEW CONSTRUCTION
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HOOP BARNs


(605) 216-2677 (605) 226-4062

JH Track Meet at Sisseton for April 12 is **postponed**
Friday: Indoor Track meet at NSU
Friday: Elementary PAC Carnival at GES
Saturday: Prom at GHS, Grand March at 7 p.m.
Saturday: ACT Testing at GHS, 7:30 a.m.
Monday, April 16: Girls Golf at Milbank **postponed**
Monday, April 16: JH Track at Ipswich is **cancelled**
Tuesday, April 17: Track at Webster is **cancelled**
Tuesday, April 17: Elementary Spring Concert, 7 p.m.
Wednesday, April 18: NSU Math Contest, 9 a.m.
Thursday, April 19: JH Track Meet at Groton, 3:30 p.m.

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**

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Blood Drive!

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

To make an appointment, call **JUST**
Carol Osterman: 397-8498 **1 DONATION**
or June Ackman: 397-8369 **SAVES**
3 LIVES

Lions Club Bingo event helping the Summer Festival

The Lions Club sponsored Summer Festival/Car Show was a huge success last year. But there was a problem. Lack of electrical infrastructure. According to Nancy Larsen of the Groton Lions Club, the Club had approached the city to install electrical infrastructure. "Last year, we had to run generators," she said. She said that the city was unable to install new electrical services because it did not have the money to do it. "We decided to start Bingo to help raise money," Larsen said. "This is why Bingo started." She said the electrical work will be done and ready in time for this year's Summer Festival.

Bingo has become a huge hit in recent weeks as the jackpot grows larger when there is no winner. The jackpot started at \$100 and 48 numbers being called. Each week, an additional number is called up to a maximum of 56 numbers, which is where it is at now. Since there was no winner this week, the jackpot next Wednesday will be \$3,521. "This is a win-win situation for Groton," said Topper Tastad of the Groton Lions Club. "The Legion gives all of its money back to the community and this helps bring people in to support the Legion," he said. "The Lions Club donates their money back to the community and this helps to make our community a better place to live."

The crowd started showing up, picking out their Bingo Cards and their tables as early as 4:30 p.m. As the tables fill up, guests are greeted by Tastad who finds a place for them to sit. It becomes a huge social gathering as the room is filled with conversations. But when Bingo Bev (Frohling) steps up to the microphone



Lions Club members Bingo Bev Frohling, President Dave Pigors and Topper Tastad greet the many Bingo players who showed up Wednesday night at the Groton Legion.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



The Groton Legion Clubroom was packed full of Bingo players playing for the \$2,700 jackpot. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Bingo Bev (Frohling) calls out the Bingo numbers each Wednesday evening. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

and begins to call the numbers, the room gets quiet as everyone gets serious about their cards. The first two games had \$400 jackpots before the Blackout Bingo jackpot of \$2,700 was played. Since no one wins, Bingo Bev continues to call numbers until a Blackout is won. Each Blackout gets \$50. Then one more game of about \$400 is played before the night is over. "I love the Lions Club," said Bingo Bev. "I needed a social life and this has filled that void for me. This is a cause that I believe in."

In addition, food is being served and the proceeds go to the group that is signed up. Yesterday, the proceeds of the Walking Tacos went to the Robotics Team. Next week, the food sales will go to the Cheerleaders. It's just another way that Bingo is giving back to the community.

And one more thing that is enforced very strongly - no one under 21 can play or be in the room during Bingo.

- Paul Kosel



Groton Lions Club member Karyn Babcock plays her four Bingo cards. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Peggy Feist, Sarah Sigestad and David McGannon helped to serve Walking Tacos at the Bingo event held Wednesday evening at the Groton Legion. The proceeds last night went to the Robotics program. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Bingo players had to park as far away as two to three blocks.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



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Facebook Items are overly priced

You see ads on Facebook that entice you to buy a certain product. But beware, those prices are overly inflated.

For example, I seen this ad for a solar-powered easy bird fountain kit. It's a great addition to your garden. The ad says its retail price is \$79.99, but if you buy within the next 14 hours, you could save 54 percent and get it for only \$32.99.

So I Googled the item and found out that I could get the same exact thing at Walmart for \$13.99. In addition, I found some of the reviews were not that good either.

So before you buy anything off of Facebook, make sure you do your homework.

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
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& Construction Equipment
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office at 605-448-0048 or

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Don Wolter 605-881-6789
Larry Lekness 605-880-5933
Jan Vold 605-228-4250

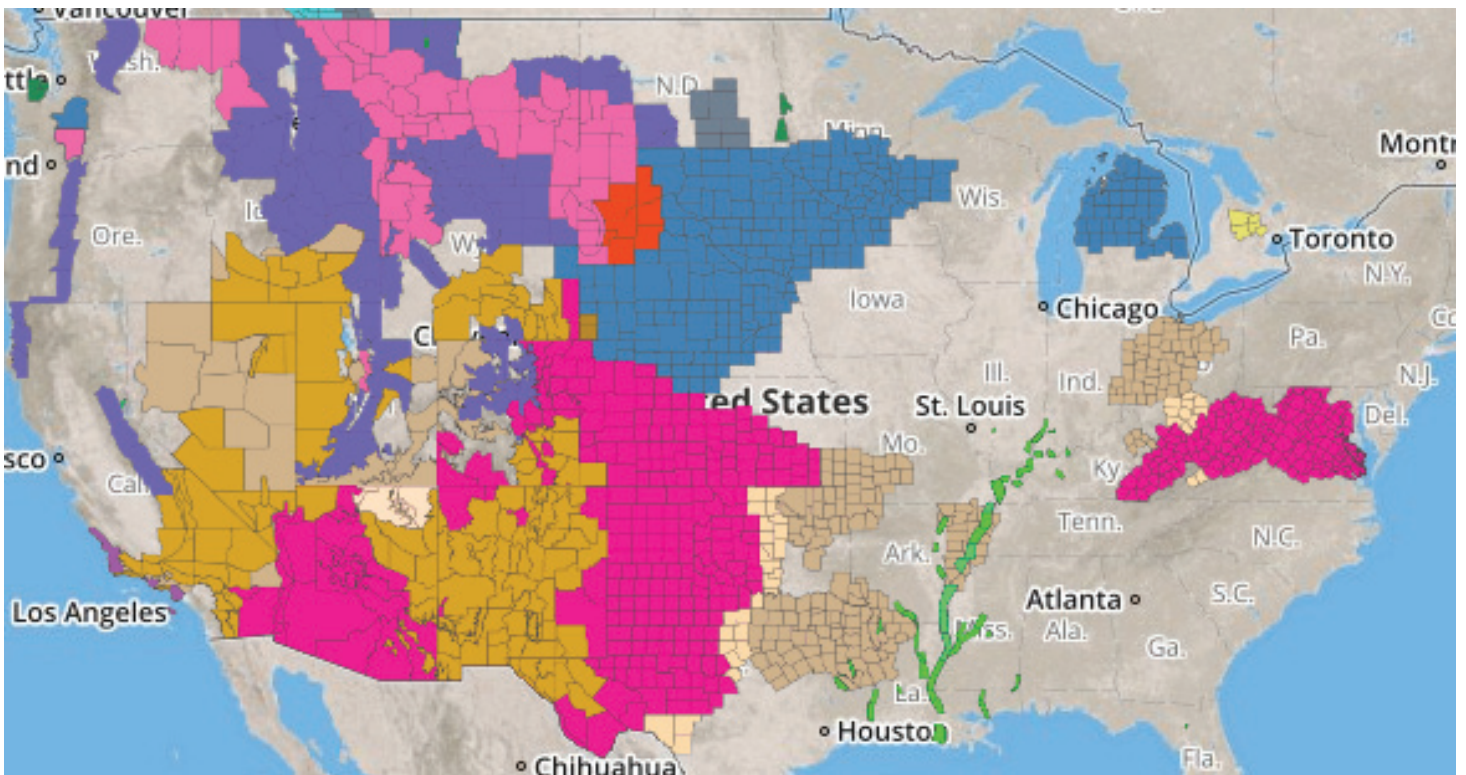
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- Blue - Winter Storm Watch
- Orange - Blizzard Warning
- Light Pink - Winter Storm Warning
- Purple - Winter Weather Advisory
- Bright Pink - Red Flag Warning
- Gold - High Wind Warning

Football Spring Game Moved Inside to Presentation College Dome on Friday

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University football spring game has been moved into the Presentation College Dome on Friday evening. Kick-off will begin at 6:30 p.m. from the dome on the North side of town.

The game was previously scheduled to be played at Swisher Field, but with the impending weather has been moved indoors. Fans will be admitted free to the contest.

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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Groton Kiwanis News

Reed Litch, president; lead the business meeting of the Groton Kiwanis meeting, Wednesday noon. Volunteers signed up to work at the annual Kiwanis track meeting, set for April 24. Chuck Raap and Lee Schinkel will take tickets /hand out programs again this year.

Tom Mahan was program chairman, and introduced Russell Wright, who is starting the newly formed trap shoot teams, at GHS.

Forty kids are signed up now, They now have coaches lined up for 6th through 12th grades. They will shoot clay pigeons in Aberdeen.

Stephen stated he got full support from our superintendent, and school board.

Next week's program leader will be Chuck Padfield, followed by Tom Paepke.

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

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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

WINTER STORM WATCH

...Strong Spring Storm System To Impact Area...

...WINTER STORM WATCH IN EFFECT FROM FRIDAY MORNING THROUGH SATURDAY AFTERNOON...

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions possible. Winds gusting as high as 50 mph could cause whiteout conditions in blowing snow. Significant drifting of the snow is also possible. Total snow accumulations of 3 to 6 inches, with localized amounts up to 7 inches, and ice accumulations of a light glaze are possible.

* WHERE...McPherson and Brown Counties.

* WHEN...From Friday morning through Saturday afternoon.

* ADDITIONAL DETAILS...Travel could be very difficult to impossible, including during the evening commute on Friday. Tree branches could fall.

A Winter Storm Watch for blizzard conditions means there is a potential for falling and/or blowing snow with strong winds and extremely poor visibilities. This can lead to whiteout conditions and make travel very dangerous.



All auto owners!
Save \$2-\$4 /tank
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by choosing low carbon
Super Premium E30's
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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 12, 1970: A strong spring storm affected the northern and western two-thirds of South Dakota. Heavy snow fell throughout the morning hours dumping over a foot of snow over a large area of the state. Winds whipped the snow into 2 to 4-foot drifts across much of northern South Dakota. The Aberdeen area was the hardest hit with around 17 inches reported. While southeast South Dakota, southwest Minnesota, and northwest Iowa did not feel the effects of the storm, east-central South Dakota was not as fortunate. Freezing drizzle and freezing rain resulted in heavy icing in east central South Dakota causing extensive damage. The ice storm caused power outages to 20 to 80% of the rural electric service in the area.

1927: A tornado wiped out the town of Rock Springs Texas, killing 72 persons and causing 1.2 million dollars damage. The tornado was more than one mile in width and destroyed 235 of 247 buildings, leaving no trace of lumber or contents in many cases. Many survivors were bruised by large hail that fell after the passage of the tornado.

1934: Winds atop Mount Washington New Hampshire, averaged 186 mph for five minutes, with a peak gust of 231 mph, the highest wind speed ever clocked in the world at that time. In a report released by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), that record was toppled in 1996 at Barrow Island, Australia during Typhoon Olivia. The new world record is now 253 mph. The 316 mph wind speed recorded at Moore, Oklahoma on 5/3/1999 logged during an F5 tornado was not recorded at ground level.

1945: A series of significant tornadoes raked Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, and Illinois. Antlers, Oklahoma were nearly obliterated by a massive F5 tornado that zigzagged from southwest to northeast across the town. 69 people died in the twister. Another tornado killed eight people in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The disaster was overshadowed by the loss of President Franklin Roosevelt, who died suddenly at his vacation home at Warm Springs, Georgia.

1987 - A cold front crossing the central U.S. produced heavy snow in the Central Rockies, and severe thunderstorms over Kansas and Oklahoma. Snowfall totals ranged up to 16 inches at Red Mountain Pass CO. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 87 mph at Ponca City OK. Winds associated with the cold front itself gusted to 69 mph at Tucumcari NM. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Snow blanketed the Southern Appalachians. Totals in North Carolina ranged up to 17 inches at Mitchell. Winds at Flat Top Mountain gusted to 80 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-two cities in the south central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Elkins WV with a low of 15 degrees, and Baton Rouge LA with a reading of 37 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Arctic air invaded the central U.S. Lincoln, NE, reported a record low of 17 degrees. Thunderstorms developing along the arctic cold front produced heavy snow in north central Kansas, wind gusts to 61 mph at Midland TX, and wind gusts to 69 mph at Rawlins WY. Warm weather prevailed in the southwestern U.S. Las Vegas NV reported a record high of 91 degrees, and on the 13th, Sacramento CA reported a record high of 95 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2010 - One-inch diameter hail falls in Fresno, CA. Two condominiums are destroyed by thunderstorms in California's San Joaquin Valley. Up to three funnel clouds were also seen in the region.

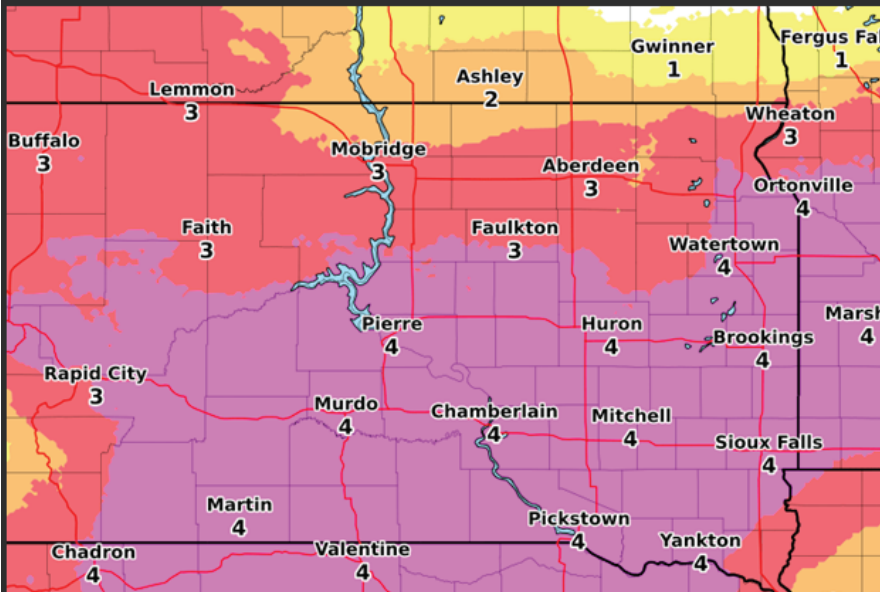
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Thu Apr 12	Fri Apr 13	Sat Apr 14	Sun Apr 15	Mon Apr 16	Tue Apr 17	Wed Apr 18
43°F	35°F	34°F	35°F	42°F	42°F	42°F
33°F	22°F	11°F	17°F	26°F	28°F	32°F
W 11 MPH Precip 80%	NNE 31 MPH Precip 70%	N 24 MPH	NNE 9 MPH	S 9 MPH	ESE 17 MPH Precip 20%	W 21 MPH



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, especially for areas along and south of U.S. Highway 212.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 4/12/2018 6:22 AM Central

Published on: 04/12/2018 at 6:28AM

It's starting to look more and more like a significant spring snow storm is going to impact much of South Dakota starting early Friday morning and persisting into Saturday. The storm system will have the potential to bring heavy snow, along with very strong northerly winds to the area. Continue to monitor the forecast today and tonight regarding this upcoming storm, as we're now about 24 hours away from the start of the event!

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 43.5 F at 1:14 PM

Low Outside Temp: 30.4 F at 5:44 AM

Wind Chill:

High Gust: 25.0 Mph at 1:21 PM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 85° in 1931

Record Low: 9° in 1961

Average High: 55°F

Average Low: 30°F

Average Precip in April: 0.57

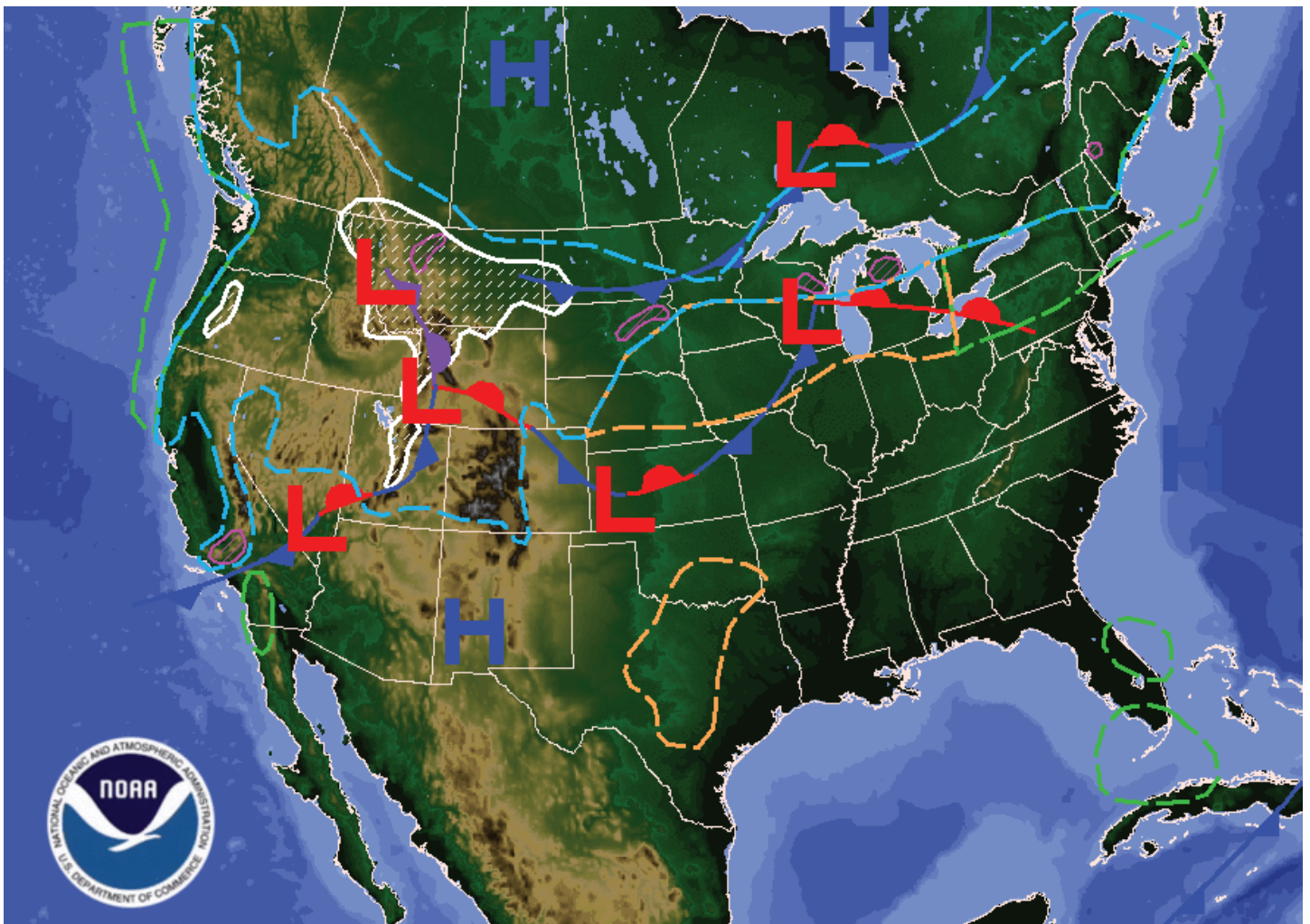
Precip to date in April: 0.61

Average Precip to date: 2.75

Precip Year to Date: 2.68

Sunset Tonight: 8:16 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:51



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Apr 12, 2018, issued 4:56 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain

Rain and T'Storms

Rain and Snow

Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)

Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)

Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)

Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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RENEWED LIKE EAGLES

Eagles have a unique place in nature - certainly a place that differs from all other birds. They represent strength, power and freedom from the things of this world that would distract them. No wonder they have a special place in God's Word. Isaiah promised, "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles." No doubt David had this in mind when he wrote, "so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." What makes eagles special?

Eagles have great vision and sharp focus. Their eyes were designed by God for long distance and clarity. Their vision enables them to see what other birds do not see. We as Christians need God's vision so we can see what we need to do for Him.

Eagles are fearless. As God's representatives, we need to be fearless as we represent Him and present His message to others. We must never bow to others in fear.

Eagles are tenacious. Other birds fly from a storm. But eagles fly into the storm - taking advantage of life's difficulties - and rise to greater heights, never giving up.

Eagles are "high flyers." They easily fly to an altitude of 10,000 feet. Pigeons stay on the ground and "grumble" all day long. The eagle quietly soars above the noises of life and finds peace with God.

Eagles possess vitality. They are full of life yet find time to reenergize themselves and extend their lives.

Eagles nurture their young ones. No other bird is more attentive or gentle to its young than the eagle.

Prayer: Grant us, Lord, the qualities of an eagle. May we live lives that distinguish us from others as we serve You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 103:5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

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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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
01-03-05-09-22
(one, three, five, nine, twenty-two)
Estimated jackpot: \$60,000

Lotto America
07-20-29-33-52, Star Ball: 1, ASB: 2
(seven, twenty, twenty-nine, thirty-three, fifty-two; Star Ball: one; ASB: two)
Estimated jackpot: \$3.14 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$55 million

Powerball
16-18-27-55-67, Powerball: 18, Power Play: 3
(sixteen, eighteen, twenty-seven, fifty-five, sixty-seven; Powerball: eighteen; Power Play: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$89 million

Rapid City partnership aims to create 5K jobs over 5 years

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A new Rapid City economic development partnership has unveiled a five-year plan to create nearly 5,000 jobs and attract \$300 million in business investment to the city.

The Elevate Rapid City public-private partnership announced Tuesday it has raised about \$3 million of its \$4.25 million goal to fund the initiative, the Rapid City Journal reported . The partnership brings together local economic development groups that previously worked independently, including the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce and the Rapid City Economic Development Partnership.

“The whole goal of this campaign is really to stimulate economic growth in the Rapid City area,” said Stuart Wevik, Black Hills Energy’s vice president of utility operations.

Creating about 4,755 jobs over five years should bring in more than \$125 million in additional consumer spending, he said.

Nearly half of those jobs would have an average wage of \$29.13 per hour, according to the partnership’s estimates. The remaining jobs would have an average wage of \$17.79 per hour.

“We want to attract good paying jobs and good paying businesses to Rapid City,” Wevik said.

The South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, the Sanford Underground Research Facility and the Ellsworth Air Force base are assets that need to be leveraged to appeal to more businesses, he said.

“We really are going to measure what this campaign does so we can look back in five years with tangible metrics and say, ‘We created this many jobs, we brought this many businesses in, we trained this many people, we built this many buildings,’” said Republican Rep. David Lust of Rapid City.

He hopes data and analysis will spark another five-year campaign to follow. He said the current initiative “will really be about measuring and quantifying this effort.”

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

Equine herpes virus confirmed in horse in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Animal Industry Board says equine herpes virus has been confirmed in a horse in Lincoln County.

The board says the horse became ill and had trouble with coordination and walking. Lab tests confirmed the disease.

According to the board, the horse has traveled extensively in South Dakota for cutting and sorting events in the past few weeks.

State veterinarian Dustin Oedekoven (OH'-dih-koh-ven) says the disease can result in respiratory problems, abortion or neurologic disease among horses. Since the disease is contagious and can be spread between horses through direct contact or through contaminated buckets, brushes or tack, Oedekoven recommends cleaning and disinfecting feed and water buckets, stalls and trailers to prevent the disease from spreading.

The virus is not a threat to humans.

In Chloe Zhao's 'The Rider,' a rodeo cowboy plays himself

By JAKE COYLE, AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Chloe Zhao is driving through the Arizona desert just north of Mexico on a research expedition for a film.

"I'm keeping an eye on the border," chuckles Zhao, a Chinese-born, U.S.-based filmmaker. "I don't have my passport with me."

In her young and promising career, Zhao has made flirting with boundaries a specialty. She was born in Beijing and attended boarding school in England before studying political science at Massachusetts' Mount Holyoke College and filmmaking at New York University.

Despite a life spent mainly in cities, she's been drawn intractably to the American heartland. After reading about the epidemic of teen suicides on Indian reservations, she packed up and drove from New York to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. She stayed, on and off, for four years, and made two films there: 2015's "Songs My Brother Taught Me," an affecting study of Lakota siblings, and the new "The Rider," a lyrical, elegiac western about a Lakota rodeo rider (Brady Jandreau) whose career is threatened by a head injury.

Each stars Pine Ridge non-professional actors playing versions of themselves — an approach that lends an unfiltered authenticity to an often mythic American genre. Earthly and soulful, Zhao's films find pain and beauty in humble lives lived close to the land. They take cinema somewhere new, and somewhere real.

"There are just all these rules about how films can be made today. It becomes like a bubble, an industry that's quite detached from reality in many ways," Zhao said in a recent interview by phone from a remote Arizona road. "Independent film has suffered from that."

The films — particularly "The Rider," which Sony Pictures Classics will release Friday — have made the 35-year-old Zhao a breakout filmmaker and an in-demand director. When she was given a \$50,000 grant earmarked for female filmmakers at the Film Independent Spirit Awards in March, Ava DuVernay said, introducing Zhao: "Her work burns so bright it burns my eyes."

"The Rider" has been a quiet sensation on the festival circuit since winning the top prize of Cannes' Directors' Fortnight last year. It's prompted comparisons to early Terrence Malick films like the (more painterly) frontier drama "Days of Heaven." Zhao grants Malick is a touchstone.

"People are like, 'You must know Terry, right?'" Zhao says, laughing. "I always say, 'Actually no. If you see him, please tell him he's got a fan.'"

Alongside the 22-year-old Jandreau, "The Rider" co-stars most of the people in his life: his autistic sister Lilly, his father Tim and many of his friends, including bull rider Lane Scott, who was paralyzed from a 2013 car crash.

Zhao became intrigued about making a movie about Jandreau while watching him recovered from a head injury when he was trampled during a rodeo competition. Despite the risk of re-injury, he refused to give up riding. They first met when Jandreau, a talented and sensitive horse trainer, taught Zhao how to ride.

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"I never met anybody from China. I never met a director. I didn't know anything about movies," said Jandreau speaking from his home in South Dakota. He lives there with his wife and their 8-month-old daughter. On a recent afternoon, he spoke on the phone after checking on a just-born calf.

"Chloe wasn't scared to get on a horse so I shouldn't be scared to say a line or whatever the hell," said Jandreau.

Zhao gives Jandreau more credit. "I'm not as good at riding horses as he is at acting," she says. "I figured if he can manipulate the emotions of a horse, he can probably do that with the audience. I just had a feeling he might be good."

Zhao came up with the story a month before shooting, shaping it around Jandreau's own experiences. For Jandreau, not being able to ride was an existential threat. "It's all I love," he says. "It's all I do." He was able to ride on a horse by himself, he says, since he was a year-a-half old.

"A very well-trained horse," says Jandreau. "I was still in a diaper."

It's been much the same for his daughter. Jandreau estimates she's been riding 40 times already, on 20 different horses. She's also been on a lot of planes. With "The Rider," the Jandreaus have traveled to Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Austin and elsewhere. Jandreau, who has started a horse breeding and training program since shooting the film, also would like to keep acting — a goal supported by the rave reviews he's received.

"I've actually auditioned for a couple things," said Jandreau. "Looking forward to acting again, hopefully. If things go well, I guess."

Zhao is juggling a handful of projects, unsure which will be next for her. One is a historic western about a black sheriff. Another is set 5,000 years in the future in China. "So no more real life for a while," she jokes. But Zhao senses a lot of opportunity coming her way.

"I feel like the industry really wants to support female filmmakers. It feels a lot more open than a year ago," says Zhao. "But at the same time I'm also very careful because the people who jump on the bandwagon now will jump off when the next social issue becomes popular."

"There's a huge shift," she adds. "There's some part of it that's going to stick."

Zhao will likely work with professional actors in the future, but even in larger productions, she expects to continue to look beyond the usual head shots.

"Even the historic western and the sci-fi, I'm going to want to include unfamiliar faces and unconventional casting," says Zhao. "I think it throws everybody off a little bit, including myself. And that's a good thing."

Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Retailers hope for certainty as Supreme Court hears tax case

By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Retailers are hoping for a resolution this year from the Supreme Court, which hears arguments Tuesday in a decades-old dispute: Whether companies must collect sales tax on items sold in a state where they don't have a store or other building.

If the court backs government officials who say they're losing billions of dollars in uncollected taxes, thousands of small companies could be forced to start charging their out-of-state customers for them. Some businesses fear that could alienate customers used to tax-free shopping. On the other side: Retailers who do collect sales tax and believe those who don't have an unfair advantage.

The justices will hear online retailers Wayfair, Overstock.com and Newegg challenging a South Dakota law enacted last May requiring out-of-state retailers that have sales of more than \$100,000 or over 200 transactions a year in the state to collect sales tax. Their decision could have national implications on e-commerce, although Congress can pass legislation afterward that broadens or narrows the law.

It's not only about the money, says Stephanie Harvey, owner of exit343design in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania. There are more than 10,000 sales tax jurisdictions in the United States: 45 states, the District of Columbia, counties and municipalities.

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"Adding this sales tax isn't just about the tax itself — it's about the cost of time to navigate and file (taxes) or the additional expense of hiring someone to do so on behalf of the business," says Harvey, whose design and printing company has an online store and sells merchandise to other retailers.

The justices are likely to rule by June on whether to overturn a 1992 decision, *Quill v. North Dakota*, that said companies cannot be forced to collect sales tax from customers in a state where they don't have a physical presence like a store or distribution center. Collecting tax from online sales hasn't been a question for big online retailers like Walmart or Macy's since they have physical stores in most or all states. They also have accounting systems and financial staffs to handle the work.

Small retailers have software options to help collect taxes and do the administrative work, but it's an added cost. Whether it's worth it may depend on how much revenue a seller gets from other states. The most comprehensive software can work with the programs retailers use to process sales transactions. The software sellers determine the correct sales tax rate and submit payments and reports to tax authorities.

Retailers who sell through Amazon.com can also have sales tax collected, although many don't on out-of-state transactions. Amazon itself long resisted collecting sales tax but now does so nationwide on its own merchandise. Some of the smaller sellers say their overhead will increase if *Quill* is overturned.

"It is going to be a process, and frankly, it would affect the bottom line of the company," says Dave "Lando" Landis, owner of Rocker Rags, an online seller of clothing with photos and logos of rock musicians. The company, based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, gets a small percentage of its sales from out-of-state customers.

Landis uses e-commerce software and expects to link it with a sales tax program if he must start collecting taxes in other states. "Should we be required to, we'll be on it extremely quickly," he says.

Adrienne Kosewicz pays \$3,300 a year for tax collection software to handle payments and reports to her home state, Washington. Her Seattle-based online business, Play It Safe World Toys, sells through Amazon, which handles computation and collection. "When you expand your reach, costs often come with it. That's business," she says.

It's customer sentiment, not an administrative burden, that concerns Gregory Hook. The vice president at QKiddo, an online children's clothing retailer in New York, worries that consumers who don't understand the situation will wonder, "How come a couple of months ago I got this product and I wasn't being charged tax and now I am?"

He's planning on explaining any changes to customers. "We don't want them to think we're running an unethical business," he says.

Though some retailers aren't daunted by the effort required to collect taxes, the potential for complications is clear, said Bill McClellan, vice president for the industry group Electronic Retailing Association.

"Each situation is going to be a little different, depending on their legacy software, bandwidth. Multiply that across the ecosystem and there just isn't a magic wand," says McClellan, who describes his group's members as split on the out-of-state tax question.

The fact that the issue was deemed worthy of hearing by the justices, who usually hear about 75 cases a year out of thousands of appeals, is a sign they believe it's time to reconsider the "fairly antiquated" *Quill* decision, says Stephanie Martz, general counsel for the National Retail Federation. The industry group filed a brief in support of that ruling being overturned.

Justice Anthony Kennedy noted in a 2015 opinion accompanying a decision in a Colorado tax case that "given these changes in technology and consumer sophistication, it is unwise to delay any longer a reconsideration of the court's holding."

In Congress, bills requiring retailers to collect tax on out-of-state purchase have been introduced periodically during the past decade only to languish and die. Lawmakers are divided over the burden that tax collection would create for small retailers. A bill currently in Congress exempts retailers with up to \$1 million in annual out-of-state sales.

"If South Dakota wins, I think we'll see a big push in Congress by the business community to try to limit the court's decision," says Scott Peterson, vice president for tax policy at Avalara, a maker of tax collection software.

Follow Joyce Rosenberg at www.twitter.com/JoyceMRosenberg . Her work can be found here: <https://apnews.com/search/joyce%20rosenberg>

Authorities ID Chancellor woman killed in weekend crash

MARION, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified a Chancellor woman who died in a one-vehicle crash in Turner County.

The Highway Patrol says 36-year-old Lolette Oja lost control of her sport utility vehicle on a gravel road south of Marion on Saturday night, and the SUV rolled in the ditch.

Oja died at the scene. She was traveling alone.

Davison County Commission rejects wind project for 2nd time

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — The Davison County Commission has rejected a wind project between Mitchell and Mount Vernon for the second time in three years.

The Daily Republic reports the panel voted unanimously Tuesday against permitting the nine-turbine wind project. Commissioners cited concerns about property rights issues and potential loss in property values.

Con Edison Development hoped to make the project part of three in the region, along with wind projects in Aurora and Brule counties that are expected to get underway next month.

The Davison County project was first presented to the county's planning board in 2015, but commissioners rejected it the next year. The company changed the plan but it still met with opposition, though it also had supporters.

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

Shot fired in restroom at Aberdeen fast food restaurant

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Aberdeen police are investigating an incident in which a gunshot was fired in a fast food restaurant's restroom.

The American News reports that officers responded to the Burger King restaurant about 11:30 a.m. Monday.

Police Capt. Eric Duven says there are no known injuries. The shot caused minor damage to the floor. Authorities are trying to identify two men in surveillance video footage who they would like to question.

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

2 business professionals will vie for Sioux Falls mayor

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The next mayor of Sioux Falls will be a business professional.

Voters in Tuesday's election sent Paul TenHaken and Jolene Loetscher on to a runoff election on May 1.

TenHaken is a 40-year-old entrepreneur who founded the Sioux Falls digital marketing company Click Rain.

The 39-year-old Loetscher owns a pair of Sioux Falls businesses, is an activist and a retired broadcast journalist.

TenHaken received 34 percent of the vote and Loetscher 25 percent in Tuesday's election, which featured six candidates.

Current Mayor Mike Huether has served two four-year terms and can't seek another.

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Oldest courthouse still in use in state to be replaced

OLIVET, S.D. (AP) — Voters in Hutchinson County have approved a \$4.5 million courthouse. The Yankton Daily Press and Dakotan reports that nearly two-thirds of the 1,700 voters in Tuesday's election favored the project.

The current courthouse was built in 1881 and is the oldest in use in the state. County officials say it has mold, water damage, cracks and other structural deficiencies.

The County Commission decided in February to replace it, but opponents organized a successful petition drive to put the matter to a public vote. Opponents had raised concerns about the proposed cost, location and necessity of a new courthouse.

The county has built up \$2.7 million in a construction fund and will borrow the rest of the needed money from a bank.

Information from: Yankton Press and Dakotan, <http://www.yankton.net/>

Bail reduced for woman accused of aiding fatal shooting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Bail has been lowered Tuesday for a woman accused of being an accessory to a fatal shooting in Rapid City.

Seventh Circuit Court Judge reduced bail for Cierra Walks from \$100,000 to \$25,000 Tuesday, citing the potential delays while jurisdictional issues regarding her arrest on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation are litigated.

KOTA-TV reports Walks was arrested with Maricelo Garcia in October of 2017 in connection with the shooting death of 20-year-old Clinton Farlee earlier that month. She has pleaded not guilty to being an accessory to the crime. A hearing to decide the legality of Walks arrest is scheduled for July 18. Garcia has been charged with first-degree murder.

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

Trump: Syria attack 'very soon or not so soon at all!'

By ROBERT BURNS and CATHERINE LUCEY

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that an attack on Syria could take place "very soon or not so soon at all!"

The president made the statement in a tweet Thursday morning. Trump on Wednesday had warned Russia to "get ready" for a missile attack on its ally Syria, suggesting imminent retaliation for last weekend's suspected chemical weapons attack. But on Thursday, Trump wrote that he: "Never said when an attack on Syria would take place."

At stake in Syria is the potential for confrontation, if not outright conflict, between the U.S. and Russia, former Cold War foes whose relations have deteriorated in recent years over Moscow's intervention in Ukraine, its interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and, most recently, its support for Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Russian lawmakers have warned the United States that Moscow would view an airstrike on Syria as a war crime and that it could trigger a direct U.S-Russian military clash. 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.

Trump, who has often said a commander in chief should never telegraph his military intentions, apparently did so himself, tweeting that missiles "will be coming" in response to the suspected chemical attack that killed at least 40 people near Damascus.

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

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kills his people and enjoys it!"

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, however, indicated that evidence of what happened was still being studied. At a photo-taking session during a Pentagon meeting with his Dutch counterpart, Mattis was asked by a reporter whether he had seen enough evidence to blame the Syrian government.

"We're still assessing the intelligence, ourselves and our allies," Mattis said. "We're still working on this."

Trump suggested Monday he had little doubt that Syria was to blame, but neither he nor other administration officials have produced hard evidence. This is in contrast to an incident one year ago in which the U.S. government had video and other evidence of certain aspects of an actual attack by Syrian aircraft, which involved the use of sarin gas. Trump responded then by launching dozens of Navy cruise missiles at a Syrian airfield.

Asked whether the U.S. military was ready to conduct an attack in Syria if ordered, Mattis replied, "We stand ready to provide military options if they're appropriate, as the president determined."

In the past, Trump has condemned others for forecasting military plans, repeatedly blistering President Barack Obama during the 2016 campaign. During one speech, he said, "We must as a nation be more unpredictable. We are totally predictable. We tell everything."

Asked about Trump's tweet about an impending attack on Syria, former Defense Secretary William Cohen, who ran the Pentagon for President Bill Clinton, said on CNN that it "compromises the mission somewhat."

Trump did not detail what a strike on Syria would look like, or whether these would be U.S. missiles. U.S. officials have been consulting with France, Britain and other allies on a possible joint military operation, but the timing remained in doubt Wednesday. Trump canceled a foreign trip in order to manage a crisis that is testing his vow to stand up to Assad.

Shortly after his tweeted warning to Russia, Trump took a more conciliatory tone in lamenting that the U.S.-Russia relationship "is worse now than it has ever been." There is no reason for this, he wrote, adding that "Russia needs us to help with their economy, something that would be very easy to do, and we need all nations to work together."

Syria's Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that Trump's threats to attack are "reckless" and endanger international peace and security.

Trump's administration has sought to show toughness on Russia, with a series of economic and diplomatic actions, including new sanctions last week against government officials and oligarchs. Trump has largely avoided criticizing Russian President Vladimir Putin by name, though he singled him out in a tweet over the weekend for supporting Assad.

The U.S., France and Britain have been in extensive consultations about launching a military strike as early as the end of this week, U.S. officials have said. 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.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday called for a "strong and joint response" to the attack in the Syrian town of Douma on Saturday. 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 terror attacks have targeted France, including one last month.

McCarthy, Scalise are likely contenders for House speaker

By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some say it's a fight between West and South. Or a battle for President Donald Trump's affections. Or a test of who can woo conservatives.

But one thing is clear: If the showdown between California Rep. Kevin McCarthy and Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise for House speaker is a popularity contest, it will be tight.

"Steve is the more low-key guy, Kevin is more the big handshake, but they're equally popular," said Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y. "It's not like right versus left or a good guy versus a bad guy."

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House Speaker Paul Ryan told colleagues Wednesday he wouldn't seek re-election in November, implicitly starting the race to replace him. Disconcertingly for the GOP, Trump's unpopularity and early Democratic momentum leave it unclear whether Ryan's replacement will be speaker or minority leader.

For now, McCarthy and Scalise are seen as the chief contenders.

McCarthy, 53, an affable California who has developed a rapport with Trump, is from a Central Valley district. He was elected in 2006 and rocketed into a leadership job in 2009, thanks to his campaigning for fellow Republicans. He replaced Eric Cantor as majority leader in 2014 after the Virginian unexpectedly lost a primary for his House seat and quit.

In 2015, McCarthy sought to succeed Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, who'd alienated conservatives who considered him insufficiently doctrinaire. McCarthy abruptly left that contest days later after failing to line up enough votes, and Ryan accepted the post.

Scalise, 52, the House GOP vote counter first elected a decade ago, had little national name recognition when tragedy thrust him into headlines. He was shot at a congressional baseball practice last year and has slowly come back from his injuries.

The former state legislator and Louisiana conservative has earned the respect of his fellow lawmakers.

"The strength he's shown with his injury, I think, has heightened where he is" among colleagues, said Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn.

Lawmakers and GOP donors want a leader who can raise money, and there McCarthy has an advantage. His leadership political committee has reported contributing more than triple that of Scalise's total to GOP candidates since January 2017.

Neither man is known for rhetorical flourishes. And both have resume problems that fellow Republicans insisted they'd overcome.

In 2014, Scalise was discovered to have addressed a white-supremacist group in 2002 founded by former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke. Scalise apologized and said he'd been unaware of the group's racial views.

McCarthy suggested in 2015 that a House committee probing the deadly 2012 raid on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi, Libya, had damaged Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's poll numbers, undermining GOP arguments that the investigation wasn't politically motivated.

That raised questions about his ability as a communicator, a key for party leaders. But he was one of Trump's earliest and most loyal congressional supporters in the 2016 presidential race.

Some Republicans prefer Scalise's deep red state background to McCarthy's bright blue California, since the GOP's chief strongholds are in rural and red state districts.

"You have a lot of the Southern states who are looking to shift leadership back to that part of the country," said Rep. Steve Russell, R-Okla.

Scalise is viewed as more conservative than McCarthy, important in a House GOP conference that's drifted to the right. That could be intensified after November, when Republicans are expected to lose seats and many of those departing will be moderates.

Conservative groups have awarded Scalise modestly stronger voting ratings than McCarthy. But McCarthy has worked to improve his relationship with conservatives, including trying to craft legislation cutting spending from the government budget enacted recently.

Either man could cut a deal with the House Freedom Caucus. Those roughly 30 conservative members could theoretically deliver their votes to a contender in exchange for a promise to back a caucus member for a leadership post.

Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., who heads the Freedom Caucus, said a candidate's willingness to listen to all lawmakers is "probably the top priority" for backing someone.

Neither Scalise nor McCarthy would acknowledge a race for Ryan's job or definitively deny it. Scalise said it's not "time to talk about what titles people want," while McCarthy said, "There is no leadership election. Paul is speaker."

Those close to Scalise say he is unlikely to directly challenge McCarthy. But he doesn't need to. By offering himself as an alternative choice, ready in case McCarthy fails to muster support, he is essentially making an indirect bid for the top post.

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Congressional leadership races often move quickly, with candidates rushing to win supporters and outmaneuver rivals. Several lawmakers said privately such moves are underway. But others said the race could stretch until after the election clarifies the number, ideology and mood of House Republicans.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro and Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

China denies Xi comments aimed at settling US dispute

BEIJING (AP) — China's government on Thursday denied President Xi Jinping's promise of market-opening measures this week was aimed at settling a tariff dispute with Washington and said negotiations are impossible under "unilateral coercion" by the United States.

A commerce ministry spokesman, Gao Feng, complained U.S. President Donald Trump's government has "shown no sincerity," according to the official Xinhua News Agency. Gao said the two sides have yet to start negotiations.

Gao repeated complaints that Trump acted improperly when he responded to Beijing's protest over his plan to raise tariffs on \$50 billion of Chinese goods by saying he might add another \$100 billion of imports to the list.

"Under unilateral coercion, it is impossible for the Chinese side to conduct any negotiations," Gao was paraphrased as saying.

Trump's proposed tariff hike was a response to complaints Beijing steals or pressures foreign companies to hand over technology. China has responded with its own \$50 billion list of U.S. goods for retaliation if Washington goes ahead with the increase.

Gao denied Xi was making an overture to Washington when he announced plans in a speech Tuesday to cut import duties on autos, ease restrictions on foreign ownership in China's auto industry and make other market-opening changes.

Share prices of global automakers rose on investor hopes their China operations, while some economists said the positive tone of Xi's comments might provide a basis for talks with Washington.

"The measures to increase opening announced by China are a major decision to open to the outside and have nothing to do with Chinese-U.S. trade frictions," Gao was paraphrased as saying.

\$30,000 rumor? Tabloid paid for, spiked, salacious Trump tip

By JAKE PEARSON and JEFF HORWITZ, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Eight months before the company that owns the National Enquirer paid \$150,000 to a former Playboy Playmate who claimed she'd had an affair with Donald Trump, the tabloid's parent made a \$30,000 payment to a less famous individual: a former doorman at one of the real estate mogul's New York City buildings.

As it did with the ex-Playmate, the Enquirer signed the ex-doorman to a contract that effectively prevented him from going public with a juicy tale that might hurt Trump's campaign for president.

The payout to the former Playmate, Karen McDougal, stayed a secret until The Wall Street Journal published a story about it days before Election Day. Since then curiosity about that deal has spawned intense media coverage and, this week, helped prompt the FBI to raid the hotel room and offices of Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen.

The story of the ex-doorman, Dino Sajudin, hasn't been told until now.

The Associated Press confirmed the details of the Enquirer's payment through a review of a confidential contract and interviews with dozens of current and former employees of the Enquirer and its parent company, American Media Inc. Sajudin got \$30,000 in exchange for signing over the rights, "in perpetuity," to a rumor he'd heard about Trump's sex life — that the president had fathered an illegitimate child with an employee at Trump World Tower, a skyscraper he owns near the United Nations. The contract subjected Sajudin to a \$1 million penalty if he disclosed either the rumor or the terms of the deal to anyone.

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Cohen, the longtime Trump attorney, acknowledged to the AP that he had discussed Sajudin's story with the magazine when the tabloid was working on it. He said he was acting as a Trump spokesman when he did so and denied knowing anything beforehand about the Enquirer payment to the ex-doorman.

The parallel between the ex-Playmate's and the ex-doorman's dealings with the Enquirer raises new questions about the roles that the Enquirer and Cohen may have played in protecting Trump's image during a hard-fought presidential election. Prosecutors are probing whether Cohen broke banking or campaign laws in connection with AMI's payment to McDougal and a \$130,000 payment to porn star Stormy Daniels that Cohen said he paid out of his own pocket.

Federal investigators have sought communications between Cohen, American Media's chief executive and the Enquirer's top editor, the New York Times reported.

Cohen's lawyer has called the raids "inappropriate and unnecessary." American Media hasn't said whether federal authorities have sought information from it, but said this week that it would "comply with any and all requests that do not jeopardize or violate its protected sources or materials pursuant to our First Amendment rights." The White House didn't respond to questions seeking comment.

On Wednesday, an Enquirer sister publication, RadarOnline, published details of the payment and the rumor that Sajudin was peddling. The website wrote that the Enquirer spent four weeks reporting the story but ultimately decided it wasn't true. The company only released Sajudin from his contract after the 2016 election amid inquiries from the Journal about the payment. The site noted that the AP was among a group of publications that had been investigating the ex-doorman's tip.

During AP's reporting, AMI threatened legal action over reporters' efforts to interview current and former employees and hired the New York law firm Boies Schiller Flexner, which challenged the accuracy of the AP's reporting.

Asked about the payment last summer, Dylan Howard, the Enquirer's top editor and an AMI executive, said he made the payment to secure the former Trump doorman's exclusive cooperation because the tip, if true, would have sold "hundreds of thousands" of magazines. Ultimately, he said the information "lacked any credibility," so he spiked the story on those merits.

"Unfortunately...Dino Sajudin is one fish that swam away," Howard told RadarOnline on Wednesday.

But four longtime Enquirer staffers directly familiar with the episode challenged Howard's version of events. They said they were ordered by top editors to stop pursuing the story before completing potentially promising reporting threads.

They said the publication didn't pursue standard Enquirer reporting practices, such as exhaustive stake-outs or tabloid tactics designed to prove paternity. In 2008, the Enquirer helped bring down presidential hopeful John Edwards in part by digging through a dumpster and retrieving material to do a DNA test that indicated he had fathered a child with a mistress, according to a former staffer.

The woman at the center of the rumor about Trump denied emphatically to the AP last August that she'd ever had an affair with Trump, saying she had no idea the Enquirer had paid Sajudin and pursued his tip.

The AP has not been able to determine if the rumor is true and is not naming the woman.

"This is all fake," she said. "I think they lost their money."

The Enquirer staffers, all with years of experience negotiating source contracts, said the abrupt end to reporting combined with a binding, seven-figure penalty to stop the tipster from talking to anyone led them to conclude that this was a so-called "catch and kill" — a tabloid practice in which a publication pays for a story to never run, either as a favor to the celebrity subject of the tip or as leverage over that person.

One former Enquirer reporter, who was not involved in the Sajudin reporting effort, expressed skepticism that the company would pay for the tip and not publish.

"AMI doesn't go around cutting checks for \$30,000 and then not using the information," said Jerry George, a reporter and senior editor for nearly three decades at AMI before his layoff in 2013.

The company said that AMI's publisher, David Pecker, an unabashed Trump supporter, had not coordinated its coverage with Trump associates or taken direction from Trump. It acknowledged discussing the former doorman's tip with Trump's representatives, which it described as "standard operating procedure in stories of this nature."

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The Enquirer staffers, like many of the dozens of other current and former AMI employees interviewed by the AP in the past year, spoke on condition of anonymity. All said AMI required them to sign nondisclosure agreements barring them from discussing internal editorial policy and decision-making.

Though sometimes dismissed by mainstream publications, the Enquirer's history of breaking legitimate scoops about politicians' personal lives — including its months-long Pulitzer Prize-contending coverage of presidential candidate Edwards' affair — is a point of pride in its newsroom.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, the Enquirer published a string of allegations against Trump's rivals, such as stories claiming Democratic rival Hillary Clinton was a bisexual "secret sex freak" and was kept alive only by a "narcotics cocktail."

Stories attacking Trump rivals or promoting Trump's campaign often bypassed the paper's normal fact-checking process, according to two people familiar with campaign-era copy.

The tabloid made its first-ever endorsement by officially backing Trump for the White House. With just over a week before Election Day, Howard, the top editor, appeared on Alex Jones' InfoWars program by phone, telling listeners that the choice at the ballot box was between "the Clinton crime family" or someone who will "break down the borders of the establishment." Howard said the paper's coverage was bipartisan, citing negative stories it published about Ben Carson during the Republican presidential primaries.

In a statement last summer, Howard said the company doesn't take editorial direction "from anyone outside AMI," and said Trump has never been an Enquirer source. The company has said reader surveys dictate its coverage and that many of its customers are Trump supporters.

The company has said it paid McDougal, the former Playboy Playmate, to be a columnist for an AMI-published fitness magazine, not to stay silent. McDougal has since said that she regrets signing the non-disclosure agreement and is currently suing to get out of it.

Pecker has denied burying negative stories about Trump, but acknowledged to the New Yorker last summer that McDougal's contract had effectively silenced her.

"Once she's part of the company, then on the outside she can't be bashing Trump and American Media," Pecker said.

In the tabloid world purchasing information is not uncommon, and the Enquirer routinely pays sources. As a general practice, however, sources agree to be paid for their tips only upon publication.

George, the longtime former reporter and editor, said the \$1 million penalty in Sajudin's agreement was larger than anything he had seen in his Enquirer career.

"If your intent is to get a story from the source, there's no upside to paying upfront," said George, who sometimes handled catch-and-kill contracts related to other celebrities. Paying upfront was not the Enquirer's usual practice because it would have been costly and endangered the source's incentive to cooperate, he said.

After initially calling the Enquirer's tip line, Sajudin signed a boilerplate contract with the Enquirer, agreeing to be an anonymous source and be paid upon publication. The Enquirer dispatched reporters to pursue the story both in New York and in California. The tabloid also sent a polygraph expert to administer a lie detection test to Sajudin in a hotel near his Pennsylvania home.

Sajudin passed the polygraph, which tested how he learned of the rumor. One week later, Sajudin signed an amended agreement, this one paying him \$30,000 immediately and subjecting him to the \$1 million penalty if he shopped around his information.

The Enquirer immediately then stopped reporting, said the former staffers.

Cohen, last year, characterized the Enquirer's payment to Sajudin as wasted money for a baseless story.

For his part, Sajudin confirmed he'd been paid to be the tabloid's anonymous source but insisted he would sue the Enquirer if his name appeared in print. Pressed for more details about his tip and experience with the paper, Sajudin said he would talk only in exchange for payment.

"If there's no money involved with it," he said, "I'm not getting involved."

Horwitz reported from Washington.

Russia says Syrian government now in control of rebel town

By SARAH EL DEEB and NATALIYA VASILYEVA, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Russian military announced on Thursday that the Syrian government is now in full control of the last rebel-held town on the outskirts of Damascus that was the site of a suspected chemical attack over the weekend.

The development would mark a major victory for the Syrian President Bashar Assad as the United States and allies consider punitive military attacks against Syria following the suspected chemical attack that killed 40 people.

However, there was no official announcement by Damascus, and no indication that Syrian government forces had entered the town of Douma on Thursday. One government flag was raised in the town, a war monitoring group said.

Syrian TV stations showed civilians in vehicles carrying the Syrian flag crossing from Damascus into Douma.

Douma and the enclave of eastern Ghouta, just east of Damascus, was a significant rebel stronghold during Syria's civil war, now in its eighth year. Its effective surrender to government forces comes after years of siege by Assad's troops and a months-long, intense military offensive.

Meanwhile, Syrians are bracing for a possible U.S. attack in retaliation for Saturday's alleged chemical assault in Douma. The Foreign Ministry in Damascus has denounced President Donald Trump's threat to attack the country as "reckless" and a danger to international peace and security.

Under an evacuation deal for eastern Ghouta that was mediated by Russia, Assad's top ally, no Syrian troops are expected to enter Douma, only police. Another police force, incorporating former rebels, is also to be formed and deployed in Douma.

Evacuation of armed gunmen and civilians who refuse the deal is still underway. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war through activists on the ground, there were still rebel fighters inside Douma on Thursday.

But the leaders of Jaish al-Islam, or Army of Islam, the strongest rebel group in eastern Ghouta that controlled Douma, have all evacuated. It is not clear if any of the remaining rebel fighters will evacuate or hand in their weapons and take part in the new policing force.

The Russian Defense Ministry statement followed a chaotic day in Douma that saw rebels there open fire as opposition fighters were leaving with families under the deal. It appeared designed to quell the tension and ensure the deal, which has been fraught with bumps, remains on track.

The Russian ministry said the situation in Douma was "normalizing." The Observatory said the Russian military is deploying to reassure thousands of remaining civilians in Douma.

Wednesday's turmoil in Douma came during the evacuation of the latest batch of civilians and rebels after pro-government supporters attempted to raise government flags over buildings and chanted in support of Assad.

Some Russian journalists who had entered the town with a reconciliation delegation were wounded in the melee. The Observatory said more evacuations would take place on Thursday.

Amid earlier disagreements, a truce collapsed last week and the Syrian government pressed ahead with its offensive.

Then came Saturday's suspected chemical attack in Douma, followed by international condemnation and threats of military action. Syria and Russia deny the attack took place.

The evacuation deal called for the formation of a local council to administer Douma. Thousands of civilians are staying in Douma, and some fighters are also expected to stay, on condition that they hand in their weapons. More than 13,500 Syrian rebel fighters and their families left Douma this month.

Vasilyeva reported from Moscow.

California to join Guard border mission, but with conditions

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE AND ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Jerry Brown accepted President Donald Trump's call to send the National Guard to the Mexican border, but rejected the White House's portrait of a burgeoning border crisis and insisted that his troops will have nothing to do with immigration enforcement.

The Democratic governor broke a week of silence Wednesday by agreeing to contribute 400 troops, though not all will be on the border. Brown's commitment brought pledges from the four states that border Mexico just shy of the low end of the president's target to marshal 2,000 to 4,000 troops.

Brown cast his decision as a welcome infusion of federal support to fight transnational criminal gangs and drug and firearms smugglers.

"Combating these criminal threats are priorities for all Americans - Republicans and Democrats," Brown wrote in a letter to Defense Secretary James Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen.

Federal law, notably the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, sharply limits military involvement in civilian law enforcement, creating a supporting role for the Guard. The Pentagon said last week that troops won't perform law enforcement functions or interact with people detained by border authorities without its approval.

Brown released a proposed agreement with the federal government that emphasizes the widely shared understanding of the Guard's limited role but explicitly bans any support of immigration enforcement. It says troops cannot guard anyone in custody for immigration violations or participate in construction of border barriers.

The White House praised Brown's decision without addressing his comments on immigration enforcement.

"We're also glad to see California Gov. Jerry Brown work with the administration and send members of the National Guard to help secure the southern border," White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said.

Reaction in California was limited, with few of Brown's allies or opponents weighing in.

State Sen. Kevin de Leon, a Democratic U.S. Senate candidate and author of California's so-called sanctuary state law, said Guard deployment was unnecessary and not a good use of resources. But he said more can be done to combat border crime and that he appreciated Brown's design of "a clear and limited mission focused on real public safety threats."

"I am confident Governor Brown will not use our National Guard to harass or tear apart immigrant families in California," he said in a statement.

Rob Stutzman, who advised former Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, praised the decision on Twitter, calling Brown's decision to accept money for using the Guard to fight drugs and human trafficking "good government."

Immigration advocacy groups were critical, saying Brown's support was a boost for Trump's agenda. Lillian Serrano, chair of the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium, acknowledged the governor's proposed limits on the Guard's role but said his decision reflected "flawed logic that we need more boots on the ground."

Pedro Rios, director for the American Friends Service Committee's U.S.-Mexico border program in San Diego, questioned why Brown would send troops while rejecting Trump's premise that they are needed to help stop illegal immigration.

"If he's in disagreement with Donald Trump about the justifications for having the National Guard on the border, then why would he accept it?" he said.

Unlike Republican governors in other border states, Brown disagreed with Trump's portrayal of a border spiraling out of control, noting that Border Patrol arrests fell to the lowest level last year since 1971 and that California accounted for only 15 percent of the agency's arrests on the Mexican border.

"Here are the facts: there is no massive wave of migrants pouring into California," Brown wrote the Trump Cabinet members.

In contrast, Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who is contributing 1,000 troops, embraced Trump's mission the day it was announced, saying it would promote the rule of law and "help ensure we are doing everything we can to stem the flow of illegal immigration."

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Brown said California's troops would join an existing program to combat transnational drug crime, firearms smuggling and human trafficking. About 250 California National Guard troops are already participating, including 55 at the border.

The new contingent of California Guard members being deployed could be posted at the border, the coast and elsewhere statewide, Brown said.

California deployed troops to the border under former Presidents George W. Bush in 2006 and Barack Obama in 2010.

Spagat reported from San Diego.

It's playoff time: The NBA's first-round pairings are set

By TIM REYNOLDS, AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The NBA playoffs that start this weekend already have an extremely tough act to follow. The regular season ended with a flourish.

Wednesday's final night of the regular season was well beyond dramatic — an overtime game between Minnesota and Denver to decide the last berth, another overtime game between Miami and Toronto to determine some East fates, a 46-point first quarter by Philadelphia, an absurd 20-rebound, 19-assist night from Russell Westbrook.

And now, the best time of the NBA year is finally here.

The playoffs are back, with Golden State and Cleveland — who've met in the last three NBA Finals — not exactly looking like the overwhelming favorites the league has come to expect. A fourth straight Warriors-Cavs matchup is no guarantee. A fourth straight trip by either of those teams alone is far from certain, either.

It all starts Saturday, the 16-team tournament that will be a two-month grind following the six-month grind of the regular season.

"I feel pretty ready," Toronto guard Kyle Lowry said. "We're ready to go."

So are 15 other teams.

Start with the East pairings: Lowry and the top-seeded Raptors play No. 8 Washington, No. 2 Boston faces No. 7 Milwaukee, No. 3 Philadelphia gets No. 6 Miami and No. 4 Cleveland — with LeBron James bidding for an eighth consecutive appearance in The Finals — opening against No. 5 Indiana, a surprise team at the start of the season and one that isn't a surprise anymore.

"We're one of 16 teams that have a chance to win a championship," James said. "That's all you can ask for."

Philadelphia, after years of the rebuilding saga known as "The Process," has a chance as well. The 76ers are going into the playoffs on a 16-game winning streak.

"Take a deep breath, then reload," 76ers coach Brett Brown said, talking about what he wants his team to do before getting ready for Game 1.

Out West, it's No. 1 Houston meeting No. 8 Minnesota — which earned its berth by topping Denver in the NBA's first win-and-get-in, lose-and-go-home regular-season finale in 21 years. No. 2 Golden State opens its quest for a third championship in four seasons against No. 7 San Antonio, No. 3 Portland drew No. 6 New Orleans and No. 4 Oklahoma City opens against No. 5 Utah.

"The playoffs are about moments, and you just want a chance to have those moments," Miami guard Dwyane Wade said.

For the Timberwolves, Wednesday was a moment in itself. They needed overtime to beat the Nuggets and get into the postseason. It's Minnesota's first berth since 2004, and ended what was the NBA's longest playoff drought (which now is bequeathed to the Sacramento Kings, who last played a playoff game in 2006).

"They just made the plays at the end," Denver's Will Barton said of the Timberwolves. "Give them credit."

There are some rematches from the 2017 playoffs already waiting. Cleveland swept Indiana in the first

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round last year, and Boston needed seven games to oust Washington in a thrilling East semifinal series. But the most intriguing should be the Golden State-San Antonio matchup — because once again, just like a year ago, the Spurs will almost certainly be without Leonard.

Those two teams played in the West finals last season, and the Spurs were up by 23 points when Leonard left in the third quarter after getting injured on a play where he tried a jumper and Warriors center Zaza Pachulia closed out aggressively. Leonard got hurt when he stepped on Pachulia on the landing; he and the Spurs haven't been the same since.

Leonard never returned to that series, and played in only nine games for the Spurs this season.

"There is no pressure on us," Spurs star LaMarcus Aldridge said.

There is on Golden State.

The Warriors are trying for a third title in four seasons, and will play this first round more than likely without Curry while he continues recovering from a knee injury. Golden State went 7-10 in its final 17 games, and clearly sputtered across the finish line.

But the records all reset now, and the Warriors have been waiting to get the postseason started.

"It'll be our first meaningful game in about a month," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "Looking forward to that."

With good reason. There's a trophy to go chase now.

For more AP NBA coverage: <https://apnews.com/tag/NBAbasketball>

Report: Missouri Gov. Greitens slapped, grabbed woman

By DAVID A. LIEB and SUMMER BALLENTINE, Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens calls it an "entirely consensual relationship." But the woman with whom he has acknowledged having an affair says Greitens spanked, slapped, grabbed and shoved her during a series of sexual encounters that at times left her crying and afraid.

The woman's graphic testimony was revealed in a report released Wednesday by a special Missouri legislative committee that now is expanding its mission to recommend whether lawmakers should begin impeachment proceedings to try to remove the Republican governor from office.

Some prominent politicians — including Republican state Attorney General Josh Hawley and Democratic U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, whom Hawley is challenging — are calling on Greitens to immediately resign.

But Greitens is vowing to remain in office and prove his innocence against mounting allegations that he denounced as "lies and falsehoods."

Greitens, 44, is to go to trial May 14 in St. Louis on a felony indictment of invasion of privacy for allegedly taking and transmitting a nonconsensual photo of the woman while she was partially nude. Separately, the special House committee is to recommend after the legislative session ends May 18 whether to pursue impeachment. Legislative leaders said they will call themselves into a special session.

The legislative report released was signed by all five Republicans and two Democrats on the committee. It describes the woman's testimony as credible and notes that Greitens has so far declined to testify or provide documents to the panel.

The woman told the committee Greitens took a photo of her after manipulating her into a compromising position during an unwanted sexual encounter in his home and told her "everyone will know what a little whore you are" if she told anyone about him.

Greitens has refused to directly answer media questions about whether he took the photo, but he has steadfastly denied any criminal wrongdoing.

"This is a political witch hunt," Greitens told reporters Wednesday, invoking one of President Donald Trump's favored criticisms of unwanted investigations. He later added: "This is exactly like what's happening with the witch hunts in Washington, D.C."

Republican House Speaker Todd Richardson called the woman's testimony "beyond disturbing" and defended the integrity of the investigation. He said: "Let me be very clear about this: This is not a witch

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hunt, and the committee had no political agenda.”

If the House were to impeach Greitens, the Senate then would choose seven jurists to conduct a trial on whether Greitens should be ousted. The impeachment process can occur independently of a criminal case.

According to the report, the woman testified that she met Greitens in 2013 as a customer of her hair salon. She said she had a crush on Greitens but was shocked when he ran his hand up her leg and touched her crotch without her consent during a March 2015 hair appointment. He later invited her to his St. Louis home while his wife was out of town.

After she arrived through the back door, the report said that the woman testified Greitens searched her purse and “patted her down from head-to-toe.” He then asked if she had exercised and had her change into a white T-shirt with a slit on the top and pajama pants.

“I thought, oh, this is going to be some sort of sexy workout,” the woman testified.

But once in his basement, Greitens taped her hands to pull-up rings, blindfolded her, started kissing her, ripped open the shirt and pulled down her pants, the woman testified. She didn’t give consent to be disrobed or kissed, the report said. The woman testified that she then heard a click, like of a cellphone picture, and saw a flash.

The woman testified that Greitens told her: “Don’t even mention my name to anybody at all, because if you do, I’m going to take these pictures, and I’m going to put them everywhere I can. They are going to be everywhere, and then everyone will know what a little whore you are.”

When she remained silent, the woman said Greitens “spanked me and said, ‘Are you going to mention my name?’ And I said, I just gritted through my teeth, and I said, ‘No.’ And he’s like, ‘Good, now that’s a good girl.’”

“I was definitely fearful,” the woman testified to the legislative committee.

After telling Greitens, “I don’t want this,” the woman testified that Greitens unbound her hands. She said she started “uncontrollably crying.” She said Greitens then grabbed her in a hug and laid her down. She said he put his penis near her face and she gave him oral sex. Asked by the committee whether the oral sex was coerced, she responded: “Coerced, maybe. I felt as though that would allow me to leave.”

The woman testified that she confronted him later that day about the photo and he responded: “You have to understand, I’m running for office, and people will get me, and I have to have some sort of thing to protect myself.” Then she said Greitens added: “I felt bad, so I erased it.”

The House committee report said it doesn’t possess any physical or electronic evidence of the photo. Prosecutors in his criminal case previously acknowledged that they don’t have the photo, though they could be trying to obtain it.

The woman’s name never has been officially released; it is redacted from the legislative documents and she is identified only by her initials in court filings. Her attorney has repeatedly sought anonymity on her behalf.

The woman testified to the committee that she had several additional sexual encounters with Greitens, including one in June 2015 when “he slapped me across my face” after she acknowledged having slept with her husband. She said she “felt like he was trying to claim me.”

In another subsequent sexual encounter, the woman testified that Greitens “out of nowhere just, like kind of smacked me and grabbed me and shoved me down on the ground, and I instantly just started bawling.”

It “actually hurt, and I know that I actually was really scared and sad when that happened,” she testified.

The woman’s account contradicts statements Greitens made previously. Asked in a January interview with The Associated Press if he had ever slapped the woman, Greitens responded: “Absolutely not.”

Greitens said in a statement Wednesday night: “This was an entirely consensual relationship, and any allegation of violence or sexual assault is false.”

Greitens, a Rhodes Scholar and former Navy SEAL officer who was once considered a rising GOP star, first acknowledged having an extramarital affair on Jan. 10, when St. Louis TV station KMOV ran a story revealing that the woman’s ex-husband had released a secret audio recording of a 2015 conversation in which she told him about the photo Greitens took at his home.

The woman testified to the House committee that her husband had said: “I’m going to ruin this guy.”

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Greitens on Wednesday criticized the House report as "one-sided tabloid, trash gossip that was produced in a secret room."

He also referenced a comment the woman made during a lengthy deposition in his criminal case when she was asked if she saw what she believed to be a phone. A court filing from Greitens' attorneys quoted her as saying, "I haven't talked about it because I don't know if it's because I'm remembering it through a dream or I — I'm not sure, but yes, I feel like I saw it after that happened."

Greitens and his defense team have seized on the "dream" comment to attack the credibility of her testimony. But the prosecutor in the case says the defense "cherry picked bits and pieces" of her nine-hour deposition and the woman's attorney says the comment referred to one particular instance concerning the photo.

In addition to the legislative investigation and the criminal case, Hawley is investigating The Mission Continues, the veterans charity founded by Greitens, as it relates to the state's consumer protection and charitable registration and reporting laws. That probe came after media reports that Greitens' campaign had obtained and used a charity donor list in 2015 as it ramped up fundraising for his gubernatorial bid.

Associated Press reporters Blake Nelson in Jefferson City, Jim Salter in St. Louis and John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas, contributed to this report.

Trump tweets about conspiracies he sees behind challenges

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Russia collusion probe. The Stormy Daniels allegations. The escalating tension with Moscow.

The tempests that have separately buffeted the White House for months merged into a maelstrom this week and threatened to engulf President Donald Trump, who on Wednesday railed against members of the Justice Department by name and took to Twitter to threaten military strikes in Syria and taunt a nuclear-armed power.

While alarmed aides and allies worried that Trump was the angriest he'd ever been, the president saw conspiracies in the challenges facing his administration and hinted at more chaos. And as Trump's party was rocked by upheaval on Capitol Hill, White House staffers explored whether he has the legal authority to fire the men leading the investigation into his administration and, as underscored by the seizure of documents from his private lawyer, his business and personal life.

"Much of the bad blood with Russia is caused by the Fake & Corrupt Russia Investigation, headed up by the all Democrat loyalists, or people that worked for Obama," Trump tweeted. "Mueller is most conflicted of all (except Rosenstein who signed FISA & Comey letter). No Collusion, so they go crazy!"

That message followed another provocative tweet, in which Trump laced into Russia for supporting Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose government is accused of launching an apparent chemical attack Saturday on its own people. Disregarding his own insistence that he would never tip his hand to military strategy, he seemed to suggest that he would launch airstrikes.

"Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and 'smart!'" Trump wrote. "You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!"

The president's renewed public anger at special counsel Robert Mueller and Deputy Attorney General Rob Rosenstein was prompted by the FBI raid on his longtime personal attorney Michael Cohen, who acknowledged paying \$130,000 to Daniels, a porn actress, to buy her silence about an alleged affair with Trump. Trump has warned that an investigation into his business would cross "a red line" and could lead him to fire Mueller, despite strong pushback from a number of aides and Republicans in Congress.

"It worries me because I realize how much he feels personally cheated and how much it feels like it's a personal witch hunt. And he's not the kind of guy that takes that lying down. He fights back," said Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker and an informal Trump adviser. "I think Trump doesn't know how to deal with it and is very frustrated by it, thinks it's totally unfair. And that's what you're seeing."

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White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders made clear Wednesday that Trump was wary of investigatory overreach, saying, "He has a very deep concern about the direction that the special counsel and other investigations have taken."

Although the president declared that his White House was "calm and calculated," aides said decisions happen fast and with even less warning than usual when Trump feels backed into a corner. Trump has continued to seethe about Attorney General Jeff Sessions recusing himself from the Russia probe. And a number of those close to Trump say they worry about his reaction — and the West Wing's lack of planning — to yet another storm on the horizon: the release of former FBI director James Comey's new book.

The advertisements for the interviews have begun blanketing cable news, leading Trump to angrily surmise that Comey was "going to lie" and try to "make money" by tarnishing the president's reputation, according to two people familiar with the president's thinking but not authorized to speak publicly about private discussions.

The January publication of Michael Wolff's "Fire & Fury" caught the White House off guard, and the critiques leveled by former chief strategist Steve Bannon and other ex-officials left Trump enraged. Although Comey's book comes as no surprise, the White House as of Wednesday had no formal plan to respond to it, instead likely opting to let the Republican National Committee and outside surrogates handle most of the pushback.

Trump's decision to fire Comey was the product of weeks of discussion among his senior-most staff. A similar debate is unlikely to play out over the potential dismissal of Mueller or Rosenstein — not least in part because those deliberations became a subject of Mueller's investigation of potential obstruction of justice.

But Trump, too, has grown more comfortable making decisions without seeking the counsel of his staff. That's what happened when he fired national security adviser H.R. McMaster and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Although both decisions had been expected for months, Trump acted first and left it to his staff to pick up the pieces.

While a number of allies believe Trump's talk on Mueller and Rosenstein was largely venting, they acknowledged that Trump is increasingly unpredictable. White House lawyers have been considering Trump's authority to circumvent Department of Justice regulations and unilaterally fire Mueller. Trump could also direct Rosenstein or a potential successor to take action against Mueller.

Republican Rep. Mark Meadows, a Trump ally, said he did not expect a purge.

"The president is not talking about firing Mueller. I've had conversations with the president, and he's not talking about it," Meadows said.

Bipartisan legislation to protect the special counsel was introduced Wednesday, but its fate was uncertain.

White House aides also worried about the surprise announcement from House Speaker Paul Ryan that he will leave Congress at the end of the year. The move was interpreted by some in Trump's orbit as an acknowledgement of the rising likelihood that Democrats could gain control of the House this fall, imperiling the president's agenda and potentially sparking talk of impeachment.

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin, Ken Thomas and Alan Fram contributed to this report.

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Pompeo cites Russian aggression, says diplomacy must go on

By JOSH LEDERMAN and MATTHEW LEE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mike Pompeo, the hard-charging CIA director picked to be the next secretary of state, will tell the Senate on Thursday that years of soft U.S. policy toward Russia are "now over." Drawing a sharp contrast with predecessor Rex Tillerson, Pompeo will vow to promote democracy and human rights while ending "demoralizing" vacancies at the State Department.

According to his prepared remarks, Pompeo will chastise Russia for acting "aggressively" and emphasize

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that the Trump administration considers Russia "a danger to our country." But he will also say that diplomatic efforts with Moscow, while challenging, "must continue." The Associated Press obtained excerpts of his remarks from a senior Trump administration official.

Pompeo will also stress America's "duty to lead," despite Trump's vows to put "America first."

"If we do not lead the calls for democracy, prosperity and human rights around the world, who will?" Pompeo plans to say. "No other nation is equipped with the same blend of power and principle."

Pompeo's remarks Thursday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will be the first chance for lawmakers and the public to hear directly from the former Kansas congressman about his approach to diplomacy and the role of the State Department, should he be confirmed to lead it. Pompeo's views on global issues are well known — he was questioned extensively by senators for his confirmation to run the CIA — but Democratic senators have raised questions about his fitness to be top diplomat, given his hawkish views and past comments about minorities.

"When journalists, most of whom have never met me, label me — or any of you — as 'hawks,' 'war hardliners,' or worse, I shake my head," the former Army officer will say. "There are few who dread war more than those of us who have served in uniform."

He will add, "War is always the last resort."

Since being nominated last month, Pompeo has spent much of his time at the State Department immersing himself in briefing books and undergoing mock hearings and prep meetings on key issues like Iran, Syria and North Korea, as well as the inner workings of the State Department, a person close to Pompeo said. He's also spoken to all eight living former secretaries — including Hillary Clinton, whom he famously criticized over the 2012 attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya.

Pompeo's chief goal Thursday is to convince senators that he intends to strengthen the State Department and re-establish its relevance as a major player in national security policy, said the individual, who wasn't authorized to comment by name and requested anonymity.

That message is an implicit contrast with Tillerson, who left scores of top positions unfilled and the diplomatic corps dispirited before being unceremoniously fired by Trump on Twitter in March. Pompeo will tell the Senate that as he met with State Department workers recently, every single one told him he or she wanted to be "empowered in their roles" and clear about Trump's mission.

"That will be my first priority," Pompeo will say. "They also shared how demoralizing it is to have so many vacancies and frankly, not to feel relevant. I'll do my part to end the vacancies, but I'll need your help."

Pompeo's questioning by senators comes amid spiraling tensions with Russia over Syria and China over trade; concerns about the planned summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un; and uncertainty over the administration's international agenda.

He'll tell the Senate that he's read CIA histories of past talks with North Korea and is confident that Trump won't repeat past mistakes.

"President Trump isn't one to play games at the negotiating table, and I won't be either," he plans to say.

The Republican will also pledge to make it "an immediate personal priority" to work with U.S. allies to try to "fix" the Iran nuclear deal. Trump has vowed to withdraw the U.S. if agreement with European allies to revamp to deal can't be reached by May 12.

Sen. Ben Cardin, a Democrat on the committee considering Pompeo's nomination, said after meeting with him Tuesday that he didn't get the impression Pompeo was well-versed in world affairs and seemed unfamiliar with the current status of several issues.

"I assume by Thursday he'll get up to speed," Cardin told reporters.

Trump announced Pompeo's nomination to become the 70th secretary of state in the same March 13 tweet in which he dumped Tillerson. "He will do a fantastic job," Trump said at the time, confirming months of speculation that the largely sidelined Tillerson was out of a job and would be replaced by Pompeo, who is known to have the president's ear and respect and shares his opposition to the Iran nuclear deal.

At the State Department, the shake-up was met with a mixture of relief and trepidation.

On the one hand, Tillerson had alienated many with his deeply unpopular bureaucratic reorganization. His overt endorsement of hefty budget cuts and his failure to fill jobs attracted the ire of lawmakers of

both political parties.

But many diplomats have privately voiced apprehension about Pompeo's history of sometimes hostile comments toward the gay community and Islam and his fierce criticism of the Obama administration's handling of the aftermath of the Benghazi attacks.

Pompeo, who was confirmed for the CIA job by a 66-32 vote, developed a reputation for being more outwardly political than many past directors of the traditionally apolitical agency. He developed a visibly close relationship with the president, traveling to the White House on most days to deliver the highly classified President's Daily Brief in person rather than leaving the task to other intelligence officials. Often Trump would have the CIA director stay in the West Wing after the briefing to accompany him to other meetings.

Associated Press writer Matthew Pennington contributed to this report.

Ryan retirement sends new ripples of uncertainty through GOP

By LISA MASCARO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Paul Ryan's abrupt announcement that he will retire rather than seek another term in Congress as the steady if reluctant wingman for President Donald Trump sent new ripples of uncertainty through a Washington already on edge and a Republican Party bracing for a rough election year.

The Wisconsin Republican cast the decision to end his 20-year career as a personal one — he doesn't want his children growing up with a "weekend dad" — but it will create a vacuum at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. It will leave congressional Republicans without a measured voice to talk Trump away from what some see as damaging impulses, and it will rob Trump of an influential steward to shepherd his more ambitious ideas into legislation.

It's unusual for a House speaker, third in line to succeed the president, to turn himself into a lame duck, especially so for Ryan, a once-rising GOP star who is only 48 and was the party's vice presidential candidate in 2012. His decision fueled fresh doubts about the party's ability to fend off a Democratic wave, fed by opposition to Trump, in November. And it threw the House into a leadership battle that could end up pushing Ryan aside sooner than he intended and crush any hopes for significant legislation before the election.

Ryan, though, said he had no regrets after having accomplished "a heckuva lot" during his time in a job he never really wanted. He said fellow Republicans have plenty of achievements to run on this fall, including the tax cuts Congress delivered, which have been his personal cause and the centerpiece of his small-government agenda, even though they helped skyrocket projected annual deficits toward \$1 trillion.

"I have given this job everything I have," Ryan said Wednesday.

Speculation over Ryan's future had been swirling for months, but as he dialed up colleagues and spoke by phone with Trump, the news stunned even top allies.

Ryan announced his plans at a closed-door meeting of House Republicans. Rep. Mark Walker of North Carolina said an emotional Ryan "choked up a few times trying to get through" his remarks and received three standing ovations.

He later briefly thanked Trump in public for giving him the chance to move GOP ideas ahead.

While Ryan was crucial in getting the tax cuts passed, a prime Trump goal, he and the president have had a difficult relationship. Trump showed impatience with Congress' pace in dealing with his proposals, and Ryan had to deal with a president who shared little of his interest in policy detail.

Still, for many Republicans, it's unclear who will be left in leadership to counterbalance Trump. Ryan has been "a steady force in contrast to the president's more mercurial tone," said Rep. Mark Sanford of South Carolina. "That's needed."

The speaker had been heading toward this decision since late last year, said a person familiar with his

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thinking, but as recently as February he had considered running for another term. His own father died suddenly of a heart attack when he was 16, and though Ryan is in good health, the distance from his family weighed on him. A final decision was made over the two-week congressional recess, which he partly spent on a family vacation in the Czech Republic.

Ryan, from Janesville, Wisconsin, was first elected to Congress in 1998. Along with Reps. Eric Cantor and Kevin McCarthy, he branded himself a rising "Young Gun" in an aging party, a new breed of hard-charging Republican ready to shrink the size of government.

He was GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney's running mate in 2012.

Ryan was pulled into the leadership job by the sudden retirement in 2015 of Speaker John Boehner, who had struggled to control the chamber's restless conservative wing. He has had more trust with the hardliners in the House.

"That's probably his greatest gift to us," said Rep. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota. "His ability to bridge the vast divide."

House Majority Leader McCarthy, a Californian known to be tighter with Trump, is expected to again seek the top leadership post that slipped from his reach in 2015. He will likely compete with Majority Whip Steve Scalise of Louisiana.

Ryan's announcement came as Republicans are bracing for a potential blue wave of voter enthusiasm for Democrats, who need to flip at least 24 GOP-held seats in November to regain the majority.

As the House GOP's top fundraiser, Ryan's lame-duck status could send shockwaves through donor circles that are relying on his leadership at the helm of the House majority. He has hauled in \$54 million so far this election cycle.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has worked with Ryan, praised his colleague's tenure. The Democratic House leader, Nancy Pelosi of California, said she hoped Ryan would work constructively on bipartisan goals before he leaves.

In Wisconsin, Republicans had no obvious successor in waiting. The most likely GOP candidate for Ryan's seat is state Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, Republicans in the state said. Another Republican mentioned as a potential candidate is longtime Ryan family friend and backer Bryan Steil, an attorney and member of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents.

Democrat Randy Bryce, a colorful ironworker who has cultivated an "IronStache" moniker, had been Ryan's best-known challenger, drawing liberal support from around the country. Janesville teacher Cathy Myers has also been running on the Democratic side. The only declared Republicans are Paul Nehlen, who was banned from Twitter earlier this year for posts criticized as racist or anti-Semitic, and Nick Polce, an Army veteran who also co-owns a security consulting firm.

While his plans are uncertain once he steps down in January, Ryan has long said being speaker would be his last job in elected office. Others have suggested that an ideal job for the policy wonk could be running a think tank, noting the leader of the conservative American Enterprise Institute recently announced he would be stepping down.

Associated Press writers Catherine Lucey, Alan Fram, Kevin Freking and Andrew Taylor contributed from Washington. Scott Bauer contributed from Madison, Wisconsin, and Steve Karnowski contributed from Minneapolis.

Plan would allow drug testing for some food stamp recipients

By JULIET LINDERMAN and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is considering a plan that would allow states to require certain food stamp recipients to undergo drug testing, handing a win to conservatives who've long sought ways to curb the safety net program.

The proposal under review would be narrowly targeted, applying mostly to people who are able-bodied, without dependents and applying for some specialized jobs, according to an administration official briefed

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on the plan. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said roughly 5 percent of participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program could be affected.

The drug testing proposal is another step in the Trump administration's push to allow states more flexibility in how they implement federal programs that serve the poor, unemployed or uninsured. It also wants to allow states to tighten work requirements for food stamp recipients and has found support among GOP governors who argue greater state control saves money and reduces dependency.

Internal emails obtained by The Associated Press indicated that Agriculture Department officials in February were awaiting word from the White House about the timing of a possible drug testing announcement.

"I think we just have to be ready because my guess is we may get an hour's notice instead of a day's notice," wrote Jessica Shahin, associate administrator of SNAP.

Conservative policymakers have pushed for years to tie food assistance programs to drug testing.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, a Republican, sued the USDA in 2015 for blocking the state from drug testing adults applying for food stamps.

A federal judge tossed the suit in 2016, but Walker renewed his request for permission later that year, after Donald Trump had won the presidency but before he took office.

"We turned that down," said former USDA Food and Nutrition Service Undersecretary Kevin Concannon, who served in the position under the Obama administration from 2009 until January of last year. "It's costly and cumbersome."

The proposal is not expected to be included in a GOP-written farm bill expected to be released as soon as early this week, a GOP aide said.

Federal law bars states from imposing their own conditions on food stamp eligibility.

Still, some states have tried to implement some form of drug testing for the food assistance program, so far with little success.

Judges have blocked similar efforts in other states. In Florida in 2014, a federal appeals court upheld a lower court's ruling that drug testing SNAP recipients is unconstitutional.

But at least 20 states have introduced legislation to screen safety net program participants in some capacity, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

In December, Walker began moving ahead with a workaround, drug testing participants in the state's Employment and Training Program who also received food stamps.

USDA under Trump has not taken a public position on drug testing. But Secretary Sonny Perdue has promised to provide states with "greater control over SNAP."

"As a former governor, I know first-hand how important it is for states to be given flexibility to achieve the desired goal of self-sufficiency for people," he said. "We want to provide the nutrition people need, but we also want to help them transition from government programs, back to work, and into lives of independence."

The emails obtained by the AP suggest that a plan could be forthcoming.

The plan would apply to able-bodied people who do not have dependents and are applying for certain jobs, such as operating heavy machinery, the official said.

In a February 15 email to USDA officials, Maggie Lyons, chief of staff to an acting official at the Food and Nutrition Service, said, "We need to have a conversation about timing given budget and when the (White House) wants us to release drug testing."

If the administration moves forward, it would not be the first time drug testing was used in a safety net program.

At least 15 states have passed laws allowing them to drug-test recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, also known as welfare.

The discussion of the future of SNAP and potential changes to the program are set against the backdrop of the 2018 farm bill, slated for release as soon as this week. The bulk of the bill's spending goes toward funding SNAP, which often proves the most contentious part of negotiations; late last month, House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson, D-Minn., issued a statement on behalf of Democrats denouncing "extreme, partisan policies being advocated by the majority."

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Ed Bolen, senior policy analyst at the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities think tank, said requiring drug testing for food benefits will have consequences for already vulnerable populations. What's more, he said, implementing drug testing for SNAP recipients is legally murky.

"Are people losing their food assistance if they don't take the test, and in that case, is that a condition of eligibility, which the states aren't allowed to impose?" he said. "And does drug testing fall into what's allowable under a state training and employment program, which typically lists things like job search or education or on-the-job experience? This is kind of a different bucket."

The emails also show that USDA is weighing the possibility of scaling back a policy currently enacted in 42 states that automatically grants food stamp eligibility to households that qualify for non-cash assistance, like job training and childcare. The proposed change, which would impose income limits, could potentially affect millions.

Republicans tried to make similar changes when Congress passed the 2014 farm bill, but the cuts were rejected by Democrats and did not end up in the final bill.

Concannon, the former USDA undersecretary, said the Trump administration "is keen on weakening the programs developed to strengthen the health or fairness or access to programs and imposing populist requirements that aren't evidence based, but often stigmatize people."

The USDA in recent months has been under fire for its controversial plan to replace a portion of millions of food stamp recipients' benefits with a pre-assembled package of shelf-stable goods dubbed "America's Harvest Box." The food box plan was tucked into the Trump administration's proposed 2019 budget, which included cutting the SNAP program by \$213 billion over the next 10 years. SNAP provides food assistance to roughly 42 million Americans

Zuckerberg: Regulation 'inevitable' for social media firms

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and BARBARA ORTUTAY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg acknowledged that regulation of social media companies is "inevitable" and disclosed that his own personal information has been compromised by malicious outsiders. But after two days of congressional testimony, what seemed clear was how little Congress seems to know about Facebook, much less what to do about it.

House lawmakers aggressively questioned Zuckerberg Wednesday on user data, privacy settings and whether the company is biased against conservatives. As they did in the Senate a day earlier, both Republicans and Democrats suggested that regulation might be needed, but there was no consensus and few specifics about what that might look like — or even what the biggest problems are.

New Jersey Rep. Frank Pallone, the top Democrat on the panel and a 30-year veteran of the House, said at the beginning of the hearing that he plans to work on legislation but is pessimistic that Congress will pass anything.

"I've just seen it over and over again — that we have the hearings, and nothing happens," he said.

For Zuckerberg, who often found himself explaining what his company does in rudimentary terms to lawmakers twice his age, the hearings could be considered a win: Facebook shares rose more than 1 percent after climbing 4.5 percent on Monday. And his company regained more than \$25 billion in market value that it had lost since it was revealed in March that Cambridge Analytica, a data-mining firm affiliated with Donald Trump's presidential campaign, gathered personal information from 87 million users to try to influence elections.

Still, Facebook's stock remains 10 percent below where it stood before the scandal, a decline that has wiped out about \$50 billion in shareholder wealth.

Zuckerberg agreed to the hearings as pressure mounted over the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the company's own admission last year that it had been compromised by Russians trying to influence the 2016 election. Earlier this year, special counsel Robert 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

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ads were on Facebook.

Zuckerberg told the Senate on Tuesday that the company has been working with Mueller in his Russia probe and apologized over and over again for the company's handling of data privacy.

"I started Facebook, I run it, and I'm responsible for what happens here," he said.

House lawmakers were a bit tougher on Zuckerberg than their colleagues in the Senate, many of whom seemed confused by the company and what it does. Some of the House members curtly cut him off in questioning, trying to make the most of their four minutes each.

Zuckerberg mostly held his composure, repeating many of the same well-rehearsed answers: He is sorry for the company's mistakes. He is working on artificial intelligence technology to weed out hate speech and at the same time ensure that they don't block people for the wrong reasons. People own their own data, as far as he sees it. And he's come a long way since he created the platform in his dorm room almost 15 years ago.

Some of the lawmakers talked to Zuckerberg, 33, as they would their children or grandchildren, and were occasionally befuddled by the complexities of his company.

Wrapping up his four minutes, Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., commended the platform, saying "it's wonderful for us seniors to connect with our relatives."

By the close of Wednesday's hearing, Zuckerberg had spent roughly 10 out of the previous 24 hours testifying before Congress.

On regulation, Zuckerberg said he was open to it.

"The internet is growing in importance around the world in people's lives and I think that it is inevitable that there will need to be some regulation," he said.

Still, he said, lawmakers need to be careful, noting that new rules or laws could hurt smaller businesses more than a behemoth like Facebook.

House Energy and Commerce Chairman Greg Walden said the committee will look at what could be done.

"While Facebook has certainly grown, I worry it has not matured," Walden, R-Ore., told Zuckerberg. "I think it is time to ask whether Facebook may have moved too fast and broken too many things."

Many questions focused on Cambridge Analytica, which gathered data several years ago through a personality quiz created by an academic researcher. The app vacuumed up not just the data of the people who took it, but also — thanks to Facebook's loose restrictions — data from their friends, too, including details that they hadn't intended to share publicly. Cambridge Analytica then obtained the data and was said to have used it to try to influence elections around the world.

Zuckerberg said at the House hearing that his own Facebook data was part of that sweep. He told the Senate that Facebook had been led to believe Cambridge Analytica had deleted the user data it had harvested and that had been "clearly a mistake." He assured senators the company would have handled the situation differently today.

That may be enough to satisfy lawmakers for now. But that could change if Democrats take control of Congress in midterm elections this year.

Pallone said that if Democrats were in charge, "then we would push all the more."

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

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

Report: Missouri Gov. Greitens initiated unwanted sex acts

By DAVID A. LIEB and SUMMER BALLENTINE, Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens initiated a physically aggressive unwanted sexual encounter with his hairdresser and threatened to distribute a partially nude photo of her if she spoke about it, according to testimony from the woman released Wednesday by a House investigatory committee.

The graphic report details multiple instances in which the woman said Greitens spanked, slapped, grabbed, shoved and called her derogatory names during a series of sexual encounters as he was preparing to run for office in 2015. The testimony contradicts Greitens' previous assertions that "there was no violence" and "no threat of violence" in what he has described as a consensual extramarital affair.

The report, signed by all five Republicans and two Democrats on the committee, describes the woman's testimony as credible and notes that Greitens has so far declined to testify or provide documents to the panel. But it outlines some of the Republican governor's public comments that appear to run counter to her allegations.

Flanked by other top Republican legislative leaders, House Speaker Todd Richardson announced that the special committee will expand its mission and make recommendations after the May 18 end of the regular legislative session on whether to pursue impeachment proceedings seeking to remove Greitens from office.

The special House investigation was initiated shortly after Greitens was indicted in February on a felony invasion-of-privacy charge for taking a nonconsensual photo of the partially nude woman and transmitting it in a way that could be accessed by a computer. The woman told the committee that Greitens took the photo after manipulating her into a compromising position during an unwanted sexual encounter and that he told her "everyone will know what a little whore you are" if she told anyone about him.

Greitens, 44, has refused to directly answer media questions about whether he took the photo, but he has steadfastly denied any criminal wrongdoing. He said he expects to be proven innocent during this trial, which is scheduled for May 14.

Greitens said in a statement Wednesday night that "this was an entirely consensual relationship, and any allegation of violence or sexual assault is false."

Earlier in the day, Greitens told reporters: "This is a political witch hunt," invoking one of President Donald Trump's favored criticisms of unwanted investigations. He added: "This is exactly like what's happening with the witch hunts in Washington, D.C."

Richardson called the woman's testimony "beyond disturbing" and defended the integrity of the investigation. He said: "Let me be very clear about this: This is not a witch hunt, and the committee had no political agenda."

If the House were to impeach Greitens, the Senate then would choose seven jurists to conduct a trial on whether Greitens should be ousted. The impeachment process can occur independently of a criminal case.

The report prompted Republican U.S. Senate candidate Josh Hawley to call for Greitens' resignation. Hawley, the state's attorney general, said the report contains "shocking, substantial, and corroborated evidence of wrongdoing by Governor Greitens."

Hawley is seeking Democratic U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill's seat, and she and Democratic state legislative leaders also called for Greitens' resignation. Democrats have been running TV ads linking Greitens to Hawley.

According to the report, the woman testified that she met Greitens in 2013 as a customer of her hair salon. She said she had a crush on Greitens but was shocked when he ran his hand up her leg and touched her crotch without her consent during a March 2015 hair appointment. He later invited her to his St. Louis home while his wife was out of town.

After she arrived through the back door, the report said that the woman testified Greitens searched her purse and "patted her down from head-to-toe." He then asked if she had exercised and had her change into a white T-shirt with a slit on the top and pajama pants.

"I thought, oh, this is going to be some sort of sexy workout," the woman testified.

But once in his basement, Greitens taped her hands to pull-up rings, blindfolded her, started kissing her, ripped open the shirt and pulled down her pants, the woman testified. She didn't give consent to be disrobed or kissed, the report said. The woman testified that she then heard a click, like of a cellphone

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picture, and saw a flash.

The woman testified that Greitens told her: "Don't even mention my name to anybody at all, because if you do, I'm going to take these pictures, and I'm going to put them everywhere I can. They are going to be everywhere, and then everyone will know what a little whore you are."

When she remained silent, the woman said Greitens "spanked me and said, 'Are you going to mention my name?' And I said, I just gritted through my teeth, and I said, 'No.' And he's like, 'Good, now that's a good girl.'"

"I was definitely fearful," the woman testified to the legislative committee.

After telling Greitens, "I don't want this," the woman testified that Greitens unbound her hands. She said she started "uncontrollably crying." She said Greitens then grabbed her in a hug and laid her down. She said he put his penis near her face and she gave him oral sex. Asked by the committee whether the oral sex was coerced, she responded: "Coerced, maybe. I felt as though that would allow me to leave."

The woman testified that she confronted him later that day about the photo and he responded: "You have to understand, I'm running for office, and people will get me, and I have to have some sort of thing to protect myself." Then she said Greitens added: "I felt bad, so I erased it."

The House committee report said it doesn't possess any physical or electronic evidence of the photo. Prosecutors in his criminal case previously acknowledged that they don't have the photo, though they could be trying to obtain it.

The woman's name never has been officially released; it is redacted from the legislative documents and she is identified only by her initials in court filings. Her attorney has repeatedly sought anonymity on her behalf.

The woman testified to the committee that she had several additional sexual encounters with Greitens, including one in June 2015 when "he slapped me across my face" after she acknowledged having slept with her husband. She said she "felt like he was trying to claim me."

In another subsequent sexual encounter, the woman testified that Greitens "out of nowhere just, like kind of smacked me and grabbed me and shoved me down on the ground, and I instantly just started bawling."

It "actually hurt, and I know that I actually was really scared and sad when that happened," she testified.

The woman's account contradicts statements Greitens made previously. Asked in a January interview with The Associated Press if he had ever slapped the woman, Greitens responded: "Absolutely not."

Greitens, a Rhodes Scholar and former Navy SEAL officer who was once considered a rising GOP star, first acknowledged having an extramarital affair on Jan. 10, when St. Louis TV station KMOV ran a story revealing that the woman's ex-husband had released a secret audio recording of a 2015 conversation in which she told him about the photo Greitens took at his home.

The woman testified to the House committee that her husband had said: "I'm going to ruin this guy."

Greitens on Wednesday criticized the House report as "one-sided tabloid, trash gossip that was produced in a secret room."

He also referenced a comment the woman made during a lengthy deposition in his criminal case when she was asked if she saw what she believed to be a phone. A court filing from Greitens' attorneys quoted her as saying, "I haven't talked about it because I don't know if it's because I'm remembering it through a dream or I — I'm not sure, but yes, I feel like I saw it after that happened."

Greitens and his defense team have seized on the "dream" comment to attack the credibility of her testimony. But the prosecutor in the case says the defense "cherry picked bits and pieces" of her nine-hour deposition and the woman's attorney says the comment referred to one particular instance concerning the photo.

In addition to the legislative investigation and the criminal case, Hawley is investigating The Mission Continues, the veterans charity founded by Greitens, as it relates to the state's consumer protection and charitable registration and reporting laws. That probe came after media reports that Greitens' campaign had obtained and used a charity donor list in 2015 as it ramped up fundraising for his gubernatorial bid.

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Associated Press reporters Blake Nelson in Jefferson City, Jim Salter in St. Louis and John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas, contributed to this report.

Sessions takes fight on border enforcement to New Mexico

By MARY HUDETZ, Associated Press

LAS CRUCES, N.M. (AP) — As thousands of National Guard troops deploy to the Mexico border, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions brought his tough stance on immigration enforcement to New Mexico on Wednesday, telling border sheriffs that cracking down on illegal crossings and drug smuggling is necessary to build a lawful immigration system.

Sessions ticked off stories about smugglers being caught with opioids and cocaine at the U.S.-Mexico border and legal loopholes that have encouraged more immigrants to make the journey.

"This is not acceptable. It cannot continue," he said. "No one can defend the way the system is working today."

Outside the meeting, dozens of immigrant rights activists protested, once again rejecting Sessions' previous characterization of the border region as "ground zero" in the Trump administration's fight against cartels and human traffickers.

They chanted in Spanish, saying the region is not a "war zone," and hoisted signs that protested the proposed border wall and the deployment of National Guard troops to the region.

Sessions was speaking in Las Cruces at the Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition annual spring meeting with the Southwestern Border Sheriff's Coalition, which includes 31 sheriff's departments from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.

The departments patrol areas located within 25 miles (40 kilometers) of the border.

Sessions' trip to Las Cruces, a small 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 part of Trump's promised wall.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials say the heightened barrier will be harder to get over, under and through than the old post and rail barriers that line the stretch of sprawling desert west of the Santa Teresa border crossing.

"The lack of a wall on the southern border is an open invitation to illegal crossings," Sessions said.

Dona Ana County Sheriff Enrique "Kiki" Vigil, whose jurisdiction includes Las Cruces and Santa Teresa, doubted that a wall is an appropriate use of resources to combat the flow of drugs in the area — one of the busiest sectors of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Vigil said he would prefer to see any additional potential spending on a border wall instead go toward acquiring more technology and filling other needs of law enforcement on the border.

"Just the building of the wall, that's going to be a humongous price," he said. "Why not use some of that money to try to address some of the issues here in the counties?"

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

He took another swipe Wednesday at sanctuary cities, telling the sheriffs that it's "illogical and insane" that a person can enter the country illegally on Monday and make their way to San Francisco by Wednesday and not be deported.

Sessions said the crisis has been allowed to fester for decades while politicians made promised but did nothing to fix the system.

A 37 percent increase in illegal border crossings in March brought more than 50,000 immigrants into the United States. It 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" involving border crossings calls for prosecuting people who are caught illegally entering the United States for the first time.

He told the sheriffs that it would help end a practice of "catch and release" at the border, drawing ap-

plause from some in the audience. Yuma County Sheriff Leon Wilmot, of Arizona, was among those who supported the "zero-tolerance directive."

"When they would catch backpackers, for instance, they were seizing the dope and cutting them loose," Wilmot said. "The criminal element is going to exploit that."

Tempests buffeting White House now threaten to engulf Trump

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Russia collusion probe. The Stormy Daniels allegations. The escalating tension with Moscow.

The tempests that have separately buffeted the White House for months merged into a maelstrom this week and threatened to engulf President Donald Trump, who on Wednesday railed against members of the Justice Department by name and took to Twitter to threaten military strikes in Syria and taunt a nuclear-armed power.

While alarmed aides and allies worried that Trump was the angriest he'd ever been, the president saw conspiracies in the challenges facing his administration and hinted at more chaos. And as Trump's party was rocked by upheaval on Capitol Hill, White House staffers explored whether he has the legal authority to fire the men leading the investigation into his administration and, as underscored by the seizure of documents from his private lawyer, his business and personal life.

"Much of the bad blood with Russia is caused by the Fake & Corrupt Russia Investigation, headed up by the all Democrat loyalists, or people that worked for Obama," Trump tweeted. "Mueller is most conflicted of all (except Rosenstein who signed FISA & Comey letter). No Collusion, so they go crazy!"

That message followed another provocative tweet, in which Trump laced into Russia for supporting Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose government is accused of launching an apparent chemical attack Saturday on its own people. Disregarding his own insistence that he would never tip his hand to military strategy, he seemed to suggest that he would launch airstrikes.

"Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and 'smart!'" Trump wrote. "You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!"

The president's renewed public anger at special counsel Robert Mueller and Deputy Attorney General Rob Rosenstein was prompted by the FBI raid on his longtime personal attorney Michael Cohen, who acknowledged paying \$130,000 to Daniels, a porn actress, to buy her silence about an alleged affair with Trump. Trump has warned that an investigation into his business would cross "a red line" and could lead him to fire Mueller, despite strong pushback from a number of aides and Republicans in Congress.

"It worries me because I realize how much he feels personally cheated and how much it feels like it's a personal witch hunt. And he's not the kind of guy that takes that lying down. He fights back," said Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker and an informal Trump adviser. "I think Trump doesn't know how to deal with it and is very frustrated by it, thinks it's totally unfair. And that's what you're seeing."

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders made clear Wednesday that Trump was wary of investigatory overreach, saying, "He has a very deep concern about the direction that the special counsel and other investigations have taken."

Although the president declared that his White House was "calm and calculated," aides said decisions happen fast and with even less warning than usual when Trump feels backed into a corner. Trump has continued to seethe about Attorney General Jeff Sessions recusing himself from the Russia probe. And a number of those close to Trump say they worry about his reaction — and the West Wing's lack of planning — to yet another storm on the horizon: the release of former FBI director James Comey's new book.

The advertisements for the interviews have begun blanketing cable news, leading Trump to angrily surmise that Comey was "going to lie" and try to "make money" by tarnishing the president's reputation, according to two people familiar with the president's thinking but not authorized to speak publicly about private discussions.

The January publication of Michael Wolff's "Fire & Fury" caught the White House off guard, and the cri-

tiques leveled by former chief strategist Steve Bannon and other ex-officials left Trump enraged. Although Comey's book comes as no surprise, the White House as of Wednesday had no formal plan to respond to it, instead likely opting to let the Republican National Committee and outside surrogates handle most of the pushback.

Trump's decision to fire Comey was the product of weeks of discussion among his senior-most staff. A similar debate is unlikely to play out over the potential dismissal of Mueller or Rosenstein — not least in part because those deliberations became a subject of Mueller's investigation of potential obstruction of justice.

But Trump, too, has grown more comfortable making decisions without seeking the counsel of his staff. That's what happened when he fired national security adviser H.R. McMaster and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Although both decisions had been expected for months, Trump acted first and left it to his staff to pick up the pieces.

While a number of allies believe Trump's talk on Mueller and Rosenstein was largely venting, they acknowledged that Trump is increasingly unpredictable. White House lawyers have been considering Trump's authority to circumvent Department of Justice regulations and unilaterally fire Mueller. Trump could also direct Rosenstein or a potential successor to take action against Mueller.

Republican Rep. Mark Meadows, a Trump ally, said he did not expect a purge.

"The president is not talking about firing Mueller. I've had conversations with the president, and he's not talking about it," Meadows said.

Bipartisan legislation to protect the special counsel was introduced Wednesday, but its fate was uncertain.

White House aides also worried about the surprise announcement from House Speaker Paul Ryan that he will leave Congress at the end of the year. The move was interpreted by some in Trump's orbit as an acknowledgement of the rising likelihood that Democrats could gain control of the House this fall, imperiling the president's agenda and potentially sparking talk of impeachment.

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin, Ken Thomas and Alan Fram contributed to this report.

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Crash kills 257 in Algeria's deadliest aviation disaster

By AOMAR OUALI, Associated Press

ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — A hulking military transport plane crashed just after takeoff in Algeria Wednesday, killing 257 people in the worst aviation disaster in the North African nation's history and plunging the country into mourning.

Soldiers, their family members and a group of 30 people returning to refugee camps from hospital stays in Algeria's capital died in the morning crash of the Russian-made II-76 aircraft.

The plane went down in a field just outside a military base in Boufarik, 30 kilometers (20 miles) south of Algiers, and was devoured by flames, killing 247 passengers and 10 crew members, the Defense Ministry said.

There was no official mention of survivors, but one witness reported seeing people jump out of the aircraft before it crashed.

Arabic-language channel Dzair TV reported that five people were in a critical state, but it was unclear if they had been on the plane or were injured on the ground.

Several witnesses told Algerian TV network Ennahar they saw flames coming out of one of the planes' four engines just before it took off.

"The plane started to rise before falling," an unidentified man lying on what appeared to be a hospital bed told Ennahar TV. "The plane crashed on its wing first and caught fire."

Video on the state television channel ENTV showed a blackened hulk broken into pieces, with huge wheels scattered about along with other plane parts. Firefighters doused the flames while body bags

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were placed in rows in the field.

The victims' bodies were transported to the Algerian army's central hospital outside the capital.

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika ordered three days of mourning starting immediately and prayers for the dead on Friday at mosques across the country.

In the south, the Algerian-backed Polisario Front seeking independence for Western Sahara ordered a week of mourning for the 30 dead Sahrawi people returning to its refugee camps in Tindouf, a statement from the group said.

The flight was scheduled to go to Tindouf and then Bechar, the site of another military base, according to Farouk Achour, spokesman for Algeria's civil protection services. Tindouf is home to many refugees from the neighboring Western Sahara, a disputed territory annexed by Morocco.

Algeria is vast and plane flights are often the best way to traverse Africa's largest nation.

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 in Algeria, killing at least 76 people and leaving just one survivor.

The four-engine Il-76 made its maiden voyage in 1997, according to Aviation Safety Network. The plane has been in production since the 1970s, and is widely used for both commercial freight and military transport.

The Algerian military, which historically depended on the Soviet Union and then Russia for military hardware, operates several of the planes.

Richard Aboulafia, an aviation analyst with Teal Group outside Washington, said it would be difficult to compare the accident rate of the Il-76 to common Western airplanes because of the relatively smaller number produced and the fewer hours flown.

"It is a Russian design. That doesn't make it unsafe, but they tend to need more maintenance," he said.

The Il-76 was designed to carry extremely heavy cargo, and it is unlikely that passengers alone — even a large number — would be a problem. Aboulafia said the number of troops that could be carried would be limited by space inside the aircraft more than weight considerations.

A retired Algerian officer, Mohamed Khelfaoui, told the online Algerian TSA site that he had flown in the aircraft several times and "it has proven itself in Algeria and elsewhere."

Wednesday's crash was not the deadliest of an Il-76. According to Aviation Safety Network, the 2003 crash of an Il-76 of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard killed 275 people.

The heavy loss of life of soldiers was certain to deeply shake Algeria. The National Liberation Army — which grew out of the fighting force which freed Algeria from French colonial rule — is revered by Algerians.

Today, the army is credited with saving the nation from an insurgency by Islamist extremists in the 1990s and early 2000s. The battle continues with sporadic attacks around Algeria and networks dismantled by soldiers.

The army's experience fighting terrorism has made it a valued ally of the United States and other western nations.

The U.S. Embassy in Algiers expressed its "deepest condolences" to "our partners and colleagues in the Algerian military," one of the numerous condolences that flooded into the capital from far and wide.

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, in the south. Only one person survived.

Also 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.

AP Airlines Writer David Koenig in Dallas and Samuel Petrequin and Elaine Ganley in Paris contributed to this report.

Nominee to lead State Dept.: Soft policy on Russia 'over'

By JOSH LEDERMAN and MATTHEW LEE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mike Pompeo, the hard-charging CIA director picked to be the next secretary of state, will tell the Senate on Thursday that years of soft U.S. policy toward Russia are “now over.” Drawing a sharp contrast with predecessor Rex Tillerson, Pompeo will vow to promote democracy and human rights while ending “demoralizing” vacancies at the State Department.

According to his prepared remarks, Pompeo will chastise Russia for acting “aggressively” and emphasize that the Trump administration considers Russia “a danger to our country.” But he will also say that diplomatic efforts with Moscow, while challenging, “must continue.” The Associated Press obtained excerpts of his remarks from a senior Trump administration official.

Pompeo will also stress America’s “duty to lead,” despite Trump’s vows to put “America first.”

“If we do not lead the calls for democracy, prosperity and human rights around the world, who will?” Pompeo plans to say. “No other nation is equipped with the same blend of power and principle.”

Pompeo’s remarks Thursday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will be the first chance for lawmakers and the public to hear directly from the former Kansas congressman about his approach to diplomacy and the role of the State Department, should he be confirmed to lead it. Pompeo’s views on global issues are well known — he was questioned extensively by senators for his confirmation to run the CIA — but Democratic senators have raised questions about his fitness to be top diplomat, given his hawkish views and past comments about minorities.

“When journalists, most of whom have never met me, label me — or any of you — as ‘hawks,’ ‘war hardliners,’ or worse, I shake my head,” the former Army officer will say. “There are few who dread war more than those of us who have served in uniform.”

He will add, “War is always the last resort.”

Since being nominated last month, Pompeo has spent much of his time at the State Department immersing himself in briefing books and undergoing mock hearings and prep meetings on key issues like Iran, Syria and North Korea, as well as the inner workings of the State Department, a person close to Pompeo said. He’s also spoken to all eight living former secretaries — including Hillary Clinton, whom he famously criticized over the 2012 attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya.

Pompeo’s chief goal Thursday is to convince senators that he intends to strengthen the State Department and re-establish its relevance as a major player in national security policy, said the individual, who wasn’t authorized to comment by name and requested anonymity.

That message is an implicit contrast with Tillerson, who left scores of top positions unfilled and the diplomatic corps dispirited before being unceremoniously fired by Trump on Twitter in March. Pompeo will tell the Senate that as he met with State Department workers recently, every single one told him he or she wanted to be “empowered in their roles” and clear about Trump’s mission.

“That will be my first priority,” Pompeo will say. “They also shared how demoralizing it is to have so many vacancies and frankly, not to feel relevant. I’ll do my part to end the vacancies, but I’ll need your help.”

Pompeo’s questioning by senators comes amid spiraling tensions with Russia over Syria and China over trade; concerns about the planned summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un; and uncertainty over the administration’s international agenda.

He’ll tell the Senate that he’s read CIA histories of past talks with North Korea and is confident that Trump won’t repeat past mistakes.

“President Trump isn’t one to play games at the negotiating table, and I won’t be either,” he plans to say.

The Republican will also pledge to make it “an immediate personal priority” to work with U.S. allies to try to “fix” the Iran nuclear deal. Trump has vowed to withdraw the U.S. if agreement with European allies to revamp to deal can’t be reached by May 12.

Sen. Ben Cardin, a Democrat on the committee considering Pompeo’s nomination, said after meeting with him Tuesday that he didn’t get the impression Pompeo was well-versed in world affairs and seemed unfamiliar with the current status of several issues.

"I assume by Thursday he'll get up to speed," Cardin told reporters.

Trump announced Pompeo's nomination to become the 70th secretary of state in the same March 13 tweet in which he dumped Tillerson. "He will do a fantastic job," Trump said at the time, confirming months of speculation that the largely sidelined Tillerson was out of a job and would be replaced by Pompeo, who is known to have the president's ear and respect and shares his opposition to the Iran nuclear deal.

At the State Department, the shake-up was met with a mixture of relief and trepidation.

On the one hand, Tillerson had alienated many with his deeply unpopular bureaucratic reorganization. His overt endorsement of hefty budget cuts and his failure to fill jobs attracted the ire of lawmakers of both political parties.

But many diplomats have privately voiced apprehension about Pompeo's history of sometimes hostile comments toward the gay community and Islam and his fierce criticism of the Obama administration's handling of the aftermath of the Benghazi attacks.

Pompeo, who was confirmed for the CIA job by a 66-32 vote, developed a reputation for being more outwardly political than many past directors of the traditionally apolitical agency. He developed a visibly close relationship with the president, traveling to the White House on most days to deliver the highly classified President's Daily Brief in person rather than leaving the task to other intelligence officials. Often Trump would have the CIA director stay in the West Wing after the briefing to accompany him to other meetings.

Associated Press writer Matthew Pennington contributed to this report.

Prosecutor: minors at risk of forced labor at Brazil church

By SARAH DiLORENZO and PETER PRENGAMAN, Associated Press

FRANCO DA ROCHA, Brazil (AP) — Minors remain at risk and are being forced to work against their will by a Brazilian church with ties to the U.S.-based Word of Faith Fellowship, a senior labor prosecutor said Wednesday after the initial hearing in a civil suit seeking the dissolution of the local church and the school it runs.

The Ministerio Evangelico Comunidade Rhema church in the city of Franco da Rocha has refused to cease practices that authorities have alleged amount to forced labor, said Catarina von Zuben, the national coordinator for prosecutors who work on combatting modern-day slavery in Brazil.

"This action aims to make these practices stop, to make this exploitation stop, particularly of minors, of children," von Zuben told The Associated Press after the closed hearing.

Brazilian authorities opened multiple investigations after the AP reported in July that leaders of Word of Faith Fellowship — based in rural Spindale, North Carolina — created a pipeline of young Brazilian congregants who told of being taken to the U.S. and forced to work for little or no pay.

Wednesday was the first time that former church members who have said they were mistreated were able to face off in court with local pastors Solange da Silva Granieri Oliveira and Juarez de Souza Oliveira, who also are named in the labor prosecutors' suit.

"It's a pleasure for me to watch justice being done," said Flavio Correa, a longtime member who left the church in 2016 complaining of abusive practices.

Both pastors and their lawyers declined to speak with the AP after the hearing, but investigators have said the church leaders have denied any wrongdoing.

During the closed session, the judge ordered that documents that had been under seal be made available to the defense, von Zuben said. The judge then scheduled another hearing for July.

Word of Faith Fellowship is a secretive evangelical sect founded in 1979 by Jane Whaley, a former math teacher, and her husband, Sam. Over the decades, it has grown to a congregation of nearly 750 people in rural North Carolina, with hundreds more followers extending to Brazil, Ghana and other countries.

Dozens of former congregants in both the U.S. and Brazil have told the AP that Whaley rules all the branches with an iron fist and that church members — including children — are regularly attacked verbally and physically in an effort to "purify" sinners.

In the suit filed March 1 in a labor court in Sao Paulo state, prosecutors cited testimony that contained harrowing details of a wide range of alleged abuses within the Rhema church, including how long the marks from a beating with a ruler were evident on a child's body.

Children and adults alike said they were worked to the point of exhaustion and feared punishment, social isolation or separation from their families if they resisted.

In recent years, Brazil — which once was the world's largest slave market — has increasingly cracked down on labor practices it deems to be tantamount to slavery.

In addition to asking a judge to shut down the church and school, the prosecutors want the church to pay a fine of at least \$153,000 to a workers' compensation fund and at least \$15,000 to each identified victim.

Gustavo Reis de Souza, who says he was physically and emotionally abused while he attended the church-run school, waited for his mother outside Wednesday's hearing.

"I suffered a lot and I don't want other people to go through this," the 15-year-old said, adding that he thought closing the school would help other children. "They're in there and they don't have the courage to leave."

Risk of Zika infection through sex may last only a month

By MIKE STOBBE, AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Signs of Zika infection can be seen in semen for as long as nine months, but the risk of sexual transmission appears to end in one month, according to a study published Wednesday.

The study suggests health officials have been overly cautious in advising couples to abstain from sex or to use condoms for at least six months after a male partner comes down with Zika.

The study's lead author, Dr. Paul Mead of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the results are spurring work on new and better recommendations. But he said the study itself is not enough to change current guidelines yet.

The study was published online Wednesday by the New England Journal of Medicine.

Zika infections swept across Latin America and the Caribbean in 2015 and 2016, with a few very small outbreaks in the southern United States. The virus is mainly spread by tropical mosquitoes. But during the epidemic, scientists discovered some infections were spread through sex — in most cases by men infecting their partners.

In the U.S., 52 reported Zika cases have been attributed to sexual transmission, according to the CDC.

Most people infected with Zika don't get sick, while some suffer a mild illness with fever, rash and joint pain.

But infection during pregnancy can cause devastating birth defects, including microcephaly, in which a baby's skull is much smaller than expected because the brain hasn't developed properly.

In the new study, health officials looked at semen and urine samples from about 180 U.S. men who were infected with Zika and developed symptoms. Most of them caught it in 2016 while traveling overseas to outbreak areas. The men were given a \$50 gift cards per submission. They submitted more than 1,300 semen samples.

Sixty of the men had genetic evidence of Zika infection in their semen.

But genetic evidence of a past infection is different from infectious concentrations of virus. The researchers looked for that, and found three men who appeared to have levels that made them contagious. The infectious-level specimens from those three men were all taken within a month of their developing symptoms, Mead said.

The results may help tailor counseling for couples who are concerned about Zika, said Dr. Neil Silverman, a UCLA professor of obstetrics.

Two years ago, the risk of Zika caused panic in many couples, but the anxiety level has waned. Silverman said his clinic used to see 20 to 25 couples each month with Zika concerns, but now sees only three to five.

Though it's no longer causing large outbreaks, the virus still lurks in mosquitoes in many tropical locales and it remains an infection threat to visitors.

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"Zika will be with us in the Americas. There's no particular reason to think it's going away," Mead said.

The Associated Press Health & Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Asian shares mixed as markets mull Fed, geopolitical risk

By KELVIN CHAN, AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian shares were mixed Thursday as investors digested the latest Fed minutes while geopolitical concerns overshadowed sentiment after President Donald Trump struck a defiant tone on the Middle East conflict.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 stock index dipped 0.2 percent to 21,646.15 while the Kospi in South Korea edged up 0.1 percent to 2,446.05. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.3 percent to 30,796.81 but the Shanghai Composite in mainland China slipped 0.6 percent to 3,188.97. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.4 percent to 5,808.20. Indexes in Taiwan, Singapore and Indonesia also lost ground.

FED MINUTES: At its most recent meeting in March, Federal Reserve policymakers said they felt the U.S. central bank might have to raise interest rates faster than expected to keep up with quickening economic growth and rising inflation that's coming close their 2 percent target, according to the latest minutes. Some officials also thought they might have to focus on slowing the economy to keep inflation under control.

TRUMP TALK: In a tweet, Trump suggested that he wanted to retaliate against Russia after the recent suspected chemical attack. Separately, Saudi Arabia said it intercepted missiles fired by rebels in Yemen as well as drones that targeted an oil facility. The prospect of escalating conflict in the Middle East has sparked fears about tighter oil supplies, driving crude prices to their highest since December 2014.

MARKET INSIGHT: "With the war drums quietly beating in the White House, markets tend to ignore the 'run of the mill' type issues like FOMC minutes," said Stephen Innes, head of Asian trading at OANDA.

WALL STREET: The S&P 500 index fell 0.6 percent to 2,642.19 after Tuesday's 1.7 percent surge. The Dow Jones industrial average slid 0.9 percent to 24,189.45. The Nasdaq composite lost 0.4 percent to 7,069.03.

ENERGY: Oil futures climbed to a fresh three-year high. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 29 cents to \$67.11 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract climbed 2 percent to settle at \$66.82 a barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, gained 24 cents to \$72.30 a barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The dollar rose to 106.85 yen from 106.79 yen in late trading Wednesday. The euro was flat at \$1.2369.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 12, the 102nd day of 2018. There are 263 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 12, 1861, the Civil War began as Confederate forces opened fire on Fort Sumter in South Carolina.

On this date:

In 1606, England's King James I decreed the design of the original Union Flag, which combined the flags of England and Scotland.

In 1776, North Carolina's Fourth Provincial Congress authorized the colony's delegates to the Continental Congress to support independence from Britain.

In 1934, "Tender Is the Night," by F. Scott Fitzgerald, was first published in book form after being serialized in Scribner's Magazine.

In 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage in Warm Springs, Georgia, at age 63; he was succeeded by Vice President Harry S. Truman.

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In 1955, the Salk vaccine against polio was declared safe and effective.

In 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to fly in space, orbiting the earth once before making a safe landing.

In 1963, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested and jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, charged with contempt of court and parading without a permit. (During his time behind bars, King wrote his "Letter from Birmingham Jail.")

In 1975, singer, dancer and civil rights activist Josephine Baker, 68, died in Paris.

In 1983, Chicagoans went to the polls to elect Harold Washington the city's first black mayor.

In 1985, Sen. Jake Garn, R-Utah, became the first sitting member of Congress to fly in space as the shuttle Discovery lifted off.

In 1988, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office issued a patent to Harvard University for a genetically engineered mouse, the first time a patent was granted for an animal life form.

In 1990, in its first meeting, East Germany's first democratically elected parliament acknowledged responsibility for the Nazi Holocaust, and asked the forgiveness of Jews and others who had suffered.

Ten years ago: Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama conceded that comments he'd made privately during a fundraiser about bitter working class voters who "cling to guns or religion" were ill chosen. Actors, relatives and politicians gathered at a church in Los Angeles to mourn Charlton Heston, one of the last lions of Old Hollywood who died April 5 after battling Alzheimer's disease. Boston College won the NCAA hockey championship, 4-1, over Notre Dame.

Five years ago: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, visiting South Korea, delivered a stark warning to North Korea not to test-fire a mid-range missile while tamping down anxiety caused by a new U.S. intelligence report suggesting significant progress in the communist regime's nuclear weapons program. Guan Tianlang, a 14-year-old from China, made history as the youngest player to make the cut in a PGA Tour-sanctioned event; despite being the first player at Augusta National to get hit with a one-shot penalty for slow play, Guan made the cut under the 10-shot rule at the Masters. American chess grandmaster Robert Byrne, 84, died in Ossining, New York.

One year ago: The United States and China struck what appeared to be an unusual bargain as President Donald Trump said he wouldn't label China a currency manipulator and voiced confidence Chinese President Xi Jinping (shee jihn-peeng) would help him deal with North Korea's mounting threat. Embattled Fox News Channel host Bill O'Reilly began a vacation after reports emerged of settlements reached with five women to keep quiet about harassment accusations.

Today's Birthdays: Children's author Beverly Cleary is 102. Actress Jane Withers is 92. Opera singer Montserrat Caballe is 85. Playwright Alan Ayckbourn (AYK'-bohrn) is 79. Jazz musician Herbie Hancock is 78. Rock singer John Kay (Steppenwolf) is 74. Actor Ed O'Neill is 72. Actor Dan Lauria is 71. Talk show host David Letterman is 71. Author Scott Turow is 69. Actor-playwright Tom Noonan is 67. Rhythm-and-blues singer JD Nicholas (The Commodores) is 66. Singer Pat Travers is 64. Actor Andy Garcia is 62. Movie director Walter Salles (SAL'-ihs) is 62. Country singer Vince Gill is 61. Actress Suzanne (cq) Douglas is 61. Model/TV personality J Alexander is 60. Rock musician Will Sergeant (Echo & the Bunnymen) is 60. Rock singer Art Alexakis (al-ex-AH'-kis) (Everclear) is 56. Country singer Deryl Dodd is 54. Folk-pop singer Amy Ray (Indigo Girls) is 54. Actress Alicia Coppola is 50. Rock singer Nicholas Hexum (311) is 48. Actor Nicholas Brendon is 47. Actress Shannen Doherty is 47. Actress Marley Shelton is 44. Actress Sarah Jane Morris is 41. Actress Jordana Spiro is 41. Rock musician Guy Berryman (Coldplay) is 40. Actor Riley Smith is 40. Actress Claire Danes is 39. Actress Jennifer Morrison is 39. Actor Matt McGorry is 32. Contemporary Christian musician Joe Rickard (Red) is 31. Rock singer-musician Brendon Urie (Panic! at the Disco) is 31. Actress Saoirse (SUR'-shuh) Ronan is 24.

Thought for Today: "All history is only one long story to this effect: men have struggled for power over their fellow men in order that they might win the joys of earth at the expense of others, and might shift the burdens of life from their own shoulders upon those of others." — William Graham Sumner, American educator and social critic (born 1840, died this date in 1910).