

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 13, 2018 ~ Vol. 25 - No. 273 ~ 1 of 54



Due to the Blizzard Warning issued for our area, the Groton Area School District will be CLOSED on Friday, April 13.

The Elementary PAC Carnival has been postponed.

The track meet scheduled for Friday has been cancelled.

It currently appears as though weather conditions are expected to improve to allow for prom activities to take place on Saturday as scheduled.

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- 1- Blood Drive Ad
- 1- Chicken Soup for the Soul
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Oven Fresh Sandwiches Hot Desserts Snack Melts
11 E Hwy 12, Groton ~ 397-8627

Blood Drive!
Monday, April 16
Noon to 6 p.m.
Groton American Legion
To make an appointment, call
Carol Osterman: 397-8498
or June Ackman: 397-8369
JUST 1 DONATION SAVES 3 LIVES

JH Track Meet at Sisseton for April 12 is **postponed**
Friday: Indoor Track meet at NSU **Cancelled**
Friday: Elementary PAC Carnival at GES **postponed**
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**

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

Winter Storm Likely To Disrupt Weekend Travel

PIERRE, S.D. – A major winter storm is forecast to bring heavy snow and strong winds across much of South Dakota that will hamper weekend travel from Thursday evening to Sunday.

The National Weather Service said the storm will begin Thursday evening with snow in western South Dakota and move east. Rain and freezing rain will precede the heavy snow in central, north central and northeastern parts of the state.

Along with the heavy, wet snow, winds from 15-40 mph and gusts up to 55 mph will create blizzard conditions and hazardous travel across much of the state Friday and into Saturday.

The National Weather Service has issued a Winter Storm Warning for parts of the northwest, southwest and Black Hills area and a blizzard warning for the rest of the state from Rapid City to Minnesota.

Conditions will deteriorate rapidly overnight and throughout the day on Friday as the storm pushes east. People with travel plans should travel today (Thursday) and plan to stay put until the storm has passed.

"This is a nasty winter storm that is going to hamper, if not cripple, travel through much of the state," says Darin Bergquist, Secretary of Transportation. "There is a high probability that at least some portions of the interstate will be closed during this time."

Travelers are reminded that Department of Transportation crews will plow until conditions allow and with the significant forecasted snow totals and high winds, it will take some time for them to get roads clear and open again. If an interstate is closed, do not assume other highways are in any better condition.

People who must travel are strongly encouraged to visit www.safetravelusa.com/sd, call 511 or download the SDDOT 511 app to check the latest road conditions and travel advisories before heading out.

The state Departments of Public Safety and Transportation remind travelers to take the following safety precautions:

- Travel during the day and use highly traveled roads and highways when possible.
- If the interstate is closed, secondary roads are not going to be any better and may be worse.
- Keep family and friends informed of your travel schedule and route.
- If you travel, wear a seatbelt. Keep a winter weather survival kit in your car and a charged cell phone with location turned on in your car, but don't rely on the phone to get you out of trouble.
- If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle.
- Consider stocking food and water if you are in a remote area of the state.
- Take care of livestock and outdoor animals ahead of the storm.
- Be flexible and cancel travel plans if weather conditions warrant.

Sumption Named to National Football Foundation Hampshire Honor Society

Irving, Texas – The National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame announced on Wednesday the 2018 members to the NFF Hampshire Honor Society, with Wolves senior Brian Sumption being named to the list. The Honor Society is comprised of college football players from all divisions of play who each maintained a cumulative 3.2 GPA or better throughout their college careers.

Nominated by their respective schools, members of the NFF Hampshire Honor Society must have completed their final year of playing eligibility in 2017, graduated players, who have remaining eligibility but will not return to collegiate play (e.g. declared for NFL Draft or retired from football), may also be nominated, achieved a 3.2 cumulative grade point average throughout entire course of undergraduate study, and met all NCAA- or NAIA-mandated progress toward degree requirements, while being a starter or significant contributors throughout the 2017 season.

Sumption started all 11 games for the Wolves in his senior campaign. He tallied 29 tackles, 22 solo and seven assisted, while adding four interceptions for 76 yards and four pass breakups.

Sydney Johnson Joins Women's Basketball for Fall 2018

Aberdeen, S.D. – Northern State University Head Coach Curt Fredrickson and Associate Head Coach Paula Krueger announced the signing of Sydney Johnson for the 2018-19 season on Thursday. Johnson, a native of Hillsboro, Wisconsin, will join November signees Zoe Hardwick (Eden Prairie, Minn.), Sydney Stofferahn (Dell Rapids, S.D.), Lexi Wadsworth (Hayti, S.D.), and Mande Williamson (Newell, S.D.).

"We are excited to welcome Sydney to our program for the 2018-19 season," noted Krueger. "She brings some much needed length and athleticism to our perimeter game."



Sydney Johnson // Hillsboro, Wis. // Hillsboro HS

Sydney Johnson is a 5-foot-10, guard out of Hillsboro High School. She was a 4-year starter and 2-year team captain for the Tigers under head coach Scott Egan. Johnson averaged 22 points, 5.3 steals, 4.5 rebounds, 2.0 assists, and 1.5 blocks per game. She totaled 499 points as a senior, shooting 40 percent from the arc and 74 percent from the foul line. Johnson was a 4-time all-conference selection, 4-time team MVP, and the 2017-18 Scenic Bluffs Player of the Year. She is the all-time leading scorer at Hillsboro with 1,335 points, and holds single game school records in points (33) and steals (13). In her four seasons, the Tigers were the 4-time region qualifiers, 3-time region champions, 3-time section qualifiers, and section finalists. Johnson is also an all-conference member of both the volleyball and softball teams. She is the daughter of Shana Johnson.

Large feedlot opponents say bill continues easing of permitting process

By DIRK LAMMERS

PIERRE, S.D. – A new law that tosses around such Latin legal terms as writ of certiorari and de novo seems to have little to do with agriculture, but corporate farming opponents say it's part of the GOP House's multi-year effort to simplify local permit approval for large feedlot operators.

In previous legislative sessions, House Speaker Mark Mickelson shepherded through bills that gave local boards of adjustment the flexibility to require just a simple majority vote for conditional use permits instead of a two-thirds supermajority. Appeals of such decisions are subject to writ of certiorari reviews, meaning a circuit judge can only look at whether the board had jurisdiction to grant the permit and followed proper procedure.

But decisions made in the seven South Dakota counties whose commissions handle zoning themselves were inadvertently left subject to a more stringent standard of appeal – a de novo review – meaning the circuit court could essentially retry the entire process. House Bill 1292, which goes into effect July 1, makes all conditional use permits issued in the state subject to only writ of certiorari reviews.

"I don't know if it makes it easier or makes it harder," said Mickelson, R-Sioux Falls. "It just makes it consistent. It should result in better government."

Mickelson, who announced last week that will not seek reelection to focus on his family and business, is a 50-percent partner in a business that stands to benefit from an easier path for applicants. In May 2017, Mickelson and Paul Kostboth formed A1 Development Solutions, a business development firm that specializes in "the siting, permitting, and development of livestock and other agricultural-related facilities of all sizes."

Mickelson said A1 Development Solutions is a small business interest for him, and he supports such legislation mostly because he thinks large farming operations are good long-term for citizens and the economy.

"Frankly it's something I got into simply because I believe in them," he said.

Kathy Tyler, a former Democratic lawmaker who testified against HB 1292 in the Senate Judiciary Committee, said South Dakota law already gives preferential treatment to conditional use permit applicants, and the latest change just amplifies that advantage.

Tyler said companies pitching concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) bring in multiple lawyers with razzle-dazzle PowerPoint presentations to woo boards, and residents in opposition are often outgunned, getting just five-minute slots to present their case. She said members of appointed boards are also handcuffed by not being allowed to talk to anyone before the hearing or do their own research.

"An appointed body is making major decisions that affect the entire county," Tyler told committee members. "They usually have no training, no background and no experience in running a hearing. And this is a typical scenario for a CAFO hearing."

HB 1292 prime sponsor Rep. Jason Kettwig, R-Milbank, said the bill simply clarifies and corrects some law language to give control to the governing board closest to the people. Kettwig said a writ of certiorari review, which validates the decision made at the local level, is a more appropriate appeal than a de novo review, which allows the courts to take testimony, find facts on their own and come to their own decision. He said opposition should be heard, but there should not be a repetitive process.

"There is recourse when the government body isn't doing it right," Kettwig said. "It's an election."

HB 1292 sailed through the House Judiciary Committee 12-0 and passed the House 44-20, with only Kettwig speaking in testimony and on the floor. Opposition organized for the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, and the bill squeezed through on a 4-3 margin before earning Senate passage on a 22-13 vote. Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed the legislation on March 23.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) as having more than 1,000 animal units, which equates to 1,000 head of beef cattle, 700 dairy cows, 2,500 swine weighing more than 55 pounds, 125,000 broiler chickens or 82,000 laying hens or pullets confined on site for more than 45 days during the year. The EPA stipulates that any animal feeding operation that discharges manure or wastewater into a natural or man-made ditch, stream or other waterway as a CAFO,

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regardless of size.

The Sierra Club, which spoke out against the bill, says CAFOs produce huge amounts of animal sewage and other pollutants.

Robert Wirsing, a retired educator who serves on the Gregory County Planning and Zoning commission, testified that HB 1292 disempowers citizens and grants a free hand to corporate interests who quite naturally don't want to be troubled by opposition.

"Corporate-based CAFOs come to the fight tied into a well-organized, single-minded and well-financed network, highly experienced in advancing CAFO interest," Wirsing said. "Citizens, in contrast, are effectively left entirely to their own usually meager resources."

Mickelson said he supports counties' rights to deny large farming operations from setting up shop, but those positions should be established up front so every conditional use permit application isn't subject to not-in-my-backyard arguments.

"If people don't want to have animal feeding operations in their counties, you want to have that reflected in your zoning plan," he said.

CAFO supporters did fail on another measure before the 2018 Legislature. House Bill 1184 would have let feedlots run waste disposal lines in the right of way along or under highways without obtaining landowner permission. The Senate Transportation Committee killed the bill on a 4-2 vote.

Truck Parking Areas on I-29 Closing for Reconstruction

WATERTOWN, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Transportation says work to reconstruct the parking areas located on Interstate 29 between Brookings and Watertown will begin Monday, April 16.

The southbound truck parking area will be closed on April 16 and the northbound parking area will be closed on April 23.

Both truck parking areas will be closed for approximately six weeks.

Duininck, Inc. is the prime contractor on this \$283,000 project.

For complete road construction information, visit <https://www.safetravelusa.com/sd/> or dial 511.

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 28, 2018, from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton.

CONSIGNMENT AUCTION

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

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

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

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Pastor Salem biography premieres May 5 in Aberdeen 'Heart of a Shepherd' explores 74-year global ministry

"Heart of a Shepherd," a biopic on South Dakota native and Christian Worship Hour pastor Dr. Harold E. Salem, premieres at the Capitol Theater in Aberdeen on Saturday, May 5 at 2 p.m. Tickets are available at the door.

The 440-seat theater is expected to sell out quickly; so five additional screenings are scheduled for 7 p.m. May 5-8 and May 6 at 2 p.m. There is a private screening on Friday, May 4 at 7 p.m.

The film describes Salem's call to ministry in 1943, transition to TV ministry in 1979 and his continued work at age 96 to reach 90 percent of the earth from a production studio in South Dakota.

"His restless passion for serving the Lord manifested itself through a simple, low-tech ministry hour," said film producer Mark Seignious. "He just wants people to know Jesus."

Salem began serving the First Baptist Church of Belle Fourche, South Dakota in 1944, accepting the call to First Baptist Church of Aberdeen, South Dakota in 1958 where he for served for 52 years.

In 2010, he resigned from First Baptist to commit full time to the Christian Worship Hour, which he founded in 1979 telecasting the worship service live on KABY-TV in Aberdeen.

The Christian Worship Hour was founded to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, offering a worship service to those who are housebound, to win the lost to Christ, to minister to the lonely, the elderly, and the shut-ins, and to nurture the saved in their daily walk with the Lord.

Salem has preached in more than 70 churches in the US as well as services in Canada, England, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Today, the program reaches homes via TV, radio, Internet and DVD. The program still consists almost entirely of a sermon preached by Salem and a few worship songs. The broadcast airs on more than 50 stations and satellite networks around the world.

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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Governor Closes State Government Offices In 32 Counties Due to Blizzard

PIERRE, S.D. – Gov. Dennis Daugaard has ordered the closure of state government offices in 32 counties for Friday because of the approaching blizzard.

The counties covered by the Governor's order are: Bennett, Brule, Buffalo, Butte, Campbell, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Faulk, Gregory, Haakon, Hand, Harding, Hughes, Hyde, Jackson, Jones, Lawrence, Lyman, Meade, Mellette, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, Perkins, Potter, Stanley, Sully, Todd, Tripp, Walworth and Ziebach.

Only essential personnel within state offices in those counties should report to their work stations.

A major late winter storm is expected to cover most of South Dakota starting tonight (Thursday night) with snow in western South Dakota. Rain, freezing rain and heavy snow are expected to reach the rest of the state sometime Friday.

Officials are monitoring the storm closely and evaluating whether further state-office closures might be necessary.

Citizens with business at state offices in other South Dakota counties impacted by the storm should call ahead to make sure the office remains open.

Groton Home for Sale



\$299,900

304 N State Street, Groton

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

www.flexmls.com/share/1NpDJ/304NSTATESTGrotonSD57445

JENCY AGENCY

◆ Real Estate ◆ Property Management ◆

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

Brittany Smart: 605/290-1487

REMINDER

RETIREMENT FARM AUCTION

Saturday, April 14, 2018 10AM

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

Online Bidding Available during the Auction!

Register to bid at Ag4bid.com

This auction features a well maintained line of Farm Equipment, Tractors, Harvest, Planting, Tillage, Trucks, Livestock & Haying Equipment

to include: JD 9610 combine ▪ JD 930 platform flex head ▪ 2004 international eagle 9400i Semi ▪ 1973 GMC 13sp. tandem truck ▪ 1991 cornhusker grain trailer, ▪ JD 1980 4440 ▪ Versatile 875 ▪ Case IH 9150, Summers 30' Super couler ▪ JD EO400 Rotary Hoe ▪ IHC 496 30' disk ▪ Kilbros 490 grain cart.

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

Owners: Terry & Marcia Haaland

www.voldrealty.com ▪ voldauctions@ag4bid.com

VOLD AUCTIONEERS & REALTY

BRITTON, SD ▪ 605-448-0048

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BLIZZARD WARNING

...MAJOR STORM TO IMPACT THE REGION...

...BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 7 AM FRIDAY TO 1 PM CDT SATURDAY...

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions expected. Winds gusting as high as 55 mph will cause whiteout conditions in blowing snow. Significant drifting of the snow is likely. Total snow accumulations of 3 to 9 inches, with localized amounts up to 15 inches, are expected. Less snow expected along the South Dakota, North Dakota border.

* WHERE...Portions of central, north central and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...From 7 AM Friday to 1 PM CDT Saturday.

* ADDITIONAL DETAILS...Blizzard conditions may be delayed until the mid morning hours. Travel will be very dangerous to impossible, including during the evening commute on Friday. Damage to trees and power lines is likely.

A Blizzard Warning means severe winter weather conditions are expected or occurring. Falling and blowing snow with strong winds and poor visibilities are likely. This will lead to whiteout conditions, making travel extremely dangerous. Do not travel. If you must travel, have a winter survival kit with you. If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle. The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.



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

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

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Today in Weather History

April 13, 1986: A significant spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas, it was the worst blizzard ever.

April 13, 1995: Flooding, resulting from snowmelt from the two major snowstorms in April and saturated soils, caused extensive road damage and inundation. The flooding caused several road closings and numerous flooded basements in many counties. Also, many lakes were overfull in Day and Campbell Counties. Flooded farmland caused severe delays in small grain planting. Spink, Sully, McPherson, and Brown Counties were declared disasters.

April 13, 2010: Unyielding south winds developed over central and northeast South Dakota in the early afternoon and continued into the early evening hours. South winds of 30 to 50 mph with gusts to near 70 mph caused some structural and shingled damage across the area. A pickup on Interstate-90 lost a camper to the high winds. The high winds, combined with lowered humidity and dry fuels, helped fan several grassland fires across the region. The most substantial fire started from a downed power line in Campbell County near the town of Glenham. The fire grew to be five miles long by two miles wide and traveled eight miles before it was under control. Almost 6000 acres were burned with nearly 20 fire departments dispatched.

1877 - The second coastal storm in just three days hit Virginia and the Carolinas. The first storm flattened the sand dunes at Hatteras, and widened the Oregon inlet three quarters of a mile. The second storm produced hurricane force winds along the coast of North Carolina causing more beach erosion and land transformation. (David Ludlum)

1955 - The town of Axis, AL, was deluged with 20.33 inches of rain in 24 hours establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A major spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas it was the worst blizzard ever. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in northern Texas produced wind gusts to 98 mph at the Killeen Airport causing a million dollars property damage. Two airplanes were totally destroyed by the high winds, and ten others were damaged. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure off the Atlantic coast produced high winds across North Carolina, with gusts to 78 mph reported at Waves. The high winds combined with high tides to cause coastal flooding and erosion. About 275 feet of land was eroded from the northern tip of Pea Island. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms in central Florida produced golf ball size hail and a tornado near Lakeland FL. Fair and mild weather prevailed across most of the rest of the nation. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in central Oklahoma and north central Texas. Thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced up to six inches of golf ball size hail along I-40 near El Reno, and produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Okarche. Thunderstorms over north central Texas produced softball size hail northwest of Rotan, and high winds which injured two persons southeast of Itasca. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1999: A two-mile-wide area of wind-driven hail pounded residences and farm equipment for about a 5 mile stretch at least as far as State Highway 158 in west Texas near Midland/Odessa. Hail grew up to about golf ball size and winds peaked at approximately 80 mph. The wind-driven hail broke windows in houses and blasted paint off the wooden siding. The strong winds took roofs off several mobile homes and at least one single-family house. Utility crews stated that the winds downed a total of 27 poles. The American Red Cross determined that 324 units were affected with 18 mobile homes and four houses destroyed. About 50-60 families were at least temporarily displaced.

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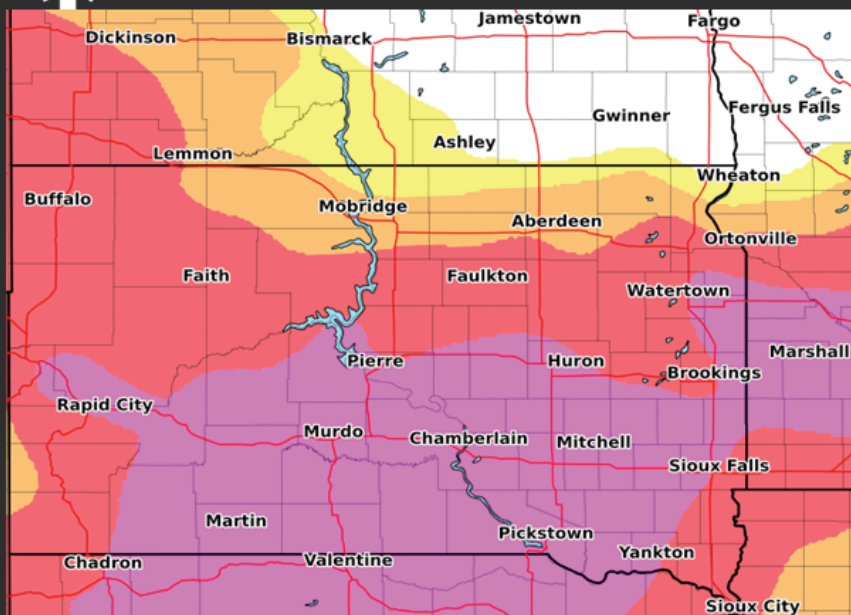
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Fri Apr 13	Sat Apr 14	Sun Apr 15	Mon Apr 16	Tue Apr 17	Wed Apr 18	Thu Apr 19
35°F	35°F	37°F	44°F	46°F	45°F	48°F
24°F	16°F	15°F	29°F	31°F	27°F	32°F
NNE 31 MPH Precip 90%	NNE 22 MPH Precip 40%	N 9 MPH	S 10 MPH	SE 17 MPH Precip 20%	NW 19 MPH Precip 20%	W 10 MPH



Heavy Snow & Blowing Snow Threat

Impact Outlook: Today - 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.

Major impacts expected from both heavy snow and blowing snow, especially for areas along and south of U.S. Highway 212.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 4/13/2018 5:51 AM Central

Published on: 04/13/2018 at 5:55AM

Rain has changed to snow across western SD. This transition will continue from west to east through the day. Snow will be heavy at times. Winds will increase to 25 to 40 mph with higher gusts. This will result in blizzard conditions across the area by evening. Stay tuned for further updates!

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 41.3 F at 3:37 PM

Low Outside Temp: 30.4 F at 6:45 AM

Wind Chill:

High Gust: 20.0 Mph at 7:17 PM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 92° in 2003

Record Low: 9° in 2013

Average High: 56°F

Average Low: 31°F

Average Precip in April: 0.63

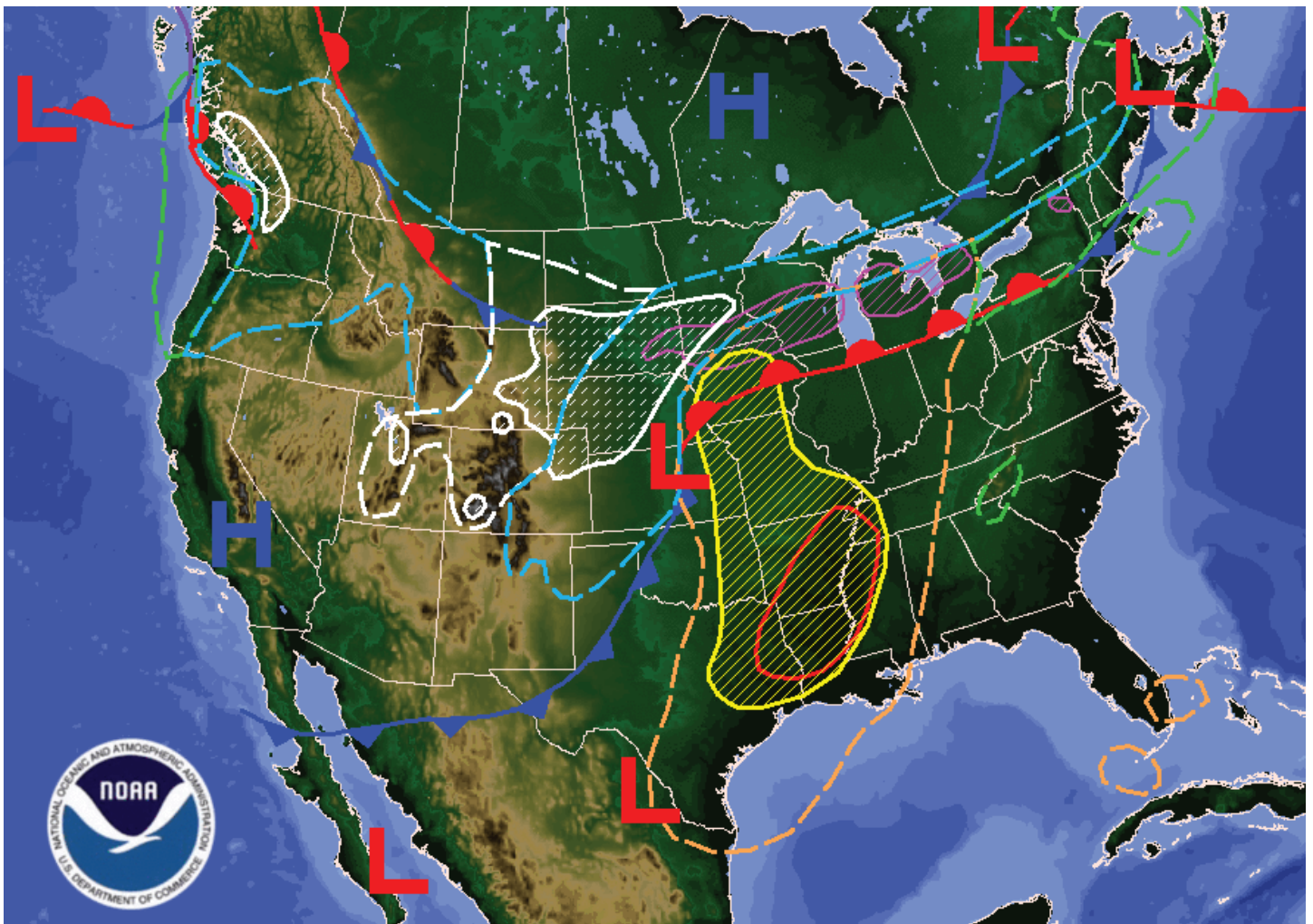
Precip to date in April: 0.61

Average Precip to date: 2.81

Precip Year to Date: 2.68

Sunset Tonight: 8:17 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:49



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Fri, Apr 13, 2018, issued 5:03 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds 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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GOOD REASONS TO REJOICE!

Centuries ago, there was a legend that mystics would share with their followers. "The Lord, at one time," went the legend, "colored all the flowers green. But one day He dipped His finger in the pot at the bottom of the rainbow and when He took it out it was covered with many different colors. When He saw how beautiful the colors were He decided to paint each of the flowers a different color and give each of them their name."

"One morning," the legend continues, "a beautiful flower with small blue, pink and white flowers was asked, 'What's your name?'" The flower hung its head, sighed and said, "Oh my, I forgot."

Embarrassed, the flower confessed to the Lord, "I'm so sorry, but I have forgotten my name." And the Lord said, "That's all right. Everyone forgets some things. But I have not forgotten you." Then He added, "Whatever else you do, 'For-Get-Me-Not,' for I am the God who created you!"

From that day until today, this lovely little flower has been called "For-Get-Me Not." Whenever we see it, we need to remember the words of David, "Praise the Lord, all my soul, and forget not all - or perhaps better stated - forget not any of His benefits."

We seldom think of the extensive range of God's gifts!: Every beat of our heart, every breath we inhale, every sight we see or noise we hear, every step we take, every taste we enjoy, every friend we have, every blessing we receive, every promise of His that we claim - and mostly our salvation - are only the beginning of His benefits to us.

Prayer: Lord! How gracious You are to give us so many gifts. Most importantly, though, give us thankful hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 103:2 Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—

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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

I-90 Closing from Rapid City to Murdo

PIERRE, S.D. – Officials are closing Interstate 90 from Rapid City to Murdo, both east and westbound, effective at 6 a.m. MST (7 a.m. CST).

Heavy snow and strong winds have made safe travel impossible in this area. Motorists are strongly cautioned that other roads in area will likely become impassible as this storm continues throughout the day.

Officials are also asking drivers to stay put and not plan any travel across the state for the rest of today and into the weekend. As this storm system moves through, more interstate closures and No Travel Advisories can be expected.

Closures and advisories are posted on www.safetravelusa.com/sd and on the phone based 5-1-1.

Based on information from the National Weather Service (NWS), conditions are expected to worsen as the storm continues to move east, with additional heavy snowfall and strong winds making travel hazardous and likely impossible. A blizzard warning is in effect for much of the South Dakota into Saturday (April 14).

Drivers of high-profile vehicles need to exercise extra caution across the state with sustained winds of 25-40 mph in most areas along with gusts of 50 plus mph according to the NWS.

“We understand people want to be on the roads and about their business, but we ask for patience while the storm moves through the state and our maintenance crews can get the roads clear and safe for travel,” said Greg Fuller, director of Operations.

Get the most up-to-date information on road conditions at www.safetravelusa.com/sd, by calling 5-1-1 or downloading and checking the SDDOT 511 app before heading out.

Sioux Falls day care worker accused of abuse, arrested

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls day care provider has been arrested and accused of abusing three children.

An arrest affidavit says the 62-year-old woman was seen hitting, pushing and dragging the children by the arm at the Boys and Girls Club day care. Police spokesman Sam Clemens says surveillance video captured the abuse.

Authorities say the three children were younger than 2. A police investigator met with the woman earlier this week. She reportedly admitted dragging a child out of frustration but didn't remember other incidents. She was arrested Thursday.

Government offices, schools close as blizzard approaches

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Dennis Daugaard has ordered the temporary closure of state government offices in nearly half of the counties in South Dakota because of the approaching storm.

Daugaard says only essential personnel at the state offices in those 32 counties should report to work Friday. Also, dozens of school districts canceled classes Friday because of a blizzard warning that covers much of the state.

Forecasters say rain will change to snow later Friday with wind gusts of 50 mph. Total snow accumulation is expected to be 12 to 16 inches.

The counties covered by the governor's order are: Bennett, Brule, Buffalo, Butte, Campbell, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Faulk, Gregory, Haakon, Hand, Harding, Hughes, Hyde, Jackson, Jones, Lawrence, Lyman, Meade, Mellette, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, Perkins, Potter, Stanley, Sully, Todd, Tripp, Walworth and Ziebach.

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Teen challenges South Dakota policy barring boy dancers

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A 15-year-old boy is challenging a policy that prevents high school boys from competing on girls' dance teams in South Dakota.

Attorneys on Thursday filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court against the South Dakota High School Activities Association on behalf of Freddie Linden and his mother.

Linden tried to join the program at Dakota Valley High School in North Sioux City, South Dakota, after he graduated from middle school but was told he couldn't.

According to the lawsuit, the association's policy allows girls to participate on boys' teams when there is no girls' team. But the policy does not allow boys to participate on girls' teams if the school does not field a team for boys.

Linden's attorneys contend the policy is discriminatory and unconstitutional, the Argus Leader reported.

Executive director Dan Swartos said the association has not been served with paperwork and had no comment.

Linden began dancing at the age of 7, according to the lawsuit. His mother, Stephanie, recognized that he had talent and when he turned 9, she rented an apartment in Los Angeles where he trained extensively, often with adults and older children.

After two years, he moved back to South Dakota and continued to take private lessons at a studio in McCook Lake, South Dakota. After he was told he could not dance on the high school team, Linden became the team manager.

The Pacific Legal Foundation, based in Sacramento, California, filed the lawsuit along with a Sioux Falls law firm. The nonprofit organization also filed a complaint in November with the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education on behalf of Kaiden Johnson, a Wisconsin boy who was told he could not compete with his dance team in Minnesota because that state does not allow boys on high school dance teams.

Johnson, who is now a sophomore at Superior High School, is dancing with his team in Wisconsin, and the Office for Civil Rights is still reviewing the complaint, Pacific League Foundation spokesman Collin Callahan said Thursday.

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

Spring storm to dump up to foot of snow on Upper Midwest

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Upper Midwest residents longing for spring are facing another spell of wintry weather.

Forecasters expect a storm to dump up to a foot (30 centimeters) of snow on parts of Minnesota and South Dakota this weekend.

One school in southeastern South Dakota moved up its prom by a day to try to beat the storm. The Argus Leader reports Brandon Valley High School rescheduled the dance from Saturday to Friday night.

"It was kind of funny," senior Grace Bennett said of the last-minute switch to avoid a prom night snow-storm. "'You never know with this South Dakota weather what's going to happen.'"

The National Weather Service in Duluth, Minnesota, issued a gale watch Friday evening through late Saturday night for high winds expected on western Lake Superior. Winds could gust up to 45 knots (52 mph), and waves could swell to 14 feet (4 meters).

A vast swath of the Upper Midwest and Plains states, stretching from western South Dakota to western Wisconsin and reaching into Nebraska, is under blizzard or winter storm warnings or a winter storm watch. Forecasters say parts of Minnesota could see strong, gusty winds of up to 50 mph (80 kilometers per hour), while some areas of Nebraska near the South Dakota border could receive up to 17 inches (43 centimeters) of snow.

Meteorologist Michelle Margraf at the Twin Cities weather service said rain Friday over southern Minnesota is expected to change to snow as temperatures drop. Snow should taper off by late Saturday morning,

she said.

Margraf said the central U.S. is stuck in a cold pattern due to high pressure sitting just off the East Coast. And while the unseasonable cold probably will linger another two weeks, Margraf said, the April sun has more power to melt snow — if the sun comes out.

Plea withdrawal motion filed in medical laser scheme

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City man convicted in a nearly \$17 million medical laser scheme is trying to withdraw his guilty pleas.

Larry Lytle, 83, filed a motion Tuesday to retract the pleas, citing ineffective counsel and asking the judge for mercy, the Rapid City Journal reported .

Lytle pleaded guilty in January to contempt and conspiracy in connection to bogus medical devices known as QLasers. He's awaiting sentencing.

Lytle's motion asked U.S. District Judge Roberto Lange to consider his age and health.

"Judge Lange, in the event you deny my motion and proceed with sentencing, anything other than time served or house arrest will be a death sentence," he wrote.

Lytle admitted to selling hundreds of QLasers from 2005 through 2015, sometimes at about \$4,000 per device.

He placed veterinary labels on the phony handheld devices to evade review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, according to investigators. Lytle and his co-conspirators marketed the devices as being able to treat more than 200 medical conditions, including AIDS.

Lytle's attorney, Ellery Grey, filed a motion to withdraw from the case following his client's allegations of ineffective representation. Grey also said he anticipates having to provide testimony in the case.

Prosecutors encouraged the judge to uphold Lytle's guilty pleas.

"As the Court is well aware, Lytle has pursued a far-reaching delay strategy in his efforts to avoid justice for his career of fraud," the prosecutors wrote in a response filed Wednesday.

Two co-conspirators have also pleaded guilty and await sentencing.

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

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, April 12

Homelessness is not a problem to ignore

A divorce, a serious illness, a mental health issue and bad luck put them on the streets, but they are far from alone.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the number of homeless in the U.S. increased for the first time in seven years in 2017. In December, the federal government reported that 553,742 people were homeless on a single night, a 0.7 percent increase from 2016.

A statewide count on Jan. 23 showed that South Dakota had 1,159 homeless compared to 955 in January 2017. Of that total, 300 were counted in Rapid City, including 51 veterans and at least 41 children.

On Sunday, the Rapid City Journal told the stories of seven homeless people, which revealed that a bad break or two, a poor decision or family and health issues can put someone on the streets as easily as an alcohol or drug problem.

A 23-year-old woman with autism who survived an abusive relationship; a 51-year-old man who had a septic infection after gall bladder surgery, quit his job and now battles myriad health issues; a 58-year-old man suffering from cancer and diabetes; a recently divorced 41-year-old woman with no place to go; a 51-year-old woman raised as a foster child and now has no support network — these are among the stories of the homeless in Rapid City.

It is convenient to blame them for their plight. In doing so, the assumption is that it is always their fault

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and perhaps they even deserve their fate. If they were only willing to apply for even a \$10 an hour job, the homeless problem would vanish. The truth, however, is that many people are only one or two unfortunate events away from living the nightmare of homelessness — adrift and preferably invisible to the rest of us.

Experts are expecting the problem will get worse in the future. Housing costs continue to rise across the country, which is certainly the case in Rapid City where even a two-bedroom apartment can cost as much as \$1,000 a month with utilities. At the same time, wages remain stagnant, health care costs soar and affordable mental health care is largely unavailable.

Rapid City, however, does reach out to help the homeless. Organizations like Cornerstone Rescue Mission, the Hope Center, WAVI, the Salvation Army, Goodwill of the Great Plains and Feeding South Dakota are just some of the nonprofits that provide assistance to the homeless.

Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender and the city, meanwhile, are closely watching the efforts of the non-profit Collective Impact, which wants to create a transformation center campus in town that would provide services — including temporary housing — in one location with the goal of returning the homeless to productive roles in society.

We, as individuals, can help, too. If you see a homeless person panhandling don't look away; consider buying that person a meal or some food. If you want to donate money or help in other ways, give to the nonprofits who work with the homeless or become a volunteer.

Compassion should guide us when we confront homelessness. Giving is good for the soul and you never know when it might be you or someone you care about who finds themselves on the streets through no fault of their own and in desperate need of help and kindness.

Madison Daily Leader, April 6

Tariff wars come to South Dakota farms

A high stakes trade war is now in place between the United States and China. It may have a happy ending, but we think it could have a profoundly negative effect on the United States and South Dakota.

President Donald Trump told the U.S. trade representative Thursday to consider additional tariffs on \$100 billion of Chinese goods. The move was intended to counter a Chinese plan to put tariffs on \$50 billion of American goods, which was in response to a U.S. plan to tax an initial \$50 billion in Chinese products.

The Chinese proposal includes tariffs on soybeans, which according to estimates, will be South Dakota's largest crop in 2018. China is the world's largest importer of soybeans, with roughly one-third of their imports coming from the United States. China accounts for 25 percent of all U.S. soybean sales.

The president has stated that he believes a trade war would benefit the U.S. manufacturers by discouraging imports from China. He's also stated that a trade war would be "easy to win."

Historically, trade wars have few winners. The most common effect is increased prices due to lower competition, then lower economic activity. Most economists agree that trade wars -- and isolationism -- following World War I contributed to the Great Depression.

As part of its proposal, China also indicated it will put tariffs on corn and beef, which are also important South Dakota products. Other U.S. tariffs imposed earlier include imported steel, aluminum and paper.

It's possible the escalating trade war could get everyone's attention, forcing the two countries to sit down and negotiate reasonable trade agreements. That's the best case scenario.

Let's hope that's where this conflict ends up, and U.S. officials have indicated a negotiated outcome is still possible. A long-term economic fight between China and the United States would not help either of us.

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, April 9

Soybean tariff would inflict broad pain

The stakes are growing in America's escalating trade war threats with China, and America's soybean producers fear they may be caught in the middle.

And if they are, they won't be alone.

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Last week, the Chinese government responded to President Donald Trump's threat of imposing tariffs on some goods made in China by announcing a potential round of tariffs of its own, including a 25 percent tariff on U.S. soybean imports. With China serving as the world's largest international consumer of American soybeans, such a tariff threat carries with it potentially devastating consequences.

The essential role of soybeans as a foodstuff and as a political tool cannot be understated. According to Bloomberg News, soybeans are a protein-rich source used for feed in raising livestock, and that is particularly important in China, where the demand for meat is on the rise. Also, Chinese officials worry that a volatile food market for its massive and growing population could fuel political unrest, and that makes soybeans even more crucial. So, this potential tariff carries a substantial risk for China, too.

This tariff threat comes at a precarious moment for American crop producers. With corn prices low, soybeans have been seen as an economic cushion for many farmers. (Last year, American farmers reportedly planted more soybeans than corn for the first time ever.) A tariff could cripple America's soybean industry; in turn, it could be a windfall for Brazil, which combines with the U.S. to feed 85 percent of China's soybean appetite, and the European Union. This would cost the U.S. a valuable share of a lucrative market.

What's more, such a hit on U.S. producers would have broad economic consequences for rural America. Nearly a quarter of this country's soybean crop is sold annually to China, the Wall Street Journal reported. Such a loss in ag revenues usually means farmers spend less, which means there is less money circulating in rural communities.

"In farming communities, that pain (from a soybean tariff) will filter down to other businesses so it's not just agriculture that will get hit," said Dan Kowalski, vice president of CoBank. "It's going to be everything from the local co-op to local law firms."

President Trump appears to acknowledge this, but even this could create problems. Trump responded to China's soybean tariff threat by ordering the U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue "to use his broad authority to implement a plan to protect our farmers and agricultural interests." That would strongly suggest more subsidization for soybean producers, which would almost certainly unleash criticism from other nations that already complain about the way the U.S. currently subsidizes its farmers, thus giving them what other nation's claim is an unfair advantage in the global market.

Economist Intelligence Unit analyst Simon Baptist told CNBC, "It is basically impossible for the U.S. to be confident that any actions it takes will protect its agricultural sector from Chinese tariffs, given the ways that other countries will respond to it."

The potential fallout from a Chinese tariff on soybeans could well have painful consequences for rural America. Perhaps all this is simply the Trump administration's high-stakes attempt to draw China to the negotiating table to address trade issues that America (and other countries) have long had with Beijing. Or maybe there's more behind it. (On Monday, when discussing the potential tariff's impact on U.S. farmers, Trump did say, "I wouldn't say that's nice, but I tell you our farmers are great patriots. They understand that they're doing this for the country. We'll make it up to them.") Either way, U.S. farmers — and rural America — are caught in the middle. And it's generating storm clouds of uncertainty as planting season nears.

Body of missing Spearfish man found in rugged terrain

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — Authorities confirm that the body of a missing Spearfish man has been found three months after he disappeared in Deadwood.

Deadwood Police Chief Kelly Fuller tells the Black Hills Pioneer that the body of 28-year-old Christopher Oien was found Wednesday night in a remote area by a person searching for deer antlers.

Fuller says members of Lawrence County Search & Rescue and the Deadwood Volunteer Fire Department were called in to help recover Oien's body from steep and rugged terrain.

Oien was in town for a hotel stay. He was last seen alive on videotape in Deadwood early on Jan. 15.

The police chief says Oien's body was found a half-mile outside the search area authorities had focused on. An autopsy is pending.

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

Report: Many state pension systems have huge funding gaps

By GEOFF MULVIHILL, Associated Press

CHERRY HILL, N.J. (AP) — A public employee pension crisis for state governments has deepened to a record level even after nearly nine years of economic recovery for the nation, according to a study released Thursday, leaving many states vulnerable if the economy hits a downturn.

The massive unfunded pension liabilities are becoming a real problem not just for public-sector retirees and workers concerned about their future but also for everyone else. As states try to prop up their pension funds, it means less money is available for core government services such as education, public safety and parks.

The annual report from the Pew Charitable Trusts finds that public worker pension funds with heavy state government involvement owed retirees and current workers \$4 trillion as of 2016. They had about \$2.6 trillion in assets, creating a gap of about one-third, or a record \$1.4 trillion.

While the study looks only at pension funds with major state-government involvement, systems run by cities, counties, school districts and other local entities have had similar problems. Just this week, the Chicago suburb of Harvey, a city with a history of underpaying its pension obligations, announced deep layoffs in its police and fire departments. Officials blamed their rising pension obligations.

Larger cities and school districts across the country also have had service cuts or freezes over the years to pay for rising costs for their retirees.

Pew says that pension funds were well-funded until about 2000. Around that time, many states increased pension benefits without a way to pay for them. In some states, such as California and Illinois, courts usually find that the government must honor those commitments.

Also in the early 2000s, the tech stock bubble burst, spiraling investment returns downward. Some states, such as New Jersey, made things worse by skimping on their contributions.

Many pension funds had not recovered from the dot-com bust by the time the Great Recession hit less than a decade later. And many haven't recovered from that, either.

"When the next downturn comes, there will be additional pressures," David Draine, a senior officer at Pew, told The Associated Press.

Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky and New Jersey had less than half the assets they needed to meet their pension obligations, according to the report. Kentucky and New Jersey have the largest gaps, with just 31 percent of the needed funding.

Kentucky has been roiled by weeks of protests over a bill passed by the Republican-dominated Legislature and signed by the Republican governor that makes changes to the state's teacher retirement system in an attempt to close the funding gap. Teachers have packed the state Capitol by the thousands to protest the changes. On Wednesday, they joined the state's attorney general, a Democrat, in filing a lawsuit seeking to overturn the law.

Just four states — New York, South Dakota, Tennessee and Wisconsin — had at least 90 percent funding. Draine said those states and some others that have repaired pension shortfalls since the Great Recession will be in better shape the next time the economy slides.

The Pew report found that lackluster investment returns in 2016 explained most of why the condition of pensions declined from the previous year. Pension administrators were counting on median returns of 7.5 percent that year. Instead, they made just 1 percent.

But the study says that even if the investments had met expectations, the overall position of pension funds still would have declined because state governments were not contributing enough. Only Kansas contributed more to its pension system in 2016 than it paid out, Pew found.

In New Jersey, actuaries say it will take around \$6 billion a year in contributions from the state to shore up its pension system. It's taken years to get to less than half that amount in the current budget. Maintaining that progress makes it difficult to pay for other priorities, such as boosting school funding.

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The study finds that states increasingly rely on investment returns in an attempt to stabilize their finances, which makes them more vulnerable to market fluctuations.

Because of a strong market last year, next year's report, which will assess the state of pensions as of 2017, is expected to look better. But market slides so far this year have not been encouraging, Draine said.

Follow Mulvihill at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>

Regents executive director and CEO resigning at end of May

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The executive director and CEO of the South Dakota Board of Regents is resigning at the end of May.

Sixty-two-year-old Michael Rush has been in the post since 2015. He says that he and the board the oversees the public higher education system "came to a mutual decision that the time had come to change gears."

He says he plans to spend more time with his grandchildren.

Regents President Bob Sutton says the search for Rush's successor will begin immediately.

Aberdeen police use tear gas, stun gun to end standoff

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — A man who barricaded himself inside an Aberdeen residence is in custody.

The American News reports police responded to the residence about 8 p.m. Wednesday after a report of a man threatening a family member with a knife. Authorities believe the man also had other weapons.

Negotiations continued for a couple of hours before officers used tear gas and a stun gun to subdue the man.

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

Volga man sentenced for disturbing protected wetlands

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A Volga man convicted of disturbing protected wetlands on his property has been sentenced to a year of probation and fined \$100.

Sixty-one-year-old Kevin Mast also was ordered to restore six wetland areas.

The U.S. attorney's office says Mast installed drain tile on his property in 2013 despite a warning from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that the project conflicted with a wetlands easement and wasn't authorized.

Mast was indicted last September and convicted by a federal jury in January.

Missouri governor's approach similar to Trump's amid scandal

By DAVID A. LIEB and SUMMER BALLENTINE, Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Facing mounting calls to resign following sexual misconduct allegations, Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens appears to be taking a cue from President Donald Trump as he fights for his political survival amid a #MeToo movement that has felled dozens of other prominent politicians and public figures.

Referencing events in Washington, D.C., Greitens is using wording similar to that used by Trump to denounce accusations of unwanted sexual aggression as "lies" and "fake charges" and the investigations into his alleged wrongdoing as a "political witch hunt."

Trump has thus far survived. But reaction from fellow Republicans indicates Greitens may have a more difficult time — in part, because allegations about Trump's behavior were known before his election, whereas Greitens had cultivated a campaign persona of an all-American hero.

On Thursday, Missouri Senate Majority Leader Mike Kehoe became the highest-ranking Republican state lawmaker calling for Greitens to immediately resign following the release of a legislative report detailing

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testimony from a woman who said Greitens slapped, grabbed, shoved and threatened her during unwanted sexual encounters. Kehoe said Greitens has lost his "moral authority."

"Should the governor choose not to resign, I am persuaded that he has not only burned bridges, he has blown them up to where it will be impossible for him to effectively lead the state going forward," Kehoe said.

Other Republicans calling for Greitens' resignation include Joplin businessman and megadonor David Humphreys — who gave Greitens nearly \$1.3 million — and Attorney General Josh Hawley, a top challenger to Democratic U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, who also said Greitens should quit.

Republican state Sen. Rob Schaaf, a vocal Greitens critic, wrote a letter Thursday to Trump asking the commander in chief to request that Greitens, a former military officer, step down.

Greitens has vowed to remain in office and denied any violence or criminal wrongdoing in what he insists was "an entirely consensual relationship" with his former St. Louis hairdresser as he was preparing to run for governor in 2015.

The legislative committee's investigation of Greitens began after he was charged in February by a St. Louis grand jury with felony invasion of privacy for allegedly taking and transmitting a nonconsensual photo of the woman while she was partially nude. He is to go to trial May 14.

In court Thursday, his attorneys asked for the case to be dismissed. They asserted that the St. Louis prosecutors' office had engaged in misconduct and potential perjury by initially saying that a video recorder had malfunctioned during a March interview of the woman. Greitens' attorneys say prosecutors shared the video with them Wednesday night — only after the release of the Legislature's report — and that the woman's testimony in the video backs up Greitens' claim of a consensual encounter.

"This woman is not a victim," Greitens' attorney Jim Martin said. "She was a willing participant in everything they did, and the video goes a long way to establish that."

St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner said in a court filing later Thursday that she supplied the video once her office determined it could be accessed. She accused Greitens' attorneys of using "diversionary tactics" to shift the focus from his "illegal and reprehensible conduct."

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.

The woman's attorney, Scott Simpson, declined to comment on the video, citing a gag order in the criminal case.

Greitens said in a statement that the video testimony "directly contradicted allegations in the House report" and that any allegations of "coercion, violence and assault" are "false."

Greitens repeatedly told reporters Wednesday that the allegations against him were a "political witch hunt" — a phrase similar to what Trump has used to discredit investigations into whether he had any role in Russia's interference in the 2016 elections.

To drive home the point, Greitens added: "This is exactly like what's happening with the witch hunts in Washington, D.C."

"I think it is conscious to link himself to Trump, but it's a loser. It's not going to work," said Ed Martin, a former Missouri Republican Party chairman and Trump supporter. "He ran as something different than everybody else, and Trump was more in some ways upfront about who he was."

Greitens, 44, ran on a pledge to clean up corruption while touting his golden resume. He's a former Rhodes Scholar, Navy SEAL officer, author and motivational speaker who gained a national platform after founding The Mission Continues charity to help military veterans become involved in their communities. Unlike prior Missouri governors, his official photo hanging in government offices statewide features his full family — a wife and two young boys — rather than just himself.

"The same allegations are more damaging against Greitens than they are against Trump because of the public image of each of those people and the expectations that voters might have," said Eric Morris, an associate professor of communications at Missouri State University who studies political rhetoric.

Morris noted that the "witch hunt" metaphor dates to the 17th century, when numerous likely innocent people were accused by other residents of British colonies in the Americas of practicing witchcraft. Some were subsequently executed.

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In modern politics, Morris said, a "witch hunt" is usually carried out by one's political opponents. But he said Greitens' case doesn't cleanly fit that mold, because he's facing bipartisan criticism from lawmakers, including from some who had been among his early supporters.

"This has nothing to do with politics; it's about sending a message to all women that sexual abuse won't be tolerated, that victims will be believed, and that the era of impunity is over," said Wendy Doyle, president and chief executive of the Kansas City-based Women's Foundation.

Republican legislative leaders said they would start gathering signatures from colleagues next week to call themselves into a special session to consider potential disciplinary action against Greitens.

The special House investigatory committee is to make a recommendation after the regular session ends May 18 about whether Greitens should face impeachment proceedings to try to oust him. It's also expected to release a second report focused on potential campaign finance violations involving Greitens' use of a charity donor list to raise money for his gubernatorial campaign.

Impeachment proceedings can operate independently from a criminal trial. The state constitution lays out several grounds for impeachment, including "moral turpitude," although there is disagreement on whether the offending behavior must occur while a person is in office.

Associated Press reporters Blake Nelson in Jefferson City and Jim Salter in St. Louis contributed.

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AP Source: Trump expected to pardon former Cheney aide Libby

By CHAD DAY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump plans to pardon I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, a former top aide to Vice President Dick Cheney.

That's according to a person familiar with the president's decision who said the announcement could come as early as Friday. The person wasn't authorized to discuss the decision ahead of its public announcement and demanded anonymity.

The person said the pardon has been under consideration at the White House for months.

Libby, who served as Cheney's chief of staff, was convicted in 2007 of perjury, obstruction of justice and making false statements. The case stemmed from an investigation into the leaking of the covert identity of CIA officer Valerie Plame, though no one was charged for the leak.

President George W. Bush had previously commuted Libby's prison sentence.

Russia: Syria chemical attack 'fabrication' by foreign power

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's foreign minister claimed on Friday that a suspected chemical attack in the Syrian town of Douma last weekend was staged with the help of an unspecified foreign intelligence agency.

A day before a team from the international chemical weapons watchdog was to arrive in Douma, just east of Damascus, Sergey Lavrov said Russian experts have already inspected the site of the alleged attack and found no trace of chemical weapons.

Moscow, he said, has "irrefutable information that it was another fabrication." Lavrov did not offer evidence to back up his claim.

Speaking to reporters in Moscow, he reiterated warnings to the West against military action in Syria, saying any such "adventures" in Syria would increase flows of refugees into Europe.

"Neither us nor European neighbors need it," he said.

A fact-finding mission from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is expected to head to Douma, where the suspected attack took place on Saturday. The Syrian government said it would

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facilitate the mission's investigation.

On Thursday, Russia's military said Douma has been brought under full control of the Syrian government under a Russia-mediated deal that secured the evacuation of the rebels and thousands of civilians after it was recaptured by Syrian forces. The government, however, said evacuations from Douma were ongoing and no Syrian government forces had entered the town.

Douma and the sprawling eastern Ghouta region near the capital, Damascus, had been under rebel control since 2012 and was a thorn in the side of President Bashar Assad's government, threatening his seat of power with missiles and potential advances for years. The government's capture of Douma, the last town held by the rebels in eastern Ghouta, marked a major victory for Assad.

The suspected poison gas attack in Douma, which killed more than 40 people, has drawn international outrage and prompted the United States and its allies to consider a military strike on Syria, something Moscow has strongly warned against.

Lavrov said that "intelligence agencies of a state that is now striving to spearhead a Russo-phobic campaign were involved in that fabrication." He didn't elaborate or name the state.

In a reference to the U.S., he said that it "it would only benefit those who are protected by the ocean ... and engage in continuous efforts to stir up the region in order to advance their geopolitical goals."

Russia has dismissed the purported chemical attack as fake and strongly warned the U.S. and its allies against launching a military strike in Syria.

Lavrov noted that Russian and U.S. militaries have a hotline to prevent incidents, adding that it's not clear if it would be sufficient amid mounting tensions.

Former FBI director Comey compares Trump to mob boss

By CHAD DAY and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former FBI Director James Comey blasts President Donald Trump as unethical and "untethered to truth" in a sharply critical new book that describes Trump as fixated in the early days of his administration on having the FBI debunk salacious rumors he insisted were untrue but could distress his wife.

In the forthcoming book, Comey compares Trump to a mafia don and calls his leadership of the country "ego driven and about personal loyalty."

He also reveals new details about his interactions with Trump and his own decision-making in handling the Hillary Clinton email investigation before the 2016 election. He casts Trump as a mobster-like figure who sought to blur the line between law enforcement and politics and tried to pressure him personally regarding his investigation into Russian election interference.

The book adheres closely to Comey's public testimony and written statements about his contacts with Trump and his growing concern about Trump's integrity. It also includes strikingly personal jabs at Trump that appear sure to irritate the president.

The 6-foot-8 Comey describes Trump as shorter than he expected with a "too long" tie and "bright white half-moons" under his eyes that he suggests came from tanning goggles. He also says he made a conscious effort to check the president's hand size, saying it was "smaller than mine but did not seem unusually so."

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"Donald Trump's presidency threatens much of what is good in this nation," Comey writes, calling the administration a "forest fire" that can't be contained by ethical leaders within the government.

On a more-personal level, Comey describes Trump repeatedly asking him to consider investigating an allegation involving Trump and Russian prostitutes urinating on a bed in a Moscow hotel, in order to prove it was a lie. Trump has strongly denied the allegation, and Comey says that it appeared the president wanted it investigated to reassure his wife, Melania Trump.

Trump fired Comey in May 2017, setting off a scramble at the Justice Department that led to the appointment of Robert Mueller as special counsel overseeing the Russia investigation. Mueller's probe has

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expanded to include whether Trump obstructed justice by firing Comey, which the president denies.

Trump has assailed Comey as a "showboat" and a "liar."

Comey's account lands at a particularly sensitive moment for Trump and the White House. Officials there describe the president as enraged over a recent FBI raid of his personal lawyer's home and office, raising the prospect that he could fire Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed Mueller, or try to shut down the probe on his own. The Republican National Committee is poised to lead the pushback effort against Comey by launching a website and supplying surrogates with talking points that question his credibility.

Trump has said he fired Comey because of his handling of the FBI's investigation into Clinton's email practices. Trump used the investigation as a cudgel in the campaign and repeatedly said Clinton should be jailed for using a personal email system while serving as secretary of state. Democrats, on the other hand, have accused Comey of politicizing the investigation, and Clinton herself has said it hurt her election prospects.

Comey writes that he regrets his approach and some of the wording he used in his July 2016 press conference in which he announced the decision not to prosecute Clinton. But he says he believes he did the right thing by going before the cameras and making his statement, noting that the Justice Department had done so in other high profile cases.

Every person on the investigative team, Comey writes, found that there was no prosecutable case against Clinton and that the FBI didn't find that she lied under its questioning.

He also reveals new details about how the government had unverified classified information that he believes could have been used to cast doubt on Attorney General Loretta Lynch's independence in the Clinton probe. While Comey does not outline the details of the information — and says he didn't see indications of Lynch inappropriately influencing the investigation — he says it worried him that the material could be used to attack the integrity of the probe and the FBI's independence.

Comey's book will be heavily scrutinized by the president's legal team looking for any inconsistencies between it and his public testimony, under oath, before Congress. They will be looking to impeach Comey's credibility as a key witness in Mueller's obstruction investigation, which the president has cast as a political motivated witch hunt.

The former FBI director provides new details of his firing. He writes that then-Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly — now Trump's chief of staff — offered to quit out of disgust at how Comey was dismissed. Kelly has been increasingly marginalized in the White House and the president has mused to confidants about firing him.

Comey also writes extensively about his first meeting with Trump after the election, a briefing in January 2017 at Trump Tower in New York City. Others in the meeting included Vice President Mike Pence, Trump's first chief of staff, Reince Priebus, Michael Flynn, who would become national security adviser, and incoming press secretary, Sean Spicer. Comey was also joined by NSA Director Mike Rogers, CIA Director John Brennan and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.

After Clapper briefed the team on the intelligence community's findings of Russian election interference, Comey said he was taken aback by what the Trump team didn't ask.

"They were about to lead a country that had been attacked by a foreign adversary, yet they had no questions about what the future Russian threat might be," Comey writes. Instead, they launched into a strategy session about how to "spin what we'd just told them" for the public.

Comey says he had flashbacks to his time investigating the Italian Mafia as a federal prosecutor in Manhattan, thinking that Trump "was trying to make us all part of the same family."

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allegations, whether supported or not. Comey said he left out one detail involving an allegation that the prostitutes had urinated on a bed once used by the Obamas.

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Comey then registers surprise, writing that he thought to himself "why his wife would think there was any chance, even a small one, that he had been with prostitutes urinating on each other in a Moscow hotel room."

Lemire reported from New York.

Trump plans to talk to allies before Syria strike decision

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has put off a final decision on possible military strikes against Syria after tweeting earlier that they could happen "very soon or not so soon at all." The White House said Thursday he would consult further with allies.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis warned such an attack carried the risk of spinning out of control, suggesting caution ahead of a decision on how to respond to an attack against civilians last weekend that U.S. officials are increasingly certain involved the use of banned chemical weapons. British officials said up to 75 people were killed.

The White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said in a brief statement after Trump met with Mattis and other members of his National Security Council: "No final decision has been made. We are continuing to assess intelligence and are engaged in conversations with our partners and allies."

Sanders said Trump would speak later with French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Theresa May.

Although Mattis noted that military action carried risks, he also emphasized that Syrian use of chemical weapons should not be tolerated. And he insisted it remains U.S. policy not to be involved directly in Syria's civil war.

"Our strategy remains the same as a year ago," he said. "It is to drive this to a U.N.-brokered peace but, at the same time, keep our foot on the neck of ISIS until we suffocate it," referring to the Islamic State extremist group.

Mattis' remarks at a House Armed Services Committee hearing followed a series of Trump tweets this week that initially indicated he was committed to bombing Syria but later suggested he was awaiting further advice and assessment. Trump wrote in a Thursday morning tweet that an attack could happen "very soon or not so soon at all."

Later Thursday he was noncommittal. "We're looking very, very seriously, very closely at the whole situation," he told reporters.

Mattis said options would be discussed with Trump at a meeting of his National Security Council on Thursday afternoon. That meant airstrikes, possibly in tandem with France and other allies that have expressed outrage at the alleged Syrian chemical attack, could be launched within hours of a presidential decision.

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.

Macron said Thursday that France has proof that the Syrian government launched chlorine gas attacks

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and said France would not tolerate "regimes that think everything is permitted."

After May met with her Cabinet, a spokesperson issued a statement saying it is highly likely that Syria's President Bashar Assad was responsible for Saturday's attack that killed dozens outside Damascus. The Cabinet agreed on the need to "take action" to deter further chemical weapons use by Assad, but added that May would continue to consult with allies to coordinate an international response.

Mattis said that although the United States has no hard proof, he believes the Syrian government was responsible for Saturday's attack. Initial reports indicated the use of chlorine gas, possibly in addition to the nerve agent Sarin. Trump's ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, told NBC News on Thursday the administration has "enough proof" of the chemical attack but was still considering its response.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, based in the Netherlands, announced it was sending a fact-finding team to the site of the attack outside Damascus, and it was due to arrive Saturday. It was not clear whether the presence of the investigators could affect the timing of any U.S. military action.

At the House hearing, Democrats grilled Mattis on the wisdom and legality of Trump ordering an attack on Syria without explicit authorization from Congress. Mattis argued it would be justified as an act of self-defense, with 2,000 U.S. ground troops in Syria; he insisted he could not talk about military plans because an attack "is not yet in the offing."

Mattis said he personally believes Syria is guilty of an "inexcusable" use of chemical weapons, while noting that the international fact-finding team would likely fall short of determining who was responsible.

Asked about the risks of U.S. military retaliation, Mattis cited two concerns, starting with avoiding civilian casualties.

"On a strategic level, it's how do we keep this from escalating out of control, if you get my drift on that," he said.

Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said he sees no legal justification for a U.S. strike in Syria, absent explicit authorization by Congress. More broadly, he doubted the wisdom of bombing.

"Until we have a more long-term strategy, until we have some idea where we're going in Syria and the Middle East, it seems unwise, to me, to start launching missiles," said Smith, D-Wash. "We need to know where that's going, what the purpose of it is before we take that act."

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 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.

At the House hearing, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, disputed Trump's legal authority to act without congressional authority and suggested a U.S. strike would lead to war with Russia.

"I'm not ready to speculate that that would happen," Mattis said.

Constand to confront Cosby after parade of women take aim

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, Associated Press

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (AP) — Bill Cosby's chief accuser is set to take the witness stand on Friday at his sexual assault retrial, making for a climactic courtroom showdown after five other women told jurors that the man once revered as "America's Dad" is a serial rapist who harmed them too.

Andrea Constand's appearance is her second chance to confront Cosby in court, since his first trial ended without a verdict. This time, though, she's facing a defense team intent on portraying her as a "con artist" who framed him for money.

Constand, who turned 45 on Wednesday, says Cosby drugged and molested her at his suburban Phila-

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delphia mansion in January 2004, when she was a women's basketball administrator at his alma mater, Temple University.

It's the only allegation among dozens against Cosby that has led to criminal charges. He says the encounter was consensual, but paid \$3.4 million in 2006 to settle a civil lawsuit Constand filed after the district attorney at the time dropped the case.

Cosby lawyer Tom Mesereau told jurors in an opening statement on Tuesday that Constand was a pauper who stifled roommates on bills, racked up big credit card debt and once ran a Ponzi scheme until she "hit the jackpot" when Cosby paid her.

Cosby spokesman Andrew Wyatt on Thursday derided the five additional accusers who testified as "distractors" and "advocates for the prosecution and Andrea Constand." Just one other accuser was permitted to take the stand at Cosby's first trial.

Wyatt said the women traded in "poetic licensing, better known as alternative facts" and were pawns in an "Ocean's 11'-style script" cooked up by lawyers Gloria Allred and her daughter, Lisa Bloom, "to extort Mr. Cosby for \$100 million."

Allred floated a proposal that Cosby set aside a chunk of his fortune to compensate accusers, but he never agreed.

"Since this American citizen didn't adhere to Ms. Allred's ransom notice, she paraded in a stable of women to destroy his legacy, his career and reputation," Wyatt said.

Constand's lawyer, Dolores Troiani, called the attacks on her client "outrageous" and "baseless," and ripped Cosby's team for trashing her reputation in the courtroom — where lawyers are immune from defamation lawsuits — and in statements to the media.

"I'd love to see if he thinks he's going to prove any of this," Troiani told The Associated Press. "What basis does he have for any of this? So he gets to say whatever he wants and once again they go outside, they slander her outside of the courtroom and what is her recourse?"

Troiani was peeved at the defense for fighting to disclose the settlement figure to jurors in what she said was a clear violation of the confidential settlement agreement Cosby and Constand struck.

"This is the type of man Cosby is," she said. "We had an agreement and that agreement was supposed to be for both sides. It's not hush money, and I really resent people calling it hush money. It's compensation for the damages done to her."

The other women's harrowing, sometimes tearful stories could help.

Janice Dickinson told jurors on Thursday that Cosby gave her a pill he claimed would ease her menstrual cramps but instead left her immobilized and unable to stop an assault she called "gross."

"I didn't consent to this. Here was 'America's Dad,' on top of me. A married man, father of five kids, on top of me," Dickinson said. "I was thinking how wrong it was. How very wrong it was."

Dickinson, 27 at the time, testified she felt vaginal pain and, after waking up the next morning, noticed semen between her legs. She said Cosby looked at her "like I was crazy" when she confronted him about what had happened.

"I wanted to hit him. I wanted to punch him in the face," she said.

Another accuser, taking the witness stand after Dickinson, said Cosby prodded her to drink two shots in his Las Vegas hotel suite, then had her sit between his knees and started petting her head.

Lise-Lotte Lublin told jurors she lost consciousness and doesn't remember anything else about that night in 1989 — a time when Cosby was at the height of his fame starring as sweater-wearing father-of-five Dr. Cliff Huxtable on America's top-rated TV show, "The Cosby Show."

"I trusted him because he's 'America's Dad,'" Lublin said. "I trusted him because he's a figure people trusted for many years, including myself."

The AP does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they grant permission, which Constand and the other women have done.

Follow Mike Sisak at www.twitter.com/mikesisak .

For more coverage visit www.apnews.com/tag/CosbyonTrial .

In new book, Comey blasts Trump's presidential leadership

By CHAD DAY and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former FBI Director James Comey blasts President Donald Trump as unethical and “untethered to truth” in a sharply critical new book that describes Trump as fixated in the early days of his administration on having the FBI debunk salacious rumors he insisted were untrue but could distress his wife.

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Lemire reported from New York.

Battle to save Africa's elephants is gaining some ground

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press

MIKUMI NATIONAL PARK, Tanzania (AP) — The elephant staggered and keeled over in the tall grass in southern Tanzania, where some of the world's worst poaching has happened.

It wasn't a killer who targeted her but a conservation official, immobilizing her with a dart containing drugs. Soon she was snoring loudly, and they propped open her trunk with a twig to help her breathe.

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They slid a 26-pound (12-kilogram) GPS tracking collar around the rough skin of her neck and injected an antidote, bringing her back to her feet. After inspecting the contraption with her trunk, she ambled back to her family herd.

The operation was part of a yearlong effort to collar and track 60 elephants in and around Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve, widely acknowledged as 'Ground Zero' in the poaching that has decimated Africa's elephants in recent years. The Associated Press traveled to the area to witness how the battle to save the continent's elephants is gaining some momentum, with killings declining and some herds showing signs of recovery. Legal ivory markets are shrinking worldwide, and law enforcement has broken up some key trafficking syndicates, say experts.

But it's far too early to declare a turnaround. Poachers are moving to new areas and traffickers are adapting, aided by entrenched corruption. The rate of annual elephant losses still exceeds the birth rate. And the encroachment of human settlements is reducing the animals' range.

"The trend in poaching is going in the right direction, but we have a long way to go before we can feel comfortable about the future for elephants," said Chris Thouless of Save the Elephants, a group based in Kenya, where elephant numbers are rising again.

In a move to crack down on demand, Britain this month announced a ban on ivory sales. In China, trade in ivory and ivory products is illegal as of 2018. And in the U.S., a ban on ivory apart from items older than 100 years went into place in 2016.

If poaching can be brought under control here in Tanzania, there is hope that the killing of elephants can be stemmed elsewhere on the continent.

Africa's elephant population has plummeted from millions around 1900 to at least 415,000 today. Intelligent and emotional, with highly developed social behavior, elephants have been hunted for their ivory for centuries. A ban on commercial trade in ivory across international borders went into effect in 1990, but many countries continued to allow the domestic buying and selling of ivory.

Increased demand from consumers in China fueled a new wave of killings.

In Tanzania alone, the elephant population declined by 60 percent to 43,000 between 2009 and 2014, according to the government. Much of the slaughter happened in an ecosystem comprising the Selous and the adjacent Mikumi National Park. A tourist guide told The Associated Press that several years ago, he and a client saw an elephant family at sunset in the Selous reserve. They returned the next day to the ghastly sight of carcasses of elephants slaughtered for their tusks.

The killings in Tanzania appear to have slowed down. A count in the Selous-Mikumi area last year added up 23 carcasses of poached elephants, just 20 percent of the number found four years earlier. And African elephant poaching has declined to pre-2008 levels after reaching a peak in 2011, according to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

It's a positive trend, but there is speculation there is a dearth of elephants to kill in many areas.

"All the 'easy' elephants are dead," said Drew McVey, East Africa manager for the WWF conservation group.

In Tanzania's Selous region, more newborn elephants are visible and confident elephants are moving more widely outside unfenced, officially protected areas, said Edward Kohi, principal research officer with the state Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute and leader of the GPS collaring program funded by WWF. The collars are designed to allow rangers to track the movement of elephant herds, and then mobilize to protect them if they move into poaching hotspots. By receiving satellite-transmitted data on mobile phones, rangers could also intercept elephants that drift into a human settlement or fields of crops.

Adam Rajeta, a farmer and cattle herder living next to Mikumi park, said elephants sometimes cause havoc.

"During the harvesting season, they come close to our homes," Rajeta said. "When they do, we beat drums and make noise to scare them and thus protect ourselves. Only with God's mercy do they leave our neighborhood."

There has also been movement to crack down on trafficking. Tanzanian President John Magufuli, who took office in 2015, took a hard line and authorities have arrested key suspects linked to trafficking syndicates.

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However, the fight against the illegal ivory trade is like squeezing a balloon — when gains are made in one area, such as Tanzania, the killings intensify in another spot, like Mozambique's Niassa reserve to the south, which is linked to the Selous by a wildlife corridor. And international seizures of smuggled ivory appear to be as large as ever, a possible sign of hurried efforts by traffickers to move stockpiles before business gets too difficult.

Some poaching gangs in Niassa are Tanzanian and "there is a lot of movement across the border" that includes other illicit trade, including in timber and minerals, said James Bampton, Mozambique director for the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society. The group co-manages Niassa with the government.

There are probably fewer than 2,000 elephants in Niassa, Bampton said. That's a small fraction of the estimated number a decade ago in Mozambique's main elephant refuge. Periodic thefts of confiscated ivory and rhino horn in Mozambique also raise concerns about official collusion with traffickers.

Another worrying development is evidence of increased processing of ivory tusks into jewelry and trinkets within Africa, instead of the old method of shipping raw ivory out of the continent. This allows traffickers to transport ivory in smaller quantities that are hard to detect and avoids increased scrutiny of ivory-carving operations in Asia.

The challenges of protecting wildlife were apparent to AP journalists who traveled with the collaring team in Mikumi park next to the Selous reserve, a U.N. world heritage site.

Plans to deploy a helicopter to help spot and herd the elephants fell through. Vehicles got stuck in mud. One morning, a startled wildlife official sprinted to his vehicle after briefly entering a toilet labeled "Gents" at a dirt airstrip. A female lion who had been reclining in a stall sauntered out.

The team sometimes tracked elephants on foot, studying big round footprints, broken branches and the freshness of elephant dung for clues to their whereabouts.

Just two out of a planned five elephants were collared over three days in the Mikumi park. The conservationists refrained from darting elephant matriarchs, instead choosing younger females that they know will follow the group. They also intend to collar often solitary bull elephants.

The elephants displayed their social bonds in one instance, retreating into a defensive circle after hearing the pop of the dart gun. When a female was hit, the others appeared to try to prop up their woozy companion before fleeing.

Suspected traffickers are a threat to more than elephants. In August 2017, conservationist Wayne Lotter, credited with helping Tanzanian authorities dismantle some ivory smuggling operations, was murdered in Dar es Salaam in an apparent hit. Eight people have been arrested for the murder, including two bank officials and several businessmen.

Tanzania's Selous-Mikumi region is known as one of the biggest killing fields for African elephants, but the vast wilderness of about 23,000 square miles (60,000 square kilometers) still offers hope for the world's biggest land animal.

In 50 to 100 years, said Kohi, the collaring team leader, "when the human population is skyrocketing, this will be one of the important areas for the conservation of elephants."

Follow Christopher Torchia on Twitter at www.twitter.com/torchiachris

Will Democrats pluck the next president from city hall?

By **THOMAS BEAUMONT** and **BILL BARROW**, Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Los Angeles' Eric Garcetti, like other Democratic mayors considering the presidential race in 2020, is hoping to show party activists that his experience running a city can preview success on the national scene.

He planned to make his debut in Iowa, an early campaign proving ground, on Friday, talking to union carpenters, seeing representatives from the Asian, Latino and LGBTQ communities and headlining a county party dinner.

Only a handful of presidents ever served as mayors, and they all had won higher offices before reaching

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the White House. Americans never have elevated a city leader directly to the presidency from city hall, and no sitting mayor has even won a major party's presidential nomination.

That doesn't seem to deter New York's Bill De Blasio and New Orleans' Mitch Landrieu, also mulling 2020 bids. So, too, are Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Indiana, and Julian Castro, housing secretary in the Obama administration and a former San Antonio mayor.

Democrats hold only half of the governorships they did 25 years ago — being governor is a more reliable stepping stone to the White House — and are locked out of power in Congress.

The party's emerging 2020 class is heavy with mayors, who claim a closer connection to their constituents and greater accountability to them than senators and representatives.

Sens. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent who challenged Hillary Clinton for the 2016 presidential nomination, and Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., may be party stars in Washington. But some Democratic mayors are distinguishing themselves by taking action on national policy that federal lawmakers are unable to influence from the disadvantage of their minority status in Congress.

"The mayors of some American cities are running cities that are bigger than some countries. We run police departments and deal with public safety. We deal with a plethora of issues, and we're on the ground," Landrieu said. "We're very accountable."

Only 16 Democrats are governors today, and few are signaling a 2020 campaign is on the horizon.

Mayors with national aspirations seem less fazed than their predecessors by the idea that voters are looking for candidates with more national experience. Consider that Donald Trump was a political newcomer before winning in 2016.

Asked whether a mayor can be president, Landrieu said, "I don't see why not."

Garcetti's mission in Iowa is to make it clear to activists that his big-city experience can translate onto the national stage.

He is the executive of a jurisdiction of roughly 4 million people, about a million more than the state of Iowa, heads a police department of 30,000 and oversees the nation's busiest seaport. De Blasio, whose city is more than twice the population of Los Angeles, was the guest at a Democratic-leaning activist group's annual dinner in December.

"It's a more hands-on job which can produce both more tangible results and a greater bond with your constituents," Democratic pollster Paul Maslin said. "At a time when frustration with all things Washington, federal government, is at a peak, and state governments are facing tough budget limitations, mayors start looking pretty good."

Garcetti and others are also stepping forward on national issues such as immigration, a burning concern for Democrats in Iowa angry with the Republican-controlled Legislature and GOP governor for enacting legislation last week outlawing "sanctuary cities." That's a term for jurisdictions that limit local involvement in federal immigration enforcement.

Garcetti promotes his opposition to such measures in Los Angeles, among cities that don't assist with federal immigration enforcement, where he has created of a \$10-million legal defense fund for immigrants threatened with deportation and defied U.S. Justice Department calls for local police to demonstrate immigration status when no serious crime has been committed.

Landrieu, as president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors last year, was vocal among the more than 300 mayors last year who opted for their cities to join an international climate agreement aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, after the Trump administration withdrew the United States from it.

Barrow reported from Atlanta.

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Guard faces tricky dance in California border mission

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — California Gov. Jerry Brown is crystal clear that his National Guard will help President Trump go after drugs and thugs on the Mexican border, but not immigrants. Drawing that line may be hazy.

Brown's pledge of 400 troops allows the president to boast that governors in all four border states back his mission to send the Guard on its third large-scale deployment since 2006. It helped bring commitments from Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas to about 2,400 troops — above the low end of Trump's target of sending 2,000 to 4,000 troops to the border shared by the four states.

The Democratic governor, who cast his decision as a welcome infusion of federal support to fight transnational criminal gangs and drug and firearms smugglers, broke from his Republican counterparts from the three other states by insisting that his troops will have nothing to do with immigration enforcement.

But some experts were skeptical that Brown will be able to force his vision of the mission on California's Guard members participating in Trump's operation.

"I think it'll be very difficult for the California National Guard to be able to walk that fine line because those things in the field are indistinguishable," said Eric Olson, deputy director of the Wilson Center's Latin America program, who specializes in organized crime and security. "It's not like someone crossing the border says, 'I'm carrying drugs.' How can you tell?"

Trump praised Brown on Twitter Thursday, but did not address the governor's conditions for not taking an immigration role for California troops. The president said Brown was "doing the right thing and sending the National Guard to the Border. Thank you Jerry, good move for the safety of our Country!"

The Border Patrol's mission of preventing people from entering the U.S. illegally has not changed in its 94-year history. But its nearly 20,000 agents also seize hundreds of tons of marijuana every year, along with other drugs. The agency has also emphasized anti-terrorism efforts since the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Andrew Selee, president of the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute, said Brown's move is clearly about how it will be seen politically in a state that overwhelmingly opposes Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration. The governor, in his decision to let the California troops participate, gave himself "wiggle room" to withdraw the Guard members if they get involved with immigration, which Trump will definitely want to prevent.

"Everyone has an interest in this working out," Selee said. "The lines will blur a bit but federal and state governments will try to make sure this doesn't blow up. That doesn't work for anyone."

Other border governors have fully embraced Trump's directive. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who will contribute about 1,400 troops, has said troops will "help ensure we are doing everything we can to stem the flow of illegal immigration."

Details on the Guard's exact assignments have been trickling out since Trump last week announced his plan to send troops to the border on April 4.

The Arizona National Guard said Wednesday that 112 of its 338 troops will provide air support, like flying helicopters, from a base in the town of Marana, near Tucson. Another 60 are being sent to border town of Nogales for what Maj. Gen. Michael McGuire called ground-based missions, without providing details.

They are not required to carry guns for their duties but can do so if they feel they need to for their own protection, McGuire said.

The Texas National Guard, which already has troops in the Rio Grande Valley and Laredo area, scouts for illegal activity by air and land and reports any findings to the Border Patrol.

Abbott said Thursday that he was waiting for instructions from the federal government but that his understanding was that the troops "will in no way be involved in any type of apprehension or confrontation process."

The New Mexico National Guard has not yet publicly defined a precise role for its 250 troops.

Federal law, notably the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, sharply limits military involvement in civilian law enforcement, creating a supporting role for Guard members. The Pentagon said last week that troops

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won't perform law enforcement functions or interact with people detained by border authorities without its approval.

From 2006 to 2008 under the administration of former President George W. Bush, the Guard went to the Mexico border and fixed vehicles, maintained roads, repaired fences and performed ground surveillance.

Its second southern border mission in 2010 and 2011 ordered by former President Barack Obama involved more aerial surveillance and intelligence work. People involved in both operations say the Guard was the Border Patrol's "eyes and ears."

Brown said Wednesday that the California troops cannot guard anyone in custody for immigration violations, participate in construction of border barriers or have any other supporting role in immigration enforcement. He did not elaborate on the Guard's specific assignments or how troops would be insulated against immigration work.

California National Guard spokesman Lt. Col. Thomas Keegan said Thursday officials "generally do not discuss the specifics of operations, tactics, techniques and procedures and we certainly do not want to tip our hand to the transnational criminal gangs, human traffickers and illegal firearm and drug smugglers we're targeting."

Jobs for the about 55 California troops already at the border include engineering to repair roads, fences and culverts and working with federal and state law enforcement on anti-terrorism and anti-drug operations, Keegan said.

Associated Press writers Paul Weber in Austin, Texas, and Kathleen Ronanye in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Ryan's departure sparks unrest, GOP fears losing House

By LISA MASCARO and BILL BARROW

WASHINGTON (AP) — When House Speaker Paul Ryan announced his retirement decision, he did so on his own terms. The political fallout may not be so easy to control.

Ryan's relinquishing of one of the most powerful positions in Washington left Republicans reeling Thursday over not just who will replace him but whether Ryan's lame-duck status will jeopardize the GOP's pitch to voters and donors, and worsen their chance of keeping the majority.

Control of the House was already at risk in a tough midterm election. Voters are fired up amid rising opposition to President Donald Trump and sagging GOP accomplishments. Now some wonder aloud if the GOP grip on the House majority is already lost.

"It's like Eisenhower resigning right before D-Day," said Tom Davis, a former Republican congressman from Virginia who once headed the House GOP's campaign committee.

"Paul Ryan was the franchise," Davis said. "With Paul, this was a Republican Party they could still give to. He's a great brand for the party. He's gone."

On some level the impact is symbolic. Ryan was once viewed as the future of the party, and he currently is a rudder for a party regularly tossed about by Trump's shifting impulses. For Republicans fighting for their political survival, it's hard not to take Ryan's decision as vote of no confidence.

One Republican in the long list of those already retiring, Rep. Ryan Costello of Pennsylvania, said the speaker didn't try to walk him off his decision, and in fact seemed to identify with his preference for returning home to family. Some four dozen House Republicans — including powerful committee chairmen — are calling it quits.

Add Ryan's retirement to the mix, and donors, lawmakers and strategists are raising red flags about and a prolonged period of uncertainty unlike anything ever seen in modern House history.

"It's not confidence building," said Ron Nehring, a former party chairman in California, who says Republicans need to boost their legislative accomplishments, especially after having failed to keep their promise to voters to repeal Obamacare, if they hope to motivate Republicans to the polls. "Democrats are going to walk a mile on broken glass to vote against the president."

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On Thursday, Ryan dismissed suggestions from some corners, including lawmakers, that maybe it would be best if he stepped aside rather than stick around until January, when the new Congress is seated, as he intends to do.

"My plan is to stay here and run through the tape," Ryan told reporters, noting he had "shattered" fundraising efforts by previous speakers, more than doubling his \$20 million goal.

"I talked to a lot of members — a lot of members — who think it's in all of our best interest for this leadership team to stay in place," Ryan said. "It makes no sense to take the biggest fundraiser off the field."

Money will be channeled to counter a blue wave of Democrats, who need to pick up 23 seats to flip the majority. The midterm is expected to be tougher, and costlier, than ever, especially amid the expanding battleground of open seats, which usually lack the built-in campaign apparatus of incumbency.

Few Republicans talk any more of retaining control of the House as a certainty. Those doubts are clear in the way they talk about the fight to replace Ryan.

Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., a member of the conservative Freedom Caucus, said he won't worry much about whom he will support for the leadership post until House Republicans figure out if they'll be choosing their new speaker in fall -- or simply the minority leader.

"At that point we'll know if we're going to elect a Republican or Democratic speaker," he said.

Ryan's allies insist the party's top fundraiser and champion of a crisp GOP message remains in full force.

If anything, Ryan's decision "frees up the speaker to raise more money for Republicans across the country," said Corry Bliss, executive director at the Congressional Leadership Fund, the political action committee at the forefront of Republican efforts to maintain a House majority.

And besides, the strategist said, the GOP message heading to November is the same. "The central thematic still remains: The American people simply do not want Nancy Pelosi to be the speaker."

But a fight between two Republicans — for lawmakers' affections and donor dollars — would certainly be a distraction. Rep. Kevin McCarthy, the majority leader, is seen as a leading contender. Majority Whip Steve Scalise is viewed as the likely alternative, and his team noted Thursday that he, too, had broken first-quarter fundraising records, hauling in \$3 million.

Already discord is showing. Some conservatives are rallying behind Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, a long-shot who could inject new uncertainty to the outcome, splinter the vote so no single leader wins a majority.

One rank-and-file lawmaker, Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio, said he doesn't mind Ryan's prolonged departure because it creates an opening for lawmakers to tailor their own campaign message. But he acknowledged others prefer the leadership race settled with a unified party message heading into fall. "A lot of people want it over swiftly," he said.

Associated Press writer Alan Fram in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Mascaro on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/LisaMascaro> and Barrow at <https://twitter.com/BillBarrowAP>

Trump flips on trade pact, weighs rejoining Pacific-Rim deal

By KEN THOMAS and KEVIN FREKING, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a striking reversal, President Donald Trump has asked trade officials to explore the possibility of the United States rejoining the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, a free trade deal he pulled out of during his first days in office as part of his "America first" agenda.

Trump's request comes as he faces pressure from farm-state Republicans anxious that his protectionist trade policies could spiral into a trade war with China that would hit rural America. Trump spent the 2016 presidential campaign ripping into the multi-national pact, saying he could get a better deal for U.S. businesses by negotiating one-on-one with countries in the Pacific Rim. Now, faced with political consequences of the action, Trump appears to be reconsidering.

"Last year, the president kept his promise to end the TPP deal negotiated by the Obama Administration because it was unfair to American workers and farmers," the White House said in a statement. The

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president assigned his top trade advisers, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and his new chief economic adviser, Larry Kudlow, "to take another look at whether or not a better deal could be negotiated."

Trump first disclosed his request Thursday to a group of lawmakers at a White House meeting on trade. Lawmakers have been pressing Trump to shift course after escalating trade threats, including China's plan to slap tariffs on soybeans and other U.S. crops.

The apparent decision comes after the 11 other TPP countries went ahead last month and signed the pact in Santiago, Chile — without the United States. The agreement is meant to establish freer trade in the Asia-Pacific region and put pressure on China to open its markets to compete with and perhaps eventually join the bloc.

Japan cautiously responded early Friday to Trump's request. Government spokesman Yoshihide Suga in Tokyo said Japan welcomes the request if it means Trump recognizes the significance of the pact. He added, though, that it would be difficult to renegotiate only parts of the TPP, describing the agreement as delicate.

Trump tweeted late Thursday that he "would only join TPP if the deal were substantially better than the deal offered to Pres. Obama."

"We already have BILATERAL deals with six of the eleven nations in TPP, and are working to make a deal with the biggest of those nations, Japan, who has hit us hard on trade for years," the president tweeted.

It was not immediately clear how committed Trump was to embarking on a new path of potentially thorny negotiations. Trump frequently equivocates on policy when faced with opposition, only to reverse course later.

"I'm sure there are lots of particulars that they'd want to negotiate, but the president multiple times reaffirmed in general to all of us and looked right at Larry Kudlow and said, 'Larry, go get it done,'" said Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., who attended the meeting.

The president has mused publicly about rejoining the deal before, suggesting he would re-enter if he could negotiate more favorable terms. He has not said precisely what provisions he would want changed.

It's unclear how willing the other 11 countries would be to reopen the agreement and make concessions to lure the United States back, though its economic power would likely be an appeal.

"If the Trump administration doesn't pose too many demands, it is likely that the other TPP members will see the value of the bringing the U.S. back into the fold," said Eswar Prasad, Cornell University professor of trade policy. "Undoubtedly, a TPP that includes the U.S. would be stronger and more formidable than one that does not."

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill have been renewing their pitches for TPP — rather than Trump's threats of steep tariffs on steel and other products — as a way to counter China on trade. Sen Ron Johnson, R-Wis., was among a handful of senators who recently visited China to meet with government and business leaders there. He said it's time to work with a coalition of trading partners to increase pressure on China.

"I have to believe President Xi is smiling all the way to regional domination as a result of our pulling out of TPP. I don't think we can get back into the TPP soon enough," Johnson said when talking to reporters about the trip.

Meanwhile, administration officials are escalating their pressure campaign against China. Kudlow said last week the U.S. may soon release a list of products that would be subject to the new tariffs Trump has threatened to slap on \$100 billion in Chinese goods. And the U.S. Treasury is working on plans to restrict Chinese technology investments in the United States.

Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, which was highly critical of U.S. involvement in a pact it viewed as lowering labor and environmental standards, said Trump's reversal on the issue would signal that the president "cannot be trusted on anything," said Lori Wallach, the group's director.

The U.S. International Trade Commission, an independent federal agency, has projected in 2016 that TPP would increase economic growth and create jobs, but the gains would be small: After 15 years, the deal would add just 128,000 jobs, an increase of less than a tenth of 1 percent. Exports would increase, but imports would increase more. Agriculture and the business services industry would see gains, but

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manufacturing output and employment would decrease slightly under TPP.

In the meeting with farm state lawmakers, Trump also suggested the possibility of directing the Environmental Protection Agency to allow year-round sales of renewable fuel with blends of 15 percent ethanol.

The EPA currently bans the 15-percent blend, called E15, during the summer because of concerns that it contributes to smog on hot days. Gasoline typically contains 10 percent ethanol. Farm state lawmakers have pushed for greater sales of the higher ethanol blend to boost demand for the corn-based fuel.

North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum said Trump made some "pretty positive statements" about allowing the year-round use of E-15 ethanol, which could help corn growers.

The White House meetings came as an array of business executives and trade groups expressed concerns at a congressional hearing about the impact that tariffs will have on their business. Still, there were some supporters, too.

"Withdrawing the threat of tariffs without achieving results would be tantamount to waiving the white flag of trade surrender," said Scott Paul, president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing.

Associated Press writers Catherine Lucey, Jill Colvin, Paul Wiseman and Matthew Daly in Washington, James MacPherson in Bismarck, North Dakota, and Ken Moritsugu in Tokyo contributed.

On Twitter follow Ken Thomas at <https://twitter.com/KThomasDC> and Kevin Freking at <https://twitter.com/apkfreking>

Inspectors head to site of suspected gas attack in Syria

By **BASSEM MROUE** and **SARAH EL DEEB**, Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — A team of inspectors from the international chemical weapons watchdog was on its way to Syria on Thursday to begin an investigation into a suspected chemical weapons attack near the capital that has brought the war-torn country to the brink of a wider conflict, amid Western threats of retaliation and Russian warnings of the potential for "a dangerous escalation."

The fact-finding mission from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was expected to head to Douma, where the suspected attack took place and where Russia said rebels had now capitulated to government control. The Syrian government said it would facilitate the mission's investigation, which was to begin Saturday.

Syria and its ally, Russia, deny any such attack, which activists say killed more than 43 people last weekend.

Speaking at the United Nations on Thursday, Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said the top priority had to be to avert a wider war, and he didn't rule out the possibility of a U.S.-Russia conflict. Speaking to reporters after a closed emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council, Nebenzia said Russia was very concerned with "the dangerous escalation" of the situation and "aggressive policies" and preparations that some governments were making — a clear reference to the Trump administration and its allies.

"We hope that there will be no point of no return — that the U.S. and their allies will refrain from military action against a sovereign state," Nebenzia said, adding that "the danger of escalation is higher than simply Syria."

The Security Council scheduled another emergency meeting for Friday morning at Russia's request.

The imminent arrival of the chemical weapons inspectors came as rebels in Douma surrendered their weapons and left the town for opposition-held areas in the north. Russia's military said Thursday that Douma was now under full control of the Syrian government after a Russian-mediated deal secured the evacuation of the rebels and thousands of civilians after it was recaptured by Syrian forces.

Douma and the sprawling eastern Ghouta region near the capital, Damascus, had been under rebel control since 2012 and was a thorn in the side of President Bashar Assad's government, threatening his seat of power with missiles and potential advances for years. The government's capture of Douma, the last town held by the rebels in eastern Ghouta, marked a major victory for Assad.

Residents in Damascus, who had lived on edge for years because of mortar shells lobbed from eastern

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Ghouta, celebrated the news. Vehicles carrying Syrian flags were seen driving from Damascus into Douma, chanting in support of the government.

"This is a victory for Syria and the allies of Syria," declared Abboud Mardini, a 38-year old merchant in Damascus. "Eastern Ghouta was the main source of ... terrorists who from there spread throughout Syria."

There was no official government announcement that Douma had been recaptured and no indication that Syrian forces had yet entered the town, where Russian military police were deployed to preserve the peace after an evacuation fraught with difficulties. A single government flag was raised, a war monitoring group said.

Hamza Bayraqdar, spokesman for Jaysh al-Islam, the main rebel group that once controlled Douma, said his fighters had all evacuated. They handed over their heavy and medium weapons, as well as maps of land mines and the tunnels they dug, according to Syrian state media.

Douma and the rest of eastern Ghouta had been a significant rebel stronghold throughout Syria's civil war and its surrender came after years of siege by Assad's troops and a months-long military offensive. It followed weeks of negotiations mediated by Russia that repeatedly were derailed. A truce collapsed last week and the Syrian government pressed ahead with its military offensive.

Then came the suspected chemical attack in Douma, followed by international condemnation and threats of military action.

Amid conflicting tweets about the timing of any retaliation, President Donald Trump said Thursday that an attack on Syria could take place "very soon or not so soon at all." On Capitol Hill, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said the National Security Council would be meeting later Thursday to present Trump with various options, adding that he could not talk about any military plans because an attack "is not yet in the offing."

Meanwhile, the British Cabinet on Thursday gave Prime Minister Theresa May the green light to work with the U.S. and France "to coordinate an international response," though it gave no indication of the timing or scale of any action.

President Emmanuel Macron said France had proof that the Syrian government had launched chlorine gas attacks in recent days, adding that his government would not tolerate "regimes that think everything is permitted," though he stopped short of saying whether France was planning military action.

In response to the threats, Assad said Thursday that a potential retaliation would be based on "lies" and would seek to undermine his forces' recent advances near Damascus. Western threats endanger international peace and security, Assad said, and military action would only contribute to the "further destabilization" of the region.

After the back-and-forth coming from Washington, Moscow and European Union capitals, residents in Damascus appeared to have brushed off the threat of an imminent attack.

The streets of Damascus were packed Thursday with people headed to the city's main market, cafes and restaurants. At Nabil Nafiseh, one of Damascus's most famous sweets shops, men, women and children sat outdoors enjoying the evening breeze and nibbling on Arab sweets.

Some residents were defiant. Real estate agent Ahmad Abdul-Rahman said he had brought his wife and three sons from his hometown of Aleppo, where there are no significant military targets, to Damascus to be together in case of an attack.

"I came here to defy the dogs who are threatening Syria," the 43-year-old said. "We don't care about America nor America's strike and we don't care about America's allies. We were not scared in Aleppo and we are not scared in Damascus."

Rafah al-Okda, a 21-year-old nursing student at Damascus University, said she had not changed her routine following the threats.

"Syria is a strong country, but our allies Russia and Iran make us stronger," she said.

Ahmad al-Issa, 46, ruled out a U.S. airstrike, saying Trump has in the past threatened to wipe North Korea off the map, then ended up calling for a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

"Even if he (Trump) fires what he calls smart bombs, at us they will be stupid bombs because they will backfire on him and Syrians will be stronger," al-Issa said.

El Deeb reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Nataliya Vasilyeva in Moscow, Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations, Raf Casert in Brussels and Albert Aji in Damascus, Syria, contributed to this report.

Arizona governor proposes 20 percent teacher raises by 2020

By **BOB CHRISTIE** and **MELISSA DANIELS**, Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Caving to demands from teachers who have protested low pay and school funding shortfalls for weeks, Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey rolled out a proposal Thursday promising a net 20 percent raise by 2020 and pledged to push the proposal through the Legislature in the coming weeks.

The Republican governor's announcement came after more than a month of protests at the state Capitol and at schools across Arizona that were followed by a strike threat early this week. Teachers were encouraged in part by successful teacher walkouts in West Virginia and Oklahoma. Those teachers shocked their state's leaders by surrounding their Capitols and demanding funding after years of cuts, setting off similar feelings in other Republican states like Arizona where tax cuts have crimped school funding.

"Today is a good day for teachers in Arizona," Ducey said to open a press briefing.

Teachers who organized a grassroots effort that drew more than 40,000 members were cool to the announcement, saying they wanted details before reacting.

"What he gave us today was just a proposal, it wasn't legislation, and we don't know where the money's coming from and we don't know if he's talking about everybody involved in education or just classroom teachers," Tucson teacher and Arizona Educators United organizer Derek Harris said. "There so many more of us that need it than just classroom teachers."

Ducey was vague about where the cash would come from, only saying a growing economy and lower spending in other areas unexpectedly freed up \$274 million this year. As recently as Tuesday, he said he was sticking with his plan to give teachers just a 1 percent raise in the coming year.

A school advocate who helped block a Ducey-backed voucher proposal was on the stage behind him and said she believes the teachers will get on board — if the proposal isn't changed at the Legislature.

"We're all unified in that if this plays out the way that it's being said today then this is a major step forward," said Dawn Penich-Thacker, a spokeswoman for Save Our Schools Arizona. "There's a lot more to do, but it's a good-faith gesture that we think is something to continue working together on."

The developments come after Arizona teachers and others held "walk-ins" at more than 1,000 schools Wednesday to draw attention to their demands.

Ducey refused to meet with teachers, calling their protests "political theater, but changed his tune after teachers threatened a walkout and said a strike date could be set soon.

"It was interesting to see that a few days ago the governor had dismissed us as political theater and now he's impressed," Harris said, while noting the group would wait for follow-through. "At this point there's not really anything to trust."

Arizona teachers are among the lowest paid in the nation, with elementary instructors earning a median 2017 wage of \$43,280 and high school teachers \$46,470, the 3rd and 6th lowest in the nation, respectively, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Adjusted for local cost of living, federal figures show elementary teachers actually rank 49th in earnings and high school teachers 48th.

Ducey says the average teacher earned \$48,372 last year. Under his proposal, average teacher pay would go to \$58,130 by the start of 2020, Ducey said, without taking money he promised earlier in the year to restore previous funding cuts.

The teacher pay boost will cost \$274 million for the coming school year and \$650 million by 2020 and go into the base school formula that increases for inflation each year.

The proposal rolled out by the Republican governor Thursday doesn't increase funding for other school needs. But he already proposed \$100 million in his budget plan as a start to restoring nearly \$400 million cuts made earlier in the decade — including \$117 million he cut in 2015.

"We know that there are other needs in public education, so there will be no shell games," Ducey said.

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"This investment will be in addition to the \$371 million in district additional assistance which will provide flexible funding for Arizona schools' most pressing needs — fixing school infrastructure, modernizing curriculum, school buses and updating classroom technologies.

Earlier Thursday, House Speaker J.D. Mesnard outlined a plan to boost teacher pay by 6 percent in the coming school year with annual increases that could lead to a 23 percent increase at the end of five years. However, the proposal does it by redirecting cash already committed or planned for school districts in coming years, so school districts would feel the squeeze.

A growing economy is boosting state revenues and cutting caseloads in social services agencies, freeing up cash for teacher raises, Ducey said. He's also said he would cancel some of the planned spending in his budget and use savings from government efficiencies.

Mesnard stood with Ducey as his fellow Republican rolled out his plan, and later said his proposal was meant to show more teacher pay was possible.

"I think what's very clear is that we all share the same priorities," Mesnard said. "We want to get more money into the classroom, more money into teacher pay, and it's always been about how we go about achieving that."

Arizona PTA president Beth Simek, who supported the statewide activist movement and was involved with the discussions for the governor's proposal, called it "a huge step forward."

She said the governor is meeting the grassroots activists halfway.

"The governor saw that this was a huge priority," she said. "He saw the #RedforEd movement; he heard what we had to say."

Pompeo vows to confront Russia, dodges Mueller questions

By **MATTHEW LEE and JOSH LEDERMAN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Aiming to quell concerns before what is likely to be a narrow confirmation vote, Secretary of State-designate Mike Pompeo vowed on Thursday to ramp up efforts against Russia in "each place we confront them." But he ducked and dodged when asked whether he supports President Donald Trump's pounding criticism of the federal investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

Pompeo, now Trump's CIA chief, tread carefully when confronted with several of the president's controversial and undiplomatic statements, focusing instead on his plans to rebuild a depleted agency and restore its influence. Pompeo suggested he did not share all the president's views — including his skepticism about Russia's interference.

"I take a back seat to no one" when it comes to standing up to Russia, Pompeo said.

However, when asked if he would resign if Trump moved to scuttle the probe by firing special counsel Robert Mueller or the deputy attorney general to whom he reports, he said no.

Pompeo's nomination faces stiff opposition from a handful of Republicans and many Democrats as well as supporters of the Iran nuclear deal, environmentalists and minority rights groups, and his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee appeared designed to blunt their criticism. The CIA chief told senators that he has been miscast as a "hawk" despite previous comments savaging the Iran accord and hinting at regime change in North Korea. He maintained he wants to improve the Iran deal and would continue efforts to do so even if Trump withdraws from it as he has threatened.

In his testimony, Pompeo confirmed for the first time publicly that he's been interviewed by the team of special counsel Mueller, who is investigating possible ties between Russia and Trump's presidential campaign as well as possible obstruction of justice issues. But he wouldn't answer questions about the contents of the interview, arguing it would be improper since, as CIA director in charge of overseas intelligence gathering, he has been a "participant" in Mueller's probe.

Under questioning, he said he would be unlikely to resign as secretary of state if Trump were to fire Mueller. Lawmakers are concerned the president may seek Mueller's ouster to try to shut down the investigation, and the White House has said it believes Trump does have the authority to fire him if desired.

"My instincts tell me no," Pompeo said about possibly resigning. "My instincts tell me my obligation to

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continue to serve as America's senior diplomat will be more important in times of domestic political turmoil."

Throughout the hearing, he drew a sharp contrast between himself and Tillerson, the former CEO of ExxonMobil who Trump unceremoniously fired last month. He lamented the "demoralizing" vacancies at the top echelons of the department during Tillerson's brief tenure and said he planned to fill those vacancies.

He cast his close connection to Trump as an advantage that would help him restore the significance of the department.

"My relationship with President Trump is due to one thing: We've demonstrated value to him at the CIA. So, in turn, he has come to rely on us," Pompeo said. "I intend to ensure that the Department of State will be just as central to the president's policies and the national security of the United States."

His remarks before the committee were 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. 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.

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., took Pompeo to task over for saying previously that Muslims have a special obligation to denounce extremism and for his longstanding position that gays should not be able to marry.

"I continue to hold that view," Pompeo said of gay marriage, though he declined repeatedly to answer whether he believes gay sex is a "perversion." Pompeo said that his record at the CIA and elsewhere proves he treats everyone equally and with respect, regardless of religion, gender or sexual orientation.

He sought to pre-empt concerns about Trump's apparent unwillingness to challenge Russian President Vladimir Putin directly. He said a long list of punitive actions taken under Trump show the U.S. takes the threat from Russia seriously, adding that "we need to push back in each place we confront them," including the economic and cyber arenas.

An avowed opponent of the Iran nuclear deal, Pompeo said he'd work immediately if confirmed to "fix" the agreement that Trump has threatened to abandon if it's not strengthened. Pompeo wouldn't say explicitly if he'd advocate a withdrawal if there's no fix by Trump's May 12 deadline, suggesting there could be an extension if significant progress was being made by then. Still, he affirmed that he won't support staying in over the long term unless more restrictions are placed on Tehran.

"If there's no chance that we can fix it, I will recommend to the president that we work with our allies to achieve a better outcome and to achieve a better deal," Pompeo said.

To the dismay of some Democratic lawmakers, Pompeo equivocated when asked about climate change — acknowledging it is occurring but saying only that it's "likely" that humans are contributing to it. Still, although Trump has announced the U.S. is pulling out of the Paris global climate agreement, Pompeo said the State Department should be involved in global efforts to address global warming.

Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton said in a statement that Pompeo is "a talented and experienced public servant" and said the administration needs him as secretary of state "as we support the President and take on some of the toughest foreign policy issues of our time."

Associated Press writer Matthew Pennington contributed to this report.

Trump puts off Syria strike decision, will talk to allies

By ROBERT BURNS and CATHERINE LUCEY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday put off a final decision on possible military strikes against Syria after tweeting earlier that they could happen "very soon or not so soon at all." The White House said he would consult further with allies.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis warned such an attack carried the risk of spinning out of control, suggesting caution ahead of a decision on how to respond to an attack against civilians last weekend that U.S. officials are increasingly certain involved the use of banned chemical weapons. British officials said up to 75 people were killed.

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The White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said in a brief statement after Trump met with Mattis and other members of his National Security Council: "No final decision has been made. We are continuing to assess intelligence and are engaged in conversations with our partners and allies."

Sanders said Trump would speak later with French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Theresa May.

Although Mattis noted that military action carried risks, he also emphasized that Syrian use of chemical weapons should not be tolerated. And he insisted it remains U.S. policy not to be involved directly in Syria's civil war.

"Our strategy remains the same as a year ago," he said. "It is to drive this to a U.N.-brokered peace but, at the same time, keep our foot on the neck of ISIS until we suffocate it," referring to the Islamic State extremist group.

Mattis' remarks at a House Armed Services Committee hearing followed a series of Trump tweets this week that initially indicated he was committed to bombing Syria but later suggested he was awaiting further advice and assessment. Trump wrote in a Thursday morning tweet that an attack could happen "very soon or not so soon at all."

Later Thursday he was noncommittal. "We're looking very, very seriously, very closely at the whole situation," he told reporters.

Mattis said options would be discussed with Trump at a meeting of his National Security Council on Thursday afternoon. That meant airstrikes, possibly in tandem with France and other allies that have expressed outrage at the alleged Syrian chemical attack, could be launched within hours of a presidential decision.

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.

Macron said Thursday that France has proof that the Syrian government launched chlorine gas attacks and said France would not tolerate "regimes that think everything is permitted."

After May met with her Cabinet, a spokesperson issued a statement saying it is highly likely that Syria's President Bashar Assad was responsible for Saturday's attack that killed dozens outside Damascus. The Cabinet agreed on the need to "take action" to deter further chemical weapons use by Assad, but added that May would continue to consult with allies to coordinate an international response.

Mattis said that although the United States has no hard proof, he believes the Syrian government was responsible for Saturday's attack. Initial reports indicated the use of chlorine gas, possibly in addition to the nerve agent Sarin. Trump's ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, told NBC News on Thursday the administration has "enough proof" of the chemical attack but was still considering its response.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, based in the Netherlands, announced it was sending a fact-finding team to the site of the attack outside Damascus, and it was due to arrive Saturday. It was not clear whether the presence of the investigators could affect the timing of any U.S. military action.

At the House hearing, Democrats grilled Mattis on the wisdom and legality of Trump ordering an attack on Syria without explicit authorization from Congress. Mattis argued it would be justified as an act of self-defense, with 2,000 U.S. ground troops in Syria; he insisted he could not talk about military plans because an attack "is not yet in the offing."

Mattis said he personally believes Syria is guilty of an "inexcusable" use of chemical weapons, while noting that the international fact-finding team would likely fall short of determining who was responsible.

Asked about the risks of U.S. military retaliation, Mattis cited two concerns, starting with avoiding civilian casualties.

"On a strategic level, it's how do we keep this from escalating out of control, if you get my drift on that," he said.

Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said he sees no legal justification for a U.S. strike in Syria, absent explicit authorization by Congress. More broadly, he doubted

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the wisdom of bombing.

"Until we have a more long-term strategy, until we have some idea where we're going in Syria and the Middle East, it seems unwise, to me, to start launching missiles," said Smith, D-Wash. "We need to know where that's going, what the purpose of it is before we take that act."

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 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.

At the House hearing, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, disputed Trump's legal authority to act without congressional authority and suggested a U.S. strike would lead to war with Russia.

"I'm not ready to speculate that that would happen," Mattis said.

Oklahoma teachers shift from marching to running for office

By SEAN MURPHY, Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — When Oklahoma second-grade teacher Cyndi Ralston heard her state representative berate teachers for walking out of the classroom and marching on the Capitol, she knew she'd be running against him in November.

Rep. Kevin McDugle, an ex-Marine Corps drill instructor, chastised teachers in a video he posted on Facebook for failing to thank lawmakers after he and other Republicans voted in favor of tax hikes to fund a teacher raise.

"I'm not voting for another stinking measure when they're acting the way they're acting," Republican McDugle said.

The walkout that shuttered schools in many of Oklahoma's largest districts for two straight weeks came to an end on Thursday, although some districts already had planned to close on Friday, including Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

The largest teachers union is calling for its members to shift their focus to electing pro-education candidates in November. Ralston is among at least a dozen teachers, most of them first-time candidates, who are taking heed.

"There are so many parents, community members and students up here seeing what's going on and how they (lawmakers) are not responding to the voices of the people they represent," Ralston said after filing her candidacy papers. "I think it's going to grow."

The teacher-led rebellion over low wages and funding cuts has spread from its genesis in West Virginia to Arizona, Kentucky and Oklahoma. Oklahoma's teacher walkout coincided with the three days when Oklahoma allows candidates to file for elective offices, giving frustrated educators an outlet for their enthusiasm. And as Kentucky's legislative session wound down this year after a fight over teacher pensions, teachers mobilized to support legislative candidates, and the influential Kentucky Education Association signaled it would turn its attention to the ballot box.

Amanda Jeffers, a Democrat and a high school English teacher in Oklahoma, said she was spurred by the teacher movement to run against a Republican incumbent, even though she acknowledges an uphill battle in a district with a 2-to-1 GOP registration advantage.

"Looking at my district, there really hasn't been anyone stepping up to the plate, so I thought: 'Well, how about me?'" Jeffers said.

Despite the disadvantage on paper, Jeffers said she thinks the teacher movement could put some wind in her sails in an election where Democrats already are energized.

A similar effort by dozens of Oklahoma teachers in the 2016 election, most of them Democrats, was

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largely unsuccessful, but the Oklahoma Democratic Party's 25-year-old chairwoman, Anna Langthorn, said she senses this cycle is different.

"Voters are more receptive, engaged and aware about what the issues actually are, and there's not a presidential election at the top of the ticket," Langthorn said, "so we're focusing on Oklahoma issues, and I think that will give everybody a head start."

Democrats also are emboldened by a string of four special election pickups from Republicans since 2016, including two victories by Democratic public school teachers. Republicans hold a 72-28 advantage in the House and a 39-8 edge in the Senate, but Democrats hope to chip away at that and have their eyes on an even bigger prize — the open governor's seat.

Langthorn said the party has been overwhelmed in recent weeks with potential candidates seeking guidance on how to run for office. She spent Wednesday and Thursday greeting state House and Senate candidates with a packet that included details about free training, templates for literature and websites, and contact names of Democratic political consultants.

While many of the teacher candidates were Democrats, some Republican educators also threw their hat in the ring against GOP incumbents they felt weren't supportive enough of public schools.

Republican Tammie Reynolds, an assistant superintendent from the southwest Oklahoma town of Elgin, said she decided to run against the GOP incumbent in large part because of his vote against a tax-hike plan that funded teacher pay and public schools.

"Regardless of Democrat or Republican, I think your representative should represent you, and if he doesn't then I think it's time to go and say: 'You're not representing me, and I'm either going to vote someone in who does or I'm going to file myself,'" Reynolds said.

Oklahoma Republican Party Chairman Pam Pollard acknowledged many GOP incumbents were faced with a difficult decision this session on whether to approve a tax hike and anger anti-tax conservatives to their right, or vote against it and upset teachers and educators in their district.

"It's going to make them talk to their voters and explain their votes on both sides, either why did they raise taxes or why did they not vote for more taxes," Pollard said.

Trebor Worthen, a former House member and now a GOP campaign consultant, said the political winds have clearly shifted since 2016 and many incumbents are feeling the pressure.

"I think that anyone running against incumbents will likely experience more success this year than they did in 2016," Worthen said. "And teachers are certainly contributing to that anti-incumbent mood."

Follow Sean Murphy at www.twitter.com/apseanmurphy

Who'll follow Paul Ryan as speaker? Contest hums below radar

By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some say it's a fight between West and South. Or who might win an endorsement from President Donald Trump. Or a test of who can woo conservatives.

But one thing was clear Thursday: Any maneuvering in the brewing showdown between California Rep. Kevin McCarthy and Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise for House speaker was occurring below the radar, and the leading players were choosing their words carefully.

"I've heard from none of the candidates, and all of the mentioned candidates are not just friends, they're close friends," said Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Ala.

A day earlier, House Speaker Paul Ryan told colleagues 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, the chief contenders are McCarthy and Scalise, two affable lawmakers who knew each other as young party activists before arriving in Congress.

McCarthy, 53, is his party's No. 2 House leader and was one of the earliest and steadiest backers of Trump's presidential campaign.

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If Trump weighs into the contest, his clout could rally lawmakers behind his favored candidate, especially conservatives. But it could alienate moderates and others who want a leader who has their back, not necessarily the president's. It's uncertain whether Trump will intervene or for whom, though many suspect it would be McCarthy. White House officials declined comment.

McCarthy 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 and No. 3 leader, was first elected a decade ago and had little national name recognition until tragedy thrust him into headlines. He was shot at a congressional baseball practice last year and is still recovering from his injuries, an ordeal that's earned the conservative former state legislator broad respect.

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

Scalise aides say he and Trump speak frequently, but they provided no detail. Trump visited Scalise in the hospital after his June 2017 shooting. Rep. John Shimkus, R-Ill., Scalise's housemate in Washington, said Trump often calls Scalise out by name at events.

Neither Scalise nor McCarthy have acknowledged a race for Ryan's job or definitively denied it.

"I've never run against Kevin and wouldn't run against Kevin. He and I are good friends," Scalise said Thursday on the Fox News Channel.

That comment essentially put the onus on McCarthy to line up 218 votes, the number needed to become speaker next January should Republicans keep the majority. It was unclear what if any efforts were quietly underway to deny that support to McCarthy, but Scalise's remarks clearly left himself as the alternative.

Ryan later told reporters Scalise "thinks after the election that Kevin McCarthy ought be the person to replace me." Scalise didn't answer directly when asked if he's now supporting McCarthy. But the whip's aides said while he and Ryan spoke Thursday morning, Scalise said nothing privately that differed from his public remarks, seemingly suggesting Ryan had gone too far.

Lawmakers and GOP donors want a leader who can raise money, and there McCarthy has an advantage. He raised \$8.75 million in the first quarter of this year and has done fundraisers for 40 GOP candidates, said a person familiar with his political operation. Scalise has raised \$3 million, a record for House whips, and hosted almost 50 events, his aides said.

Neither man is known for rhetorical flourishes, with McCarthy, in particular, prone to sentences that defy the rules of grammar. 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.

Scalise is viewed as more conservative than McCarthy. That's important in a House GOP conference that could grow more conservative after November, when many Republicans who are retiring or face likely defeat are moderates.

McCarthy has worked to improve his relationship with conservatives, including trying to craft legislation cutting spending from the government budget enacted recently.

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

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\$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 a 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.

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. And on Thursday, the government watchdog group Common Cause filed complaints with the Justice Department and the Federal Election Commission, asking authorities to investigate whether the payment violated campaign finance laws.

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

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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."

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.

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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.

Gun rights supporters: Bring your unloaded rifle to rallies

By **RUSS BYNUM, Associated Press**

Organizers are encouraging gun rights supporters to bring unloaded rifles to rallies at state capitols across the U.S. this weekend, pushing back against a wave of student-led gun violence protests that some see as a threat to the Second Amendment.

A group called the National Constitutional Coalition of Patriotic Americans spread word of the gatherings on social media. Organizers have permits for rallies Saturday outside 45 statehouses, said David Clayton, of West Virginia, one of the coalition's founders.

The rallies come less than three weeks after hundreds of thousands marched in Washington, New York and other U.S. cities to demand tougher gun laws after the February school shooting that killed 17 in Parkland, Florida. It's unclear how many will show up — turnout predictions of national organizers are vastly higher than those of local planners.

Clayton said a new gun law in Florida and similar measures being considered in other states threaten the rights of law-abiding gun owners. He said those attending rallies are encouraged to carry rifles — unloaded, with no magazines inserted — in states where it's legal.

"This is a very peaceful approach to a show of force," Clayton said. "What that means is we're not going to go there looking for a fight. We're saying, 'Look at all the people gathered here. We have a voice too.'"

Most U.S. states allow long guns to be carried openly in public spaces, though other legal restrictions may apply. In Maine, for example, the statehouse grounds are a gun-free zone.

Assembling near the state Capitol on Saturday could prove expensive, at least for organizers in Georgia. They're being asked to pay about \$6,700 to cover overtime for state troopers to provide security. Capt. Mark Perry of the Georgia Department of Public Safety said that's because the rally is on a weekend — permitted assemblies are free on weekdays when statehouse security is fully staffed.

"It's an insult," said Atlanta rally organizer Chris Hill, who said he has no intention of paying.

Other groups have been charged similar fees. Tim Franzen, who helped organize the March For Our Lives rally against gun violence in Atlanta on March 24, said organizers paid for statehouse security but he didn't recall how much.

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The coalition behind the gun rights rallies describes itself as a collection of patriotic-based groups that “come from all walks of life, including Three Percent groups and local militias.”

The Three Percent movement vows to resist any government that infringes on the U.S. Constitution. Its name refers to the belief that just 3 percent of colonists rose up to fight the British.

Clayton leads a group called the Three Percent Republic. Such groups lack the following of more mainstream Second Amendment advocates such as the National Rifle Association.

An NRA spokeswoman did not immediately return a call seeking comment. Other gun rights organizations said they’ve played minor roles.

Jerry Henry, executive director of GeorgiaCarry.org, said a few of the group’s 8,000 members have emailed him asking for details about the rally in Atlanta.

“We are not sponsoring it in any shape or form, but we’re not opposing it,” said Henry, who doesn’t plan to attend.

Clayton said the organizers’ goal is for attendance to reach 1 million nationwide.

That would require average turnout of 20,000 per state. Maine rally organizer Dave Gulya said he expects 500 to 1,500 people. The permit for Missouri’s rally anticipates 100 participants. Mississippi rally organizer Monty Reeves estimated 50 to 200 people.

Reeves and Gulya said they have no ties to militias or other such groups. Reeves owns a bolt-action rifle and a shotgun for hunting doves and squirrels near his home in rural Whynot, Mississippi. Gulya is a truck driver in Blue Hill, Maine, who likes shooting targets with handguns and rifles. He worries gun rights are slowly getting chipped away.

“As responsible, law-abiding gun owners, we seem to pay the price every time there’s one of these tragedies,” Gulya said. “We’ve stayed silent long enough.”

Associated Press writers Lisa Marie Pane in Atlanta; Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi; and Blake Nelson in Jefferson City, Missouri, contributed to this story.

Chemical watchdog backs UK: Nerve agent poisoned spy Skripal

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The international chemical weapons watchdog on Thursday confirmed Britain’s finding that a former Russian spy and his daughter were poisoned with a nerve agent, as Russia continued to deny suggestions that it was behind the attack.

Investigators from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said the nerve agent was “of high purity.” Britain says that means only a state with a sophisticated laboratory could have manufactured it.

The watchdog’s report does not say who was responsible for the attack, since that was outside the scope of its mission. The OPCW’s job was to identify the poison, not to trace its origins or assign blame.

Britain blames Russia for the March 4 poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the English city of Salisbury.

Russia denies involvement, and says Britain hasn’t shared any evidence for its assertion.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Thursday accused Britain of waging a defamation campaign against Russia, manipulating public opinion and hiding facts. She said Moscow will continue to press Britain to share evidence in the case.

Britain has asked for a meeting of OPCW’s executive council on Wednesday to discuss the organization’s findings, and Britain is also seeking a meeting of the U.N. Security Council next week on the chemical weapons report.

In a published summary, the OPCW did not name Novichok, the type of nerve agent previously cited by British Prime Minister Theresa May. But it confirmed “the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical that was used in Salisbury.” It said the name and structure of the toxin were included in the full classified report, distributed to 192 member states of the organization.

The Novichok class of nerve agents was developed in the Soviet Union toward the end of the Cold War,

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and Britain says it has evidence Russia has continued to manufacture Novichok agents in the last decade. Russia denies this and says the nerve agent used on the Skripals could easily have been manufactured in another country.

The purity of the nerve agent makes it hard to tell when the agent was manufactured, since without impurities it does not degrade over time.

Britain says scientific analysis of the poison is only one of the factors that has led it to blame Russia.

Others include intelligence that Russia has made nerve agents and studied how to use them for assassinations, and the view of Russian President Vladimir Putin's government that traitors are legitimate targets.

But the U.K. does not possess a scientific smoking gun — a sample of Novichok from a Russian lab to compare with the Salisbury samples.

The poisoning has sparked a Cold War-style diplomatic crisis Russia and the West, including the expulsion of hundreds of diplomats from the two sides.

Georgy Kalamonov, Russia's deputy minister of industry and trade, told the Interfax news agency Thursday it's impossible to pinpoint the agent's origin and reaffirmed Moscow's demand for a probe that would involve Russia.

U.K. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson welcomed the OPCW's report, saying tests in four independent laboratories around the world all returned the same results.

"There can be no doubt what was used and there remains no alternative explanation about who was responsible — only Russia has the means, motive and record," he said.

The findings come after Yulia Skripal rejected Russian Embassy assistance as she recovers at an undisclosed location. Yulia, 33, was released from the hospital earlier this week, but her 66-year-old father is recovering more slowly.

In a statement released by London's Metropolitan Police, Yulia Skripal said the embassy had offered assistance but "at the moment, I do not wish to avail myself of their services." She also said she did not yet want to speak to the media.

"Until that time, I want to stress that no one speaks for me, or for my father, but ourselves," she said.

The comment came after Yulia's cousin Viktoria gave a series of interviews about a telephone conversation between the two, leading the British government to claim that Russia was using Viktoria Skripal as a "pawn" in the poisoning dispute.

Russia's Embassy in London questioned the authenticity of Yulia's statement, saying it was crafted to support Britain's version of events and increases suspicions that she is being held against her will.

"The document only strengthens suspicions that we are dealing with a forcible isolation of the Russian citizen," the embassy said.

Edith Lederer at the United Nations and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this story.

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. Escalating tension with Moscow.

The tempests that have 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 used 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.

Trump pushed back Thursday on reports of disarray, insisted he did not consider firing special counsel

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Robert Mueller in December. The president denied a report in The New York Times, saying: "If I wanted to fire Robert Mueller in December, as reported by the Failing New York Times, I would have fired him. Just more Fake News from a biased newspaper!"

The Times reported that in early December, Trump was furious over reports about a new round of subpoenas from Muller's office and told advisers the investigation needed to be ended.

On Wednesday, Trump tweeted, "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. 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 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

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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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Asia cautious about possible Trump rethink on trade deal

By **KEN MORITSUGU** and **NICK PERRY**, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan, Australia and New Zealand reacted cautiously Friday after President Donald Trump signaled he might reopen talks on a Pacific Rim trade deal that he pulled the U.S. out of shortly after taking office.

Japanese officials said they welcome the move if it means that Trump is recognizing the importance of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. New Zealand's trade minister said his country is not blind to the benefits of free trade with the world's largest economy, but U.S. participation remains theoretical.

"It's not yet clear how real it is, given the different views in the U.S. administration," Trade Minister David Parker said.

His Australian counterpart, Steve Ciobo, said the U.S. is welcome to rejoin the agreement, but added: "Let's also be clear, I think there's very little appetite among the TPP 11 countries for there to be any meaningful renegotiation or indeed any substantial renegotiation of the TPP 11 at all."

"What we're all focused on is making sure we can bring the TPP 11 into effect as soon as possible," he said.

He said that Australian agricultural exporters in particular are at an advantage compared to their American colleagues, "and I think that's one of the reasons why the United States is having a second look at possibly rejoining the TPP."

The three countries are among the 11 that signed the agreement last month after deciding to go ahead without the U.S. The others include Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Canada, Chile, Mexico and Peru.

In a surprise step, Trump asked his top trade advisers Thursday to take another look at TPP and whether a better deal could be negotiated. He has previously criticized multi-nation pacts, preferring to negotiate one-on-one with other countries. With congressional elections later this year, he now faces pressure from some Republican lawmakers anxious that his protectionist policies could spiral into a trade war with China that would hit rural America.

Trump tweeted that he "would only join TPP if the deal were substantially better" than the one negotiated by his predecessor, Barack Obama.

Japan's trade minister, Toshiimitsu Motegi, warned that it would be difficult to renegotiate, saying TPP is a well-balanced agreement based on the varying interests of the signatory nations.

"It is an agreement so delicate, like something made of glass," he said. "So, it will be difficult to take only parts of it and reopen negotiation, or change only parts of it."

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the 11 nations "fought hard to get the final agreement that we have now before us."

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"We've heard some of this discussion and debate about whether the U.S. might join before. If they were to choose to do that, that would trigger a process kicking off again. As it stands, the deal today would continue as is going forward," she said.

The 11-nation trade deal, which was renamed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership after the U.S. withdrew, was signed in March but won't come into force until it's ratified by individual nations.

Parker said other countries have also expressed an interest in joining, including Colombia, South Korea and Britain.

New Zealand's liberal government, voted into power last year, has been more cautious about the deal than the previous conservative government. One change the new government made was to introduce new laws that will restrict the sales of New Zealand homes to foreign buyers, a provision Parker said would not change were the U.S. to join the pact.

Perry reported from Wellington, New Zealand.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, April 13, the 103rd day of 2018. There are 262 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 13, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. on the 200th anniversary of the third American president's birth.

On this date:

In 1598, King Henry IV of France endorsed the Edict of Nantes, which granted rights to the Protestant Huguenots. (The edict was abrogated in 1685 by King Louis XIV, who declared France entirely Catholic again.)

In 1613, Pocahontas, daughter of Chief Powhatan, was captured by English Capt. Samuel Argall in the Virginia Colony. (During a yearlong captivity, Pocahontas converted to Christianity and ultimately opted to stay with the English.)

In 1742, "Messiah," the oratorio by George Frideric Handel featuring the "Hallelujah" chorus, had its first public performance in Dublin, Ireland.

In 1743, the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, was born in Shadwell in the Virginia Colony.

In 1861, at the start of the Civil War, Fort Sumter in South Carolina fell to Confederate forces.

In 1917, American business tycoon James "Diamond Jim" Brady, known for his jewelry collection as well as his hearty appetite, died in Atlantic City, New Jersey at age 60.

In 1953, "Casino Royale," Ian Fleming's first book as well as the first James Bond novel, was published in London by Jonathan Cape Ltd.

In 1958, Van Cliburn of the United States won the first International Tchaikovsky Competition for piano in Moscow; Russian Valery Klimov won the violin competition.

In 1964, Sidney Poitier became the first black performer in a leading role to win an Academy Award for his performance in "Lilies of the Field."

In 1970, Apollo 13, four-fifths of the way to the moon, was crippled when a tank containing liquid oxygen burst. (The astronauts managed to return safely.)

In 1986, Pope John Paul II visited the Great Synagogue of Rome in the first recorded papal visit of its kind to a Jewish house of worship.

In 1992, the Great Chicago Flood took place as the city's century-old tunnel system and adjacent basements filled with water from the Chicago River. "The Bridges of Madison County," a romance novel by Robert James Waller, was published by Warner Books.

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Ten years ago: World Bank President Robert Zoellick (ZEL'ik) urged immediate action to deal with mounting food prices that had caused hunger and deadly violence in several countries. Trevor Immelman won the Masters, becoming the first South African to wear a green jacket in 30 years. A construction worker's bid to curse the New York Yankees by planting a Boston Red Sox jersey in their new stadium was foiled when the home team removed the offending shirt from its burial spot. Physicist John A. Wheeler, who coined the term "black holes," died in Hightstown, New Jersey, at age 96.

Five years ago: Francine Wheeler, the mother of a 6-year-old boy killed in the Connecticut school shooting, used the opportunity to fill in for President Barack Obama during his weekly radio and Internet address to make a personal plea from the White House for action to combat gun violence. All 108 passengers and crew survived after a new Lion Air Boeing 737 crashed into the ocean and snapped in two while attempting to land on the Indonesian resort island of Bali. Hundreds of opponents of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher partied in London's Trafalgar Square to celebrate her death, sipping champagne and chanting, "Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead."

One year ago: Pentagon officials said U.S. forces in Afghanistan had struck an Islamic State tunnel complex in eastern Afghanistan with "the mother of all bombs," the largest non-nuclear weapon ever used in combat by the U.S. military. Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck filed divorce petitions, the first step in formally ending their marriage more than a year after they publicly declared their relationship was over.

Today's Birthdays: Movie director Stanley Donen (DAH'neh) is 94. Former Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., is 85. Actor Lyle Waggoner is 83. Actor Edward Fox is 81. Actor Paul Sorvino is 79. Rhythm-and-blues singer Lester Chambers is 78. Movie-TV composer Bill Conti is 76. Rock musician Jack Casady is 74. Actor Tony Dow is 73. Singer Al Green is 72. Actor Ron Perlman is 68. Actor William Sadler is 68. Singer Peabo Bryson is 67. Bandleader/rock musician Max Weinberg is 67. Bluegrass singer-musician Sam Bush is 66. Rock musician Jimmy Destri is 64. Comedian Gary Kroeger is 61. Actress Saundra Santiago is 61. Sen. Bob Casey Jr., D-Pa., is 58. Rock musician Joey Mazzola (Sponge) is 57. Chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov is 55. Actress Page Hannah is 54. Actress-comedian Caroline Rhea (RAY) is 54. Rock musician Lisa Umbarger is 53. Rock musician Marc Ford is 52. Reggae singer Capleton is 51. Actor Ricky Schroder is 48. Rock singer Aaron Lewis (Staind) is 46. Actor Bokeem Woodbine is 45. Singer Lou Bega is 43. Actor-producer Glenn Howerton is 42. Actor Kyle Howard is 40. Actress Kelli Giddish is 38. Actress Courtney Peldon is 37. Pop singer Nellie McKay (mih-KY') is 36. Rapper/singer Ty Dolla \$ign is 36. Actress Allison Williams is 30. Actress Hannah Marks is 25.

Thought for Today: "Go on failing. Go on. Only next time, try to fail better." — Samuel Beckett, Irish playwright and author (born this date in 1906, died in 1989).