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Open: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

JOHNSON AGENCY
Real Estate & Insurance
Jay Johnson, Broker
www.johnsonagencygroton.com
102 N Main St. Office: 605/397-2424
Groton, SD 57445 Home: 605/397-8565



Virginia Abeln will be celebrating her 90th birthday on June 16, 2018. Help her celebrate by sending birthday wishes to: 407 North Garfield, Apt.11, Groton, SD, 57445

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Happy Flag Day!



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The staff of the Groton Care and Rehab Center took their residents outside and invited people from the community for root beer floats and live music. Pictured left to right are Shania May, Kiesha Channpraseut, Nellie Hatfield, Pam Rohrbach, Pam Hanson, Pat Miller and CEO Brynn Pickrel. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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Shania May gives Rose Locke a root beer float at the Groton Care and Rehab Center's evening time out. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Activities director Pam Hanson went around with the residents and danced with them during the live music. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Luke Thorson had a grand slam in the first game against Sisseton last night!



Luke Thorson pitched the complete first game last night in Sisseton. Score ended up with Groton winning 23-8.



Wyatt Locke was the catcher for the first game.

(Photos by Tricia Keith)

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Today in Weather History

June 14, 1970: An estimated F3 tornado moved northeast from just southeast of Mound City. Barns and sheds were said to have been blown away on three farms.

June 14, 1985: A thunderstorm produced golf ball size hail in the Castlewood area causing considerable damage to grain, corn, soybeans, and gardens. Some areas just south of Castlewood had hail piled up to six inches deep. Leaves were stripped from several trees. Wind gusts to 60 mph accompanied the hail.

Another thunderstorm produced high winds and damaging hail in Grant and Roberts Counties. North of Milbank along both sides of Highway 15, crops incurred considerable damage. An area 17 miles northeast of Sisseton into Browns Valley, to Mud Lake, saw crop damage from golf ball size hail.

June 14, 2009: An upper-level disturbance combined with a warm front and very unstable air brought severe thunderstorms to parts of central and north-central South Dakota. Hail up to the size of golf balls, flash flooding, along with several tornadoes occurred with these storms. Heavy rain caused flash flooding on the Moreau River with the bridge on Route 14 being overtopped. The bridge had to be closed west of Green Grass. A basement was also flooded three miles east of Green Grass along with several roads in the area in Dewey Country. A tornado touched down west of Hayes in Stanley County and traveled almost a mile before lifting. No damage occurred. A second tornado touched down east of Hayes with no damage occurring.

1903 - The Heppner Disaster occurred in Oregon. A cloudburst in the hills sent a flood down Willow Creek, and a twenty foot wall of water swept away a third of the town in minutes, killing 236 residents and causing 100 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1961 - The temperature in Downtown San Francisco, CA, soared to 106 degrees to establish an all-time record for that location. (The Weather Channel)







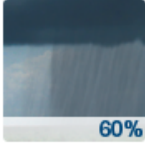
1987 - Thirty-two cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 97 degrees at Flint, MI, tied their record for June, and the high of 101 at Milwaukee WI marked their first 100 degree reading in 32 years. Thunderstorms brought much needed rains to South Texas, drenching McAllen with 3.2 inches in one hour. A thunderstorm soaked the town of Uncertain with 2.3 inches of rain in one hour. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thirty cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

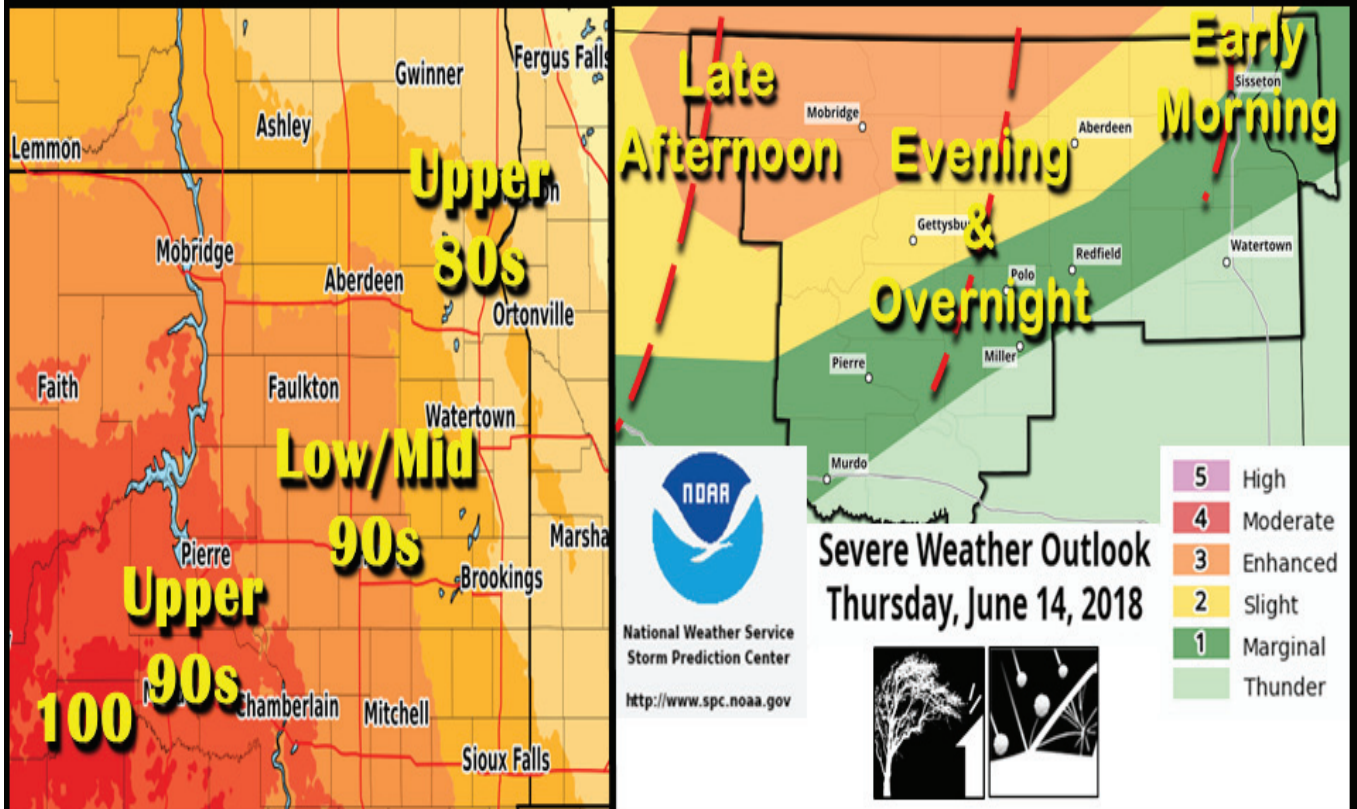
1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from the Central Gulf States to the Middle Atlantic Coast Region during the day and into the night. There were 62 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Thunderstorm winds caused 28 million dollars damage in Montgomery County MD. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)




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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
20%	40%		30%	50%	60%	60%
Breezy. Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms	Severe Thunderstorms	Mostly Sunny	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	T-storms Likely	Showers Likely
High: 91 °F	Low: 69 °F	High: 87 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 82 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 75 °F

Hot Today – Risk For Severe Weather Late



 weather.gov/Aberdeen  National Weather Service Aberdeen  @NWSAberdeen Updated: 6/14/2018 4:07 AM Central

Published on: 06/14/2018 at 4:11AM

A stiff south wind will bring hot temperatures and high humidity to the area today. This will also result in the risk for severe storms late this afternoon west river, into the evening/overnight east river, and to start the day off in western Minnesota. The main risk with this system will be for hail and strong winds.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 81.2 F at 2:25 PM

Low Outside Temp: 46.4 F at 5:26 AM

Wind Chill:

High Gust: 24.0 Mph at 4:11 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 99° in 1933

Record Low: 34° in 1969

Average High: 77°F

Average Low: 53°F

Average Precip in June: 1.68

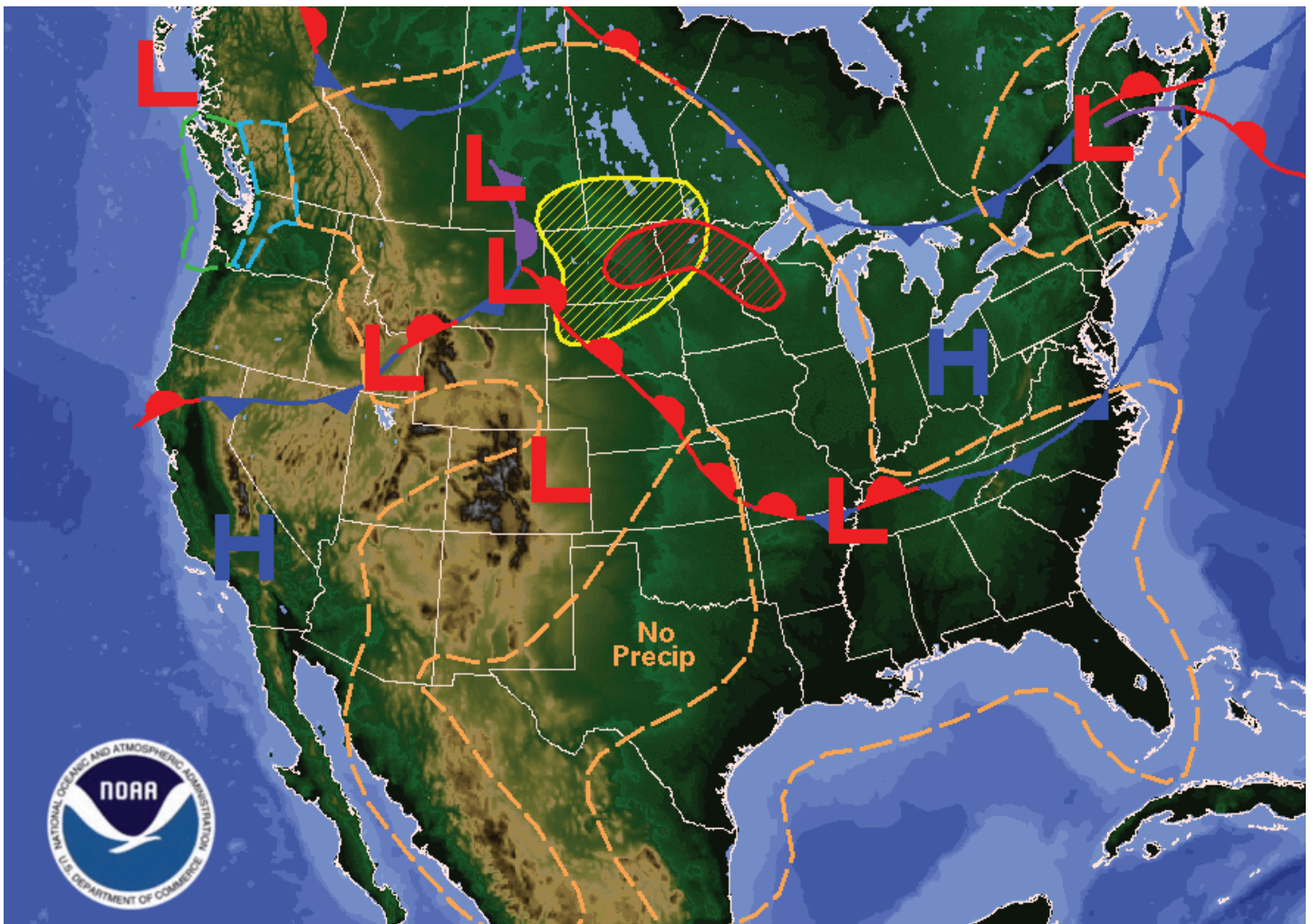
Precip to date in June: 0.89

Average Precip to date: 8.82

Precip Year to Date: 5.19

Sunset Tonight: 9:23 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:44 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Jun 14, 2018, issued 4:24 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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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

There are many things in the Bible that we do not understand. There are other things in the Bible that we think we understand. There are many things in the Bible that we cannot understand. But there are many things in the Bible that we do understand but simply chose to do nothing about.

So, what's the problem?

If we want to know a person, we must spend time with that one. And more than anything else the Bible is about a Person. So if we want to know that Person, we must spend time in the Bible. Now, there are two important facts here. The Bible was given to us by men who God inspired to write it. Because it is God's inspired Word, we need His Spirit to illuminate it for us. But we cannot expect Him to illuminate it for us unless we are willing to allow His Spirit to open our eyes to see Him as He is in His Word.

A child was born blind and spent years unable to see the world around him. Researchers finally found a way to restore his sight. Not knowing what the outcome would be the surgeons were cautious not to give him too much hope. The day finally arrived when they were to remove his bandages. They led him to a window that overlooked a flower garden. When the bandages were removed, he stood in amazement and said, "Mom, why didn't you tell me how beautiful the flowers are?"

"I tried," she said, "but you have to see them for yourself." So it is with God. We have to see Him for ourselves.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to see You as You are - in all of Your loveliness - as we find You in Your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.

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
- 4/13/2019 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 5/4/2019 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 5/27/2019 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program at the Cemetery, Lunch to follow at the American Legion (Memorial Day)
- 6/14/2018 Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- 6/15/2018 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove
- 6/16/2018 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 7/4/2018 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 7/22/2018 Summer Fest (4th Sunday in July)
- 9/8/2018 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/6/2018 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/12/2018 Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2018 Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/10/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 12/01/2018 Olive Grove Golf Course 2018 Holiday Party

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
04-05-11-20-28
(four, five, eleven, twenty, twenty-eight)
Estimated jackpot: \$64,000

Lotto America
03-17-21-35-42, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 4
(three, seventeen, twenty-one, thirty-five, forty-two; Star Ball: ten; ASB: four)
Estimated jackpot: \$3.59 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$161 million

Powerball
13-20-38-45-55, Powerball: 1, Power Play: 2
(thirteen, twenty, thirty-eight, forty-five, fifty-five; Powerball: one; Power Play: two)
Estimated jackpot: \$121 million

South Dakota corn and soybean crops in decent shape

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Corn and soybean crops in South Dakota are looking in decent shape as they emerge.

The federal Agriculture Department says in its weekly crop report that 89 percent of the corn crop and 90 percent of the soybean crop is rated fair or good.

The state's spring wheat and winter wheat crops also are rated mostly fair to good.

Topsoil moisture supplies are rated 67 percent adequate to surplus, and subsoil moisture is 65 percent in those categories.

Pasture and range conditions statewide are mostly rated fair or good.

South Dakota landowners sue county for tax refund

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Some South Dakota property owners who have been overtaxed recently are suing a northern county to claim a larger refund than offered by commissioners.

A group of agriculture landowners filed a lawsuit against Brown County seeking refunds for the 18 percent they were overtaxed for their 2017 property taxes paid this year, Aberdeen American News reported.

The move comes after hundreds of landowners paid property taxes in protest when the state Revenue Department determined earlier this year the county was overvaluing land.

"At the end of last year we got a tax bill, and that tax bill was for 118 percent of what we actually owed," said Jim Hundstad, one of the six property owners suing the county.

Landowners met with county commissioners to negotiate how to settle the issue, he said.

Brown County commissioners allotted more than \$510,000 last month for the property owners who have overpaid taxes in 15 townships. The average refund per acre came out to \$1.35.

"A lot of us thought, 'Wow, this is a slap in the face.' So we decided we'd get an attorney," Hundstad said.

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The landowners are requesting a roughly \$4 per acre refund amount, according to Hundstad. "I would hope that the county would look at our request for 18 percent and see it as reasonable. We're not going after 2016, 2015 or 2014 taxes," he said. "We were abused for a long period of time. It seems like we're asking for something that's not off the charts."

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

Former postmaster ordered to pay more than \$353,000

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man has been ordered to pay a civil judgment of more than \$353,000 for defrauding his employer — the U.S. Postal Service.

The U.S. Attorney's Office says Craig Christeson, while he was employed as a postmaster, falsely certified receipt of spoiled postage meter strips, printed and cashed money orders, and kept the money.

The Arlington man pleaded guilty to theft of government funds in 2016 and was ordered to pay nearly \$9,000 in restitution. The U.S. Attorney's Office then filed a civil action under the False Claims Act. In imposing the civil judgment, District Judge Karen Schreier noted the intentional fraud continued over a number of years.

Rapid City man who struck pedestrian pleads guilty

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City man has pleaded guilty to aggravated assault for running his car into a teenager and breaking his leg.

Twenty-year-old Lantz Apple agreed to a plea deal with prosecutors who had charged him with attempted murder. Apple admitted to striking 17-year-old Dayton Mesteth with his car last October in Pennington County. Prosecutors say Apple tried to strike the victim a second time.

The Rapid City Journal says it's not clear what motivated the incident. Apple faces up to 15 years in prison when he's sentenced on July 17.

South Dakota man found not guilty of murder due to insanity

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota judge has declared a Sioux Falls man not guilty by reason of insanity in the 2016 beating death of his friend.

The Argus Leader reports that Mark Lovejoy fought with Rodney Iron Hawk after a night of drinking in January 2016, attacking Iron Hawk in a motel parking lot and repeatedly punching him in the head.

Minnehaha County Coroner Kenneth Snell says the beating injuries that killed Iron Hawk resembled those from a major fall or a car accident. Judge Lawrence Long says Lovejoy has a history of mental illness and says two psychiatrists agreed Lovejoy wasn't sane.

Long found Lovejoy not guilty of second-degree murder due to insanity. Lovejoy will be committed to the Human Services Center in Yankton.

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

Authorities ID Iona man killed in ATV-semitrailer crash

GREGORY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified an Iona man who was killed when the ATV he was driving collided with a semitrailer in Lyman County.

The Highway Patrol says 81-year-old Vincent Svoboda turned in front of the semi on state Highway 47 north of Gregory on Saturday evening, and was struck.

Svoboda was thrown from the ATV and died at the scene. The truck driver was not hurt.

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Teen sentenced in manslaughter case that caused furor

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota teenager has been sentenced to about 1 ½ years in jail for causing a fatal crash following a drug dispute — a punishment the victim's family says is too lenient.

The Argus Leader reports that 17-year-old Alex Lingor, of Sioux Falls, was sentenced Tuesday for manslaughter in the February 2017 death of 15-year-old Kareem Cisse.

Authorities say Cisse and two others stiffed Lingor during a \$25 marijuana deal and Lingor chased after their car in his truck, hitting it and sending it crashing into a tree.

Cisse's parents say the sentence isn't adequate justice.

The judge drew criticism from the victim's family and friends last month when he granted Lingor a furlough so the boy could attend graduation. Lingor decided to skip the ceremony.

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

Barn standoff in Brown County ends peacefully after 20 hours

CLAREMONT, S.D. (AP) — A standoff involving law officers and an armed man holed up in a barn in Brown County ended peacefully after nearly 20 hours.

The American News reports the incident involved a 53-year-old man who refused to leave the barn southwest of Claremont after an alleged domestic assault. It started Monday night and ended with his arrest Tuesday afternoon. No injuries were reported.

The incident began when officers responded to a report of a drunk person who had used a vehicle to ram a family member's vehicle.

Authorities say the man had guns and threatened to harm himself. He eventually surrendered and was arrested on charges of aggravated domestic assault and intentional property damage.

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

McLaughlin man pleads not guilty in reservation child death

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A McLaughlin man accused of abusing and killing a child on the South Dakota side of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation has pleaded not guilty.

Thirty-one-year-old Kenneth Chase faces murder, child abuse and child neglect charges in federal court. He waived his right to a detention hearing and remains in custody. His trial is scheduled to begin Aug. 7.

Court documents allege Chase caused the death of a child younger than three in early April by inflicting traumatic head injuries. Authorities have not identified the child.

Chase could face life in prison if convicted.

After summit, North Korea shows Trump in new light

By ERIC TALMADGE, Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — North Koreans are getting a new look at U.S. President Donald Trump now that his summit with leader Kim Jong Un is over and it's a far cry from the "dotard" label their government slapped on him last year.

Previously, even on a good day, the best he might get was "Trump." No honorifics. No signs of respect. Now, he's being called "the president of the United States of America." Or "President Donald J. Trump."

Even "supreme leader."

The post-summit transformation of North Korea's official version of Trump, who's now being shown by the state media looking serious and almost regal, underscores the carefully choreographed reality show the government has had to perform to keep its people, taught from childhood to hate and distrust the "American imperialists," ideologically on board with the tectonic shifts underway in their country's relationship with Washington.

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With a time lag that suggests a great deal of care and thought went into the final product, the North's state-run television aired its first videos and photos of the summit on Thursday, two days after the event and a full day after Kim returned home to Pyongyang, the capital.

To be sure, the star of the show was Kim. Trump's first appearance and the now famous handshake didn't come until almost 20 minutes into the 42-minute program.

To the dramatic, almost song-like intonations of the nation's most famous newscaster, the program depicted Kim as statesmanlike beyond his years, confident and polite, quick to smile and firmly in control. He was shown allowing the older American — Trump, in his seventies, is more than twice Kim's age — to lean in toward him to shake hands, or give a thumbs up, then walking a few steps ahead to a working lunch.

Before showing the two signing their joint statement, the newscaster said Trump made a point of giving Kim a look at his armored Cadillac limousine, and noted that it is known to Americans as "the Beast." She also at one point called them the "two supreme leaders" of their countries.

The image-heavy news of Kim's trip to Singapore was presented like a chronological documentary, starting with the red-carpet send off at the Pyongyang airport on, interestingly enough, a chartered Air China flight. That was followed by video of his motorcade making its way to the St. Regis Hotel in Singapore as throngs of well-wishers waved as though awaiting a rock star, and Kim's night tour of the city-state on the summit's eve.

The state media's representation of the summit and Trump is extremely important because it gives the North Korean population, which has only limited access to other news sources, an idea not just of what's going on but also of how the government expects them to respond.

For the average North Korean, the state media's coverage of Kim's diplomatic blitz this year must seem nothing short of astonishing.

After sending a top-level delegation that included his own sister to the Winter Olympics in South Korea in February, Kim has met twice each with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Chinese President Xi Jinping and the state media have splashed all of the meetings across its front pages and newscasts — though generally a day after the fact to allow time to make sure the ideological tone is right and the images as powerful as possible.

In the run-up to the summit, the North's media softened its rhetoric so as not to spoil the atmosphere as Kim prepared to sit down with the leader of the country North Korea has maligned and lambasted for decades as the most evil place on Earth, other than perhaps Japan, its former colonial ruler.

It fired a few barrages against hard-line comments by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and National Security Adviser John Bolton and has stood ever critical of "capitalist values," but has kept direct references to Trump to a minimum. Bolton, who has been a target of Pyongyang's ire since his service in the George W. Bush administration, was introduced in the Thursday program dead-pan and shown shaking Kim's hand.

What this all means for the future is a complicated matter.

North Korea has presented Kim's diplomatic strategy as a logical next step following what he has said is the completion of his plan to develop a credible nuclear deterrent to what Pyongyang has long claimed is a policy of hostility and "nuclear blackmail" by Washington.

That was its message through the news on Thursday, which stressed that the talks with Trump would be focused on forging a relationship that is more in tune with what it called changing times — most likely meaning North Korea's new status as a nuclear weapons state — and its desire for a mechanism to ensure a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula and, finally, denuclearization.

Despite the respectful tone, there remains a clear undercurrent of caution.

Kim remains the hero in the official Pyongyang narrative. Whether Trump will be his co-star, or once again the villain, is fodder for another episode.

Talmadge is the AP's Pyongyang bureau chief. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram: @EricTalmadge.

Saudi-led forces battle Shiite rebels south of Hodeida

By JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Troops in a Saudi-led coalition captured a town south of Yemen's port city of Hodeida on Thursday as fierce fighting and airstrikes pounded the area, officials said, on the second day of an offensive to capture the strategic harbor.

Soldiers took the town of Nakhila in Yemen's ad-Durayhimi district, some 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) south of Hodeida International Airport, according to the government-run SABA news agency.

Fighters continued to move closer to the airport in fighting Thursday.

The Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's exiled government launched an assault on the port city of Hodeida (hoh-DY'-duh) on Wednesday. The Red Sea port is the main entry for food into a country already on the brink of famine.

The biggest offensive of the yearslong war in the Arab world's poorest nation has raised warnings from aid agencies that Yemen's humanitarian disaster could deepen.

The attack is aimed at driving out Iranian-aligned Shiite rebels known as Houthis, who have held Hodeida since 2015, and break the civil war's long stalemate. But it could set off a prolonged street-by-street battle that inflicts heavy casualties.

The fear is that a protracted fight could force a shutdown of Hodeida's port at a time when a halt in aid risks tipping millions into starvation. Some 70 percent of Yemen's food enters via the port, as well as the bulk of humanitarian aid and fuel supplies. Around two-thirds of the country's population of 27 million relies on aid and 8.4 million are already at risk of starving.

Early on Wednesday, convoys of vehicles headed toward the rebel-held city as heavy gunfire rang out. The assault, part of an operation dubbed "Golden Victory," began with coalition airstrikes and shelling by naval ships, according to Saudi-owned satellite news channels and state media.

Bombardment was heavy, with one aid official reporting 30 strikes in 30 minutes.

The initial battle plan appeared to involve a pincer movement. Some 2,000 troops who crossed the Red Sea from an Emirati naval base in the African nation of Eritrea were awaiting orders to move in from the west after Yemeni government forces seize Hodeida's port, Yemeni security officials said.

Emirati forces with Yemeni government troops moved in from the south near Hodeida's airport, while others sought to cut off Houthi supply lines to the east, the officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to brief journalists.

Yemen's exiled government "has exhausted all peaceful and political means to remove the Houthi militia from the port of Hodeida," it said in a statement. "Liberation of the port of Hodeida is a milestone in our struggle to regain Yemen from the militias."

Four Emirati soldiers were killed in Wednesday's assault, the United Arab Emirates' state-run news agency said, but gave no details of how they died.

The Houthi-run Al Masirah satellite news channel claimed rebel forces hit a Saudi coalition ship near Hodeida with two missiles. The Saudi-led coalition did not immediately acknowledge the incident.

Forces loyal to Yemen's exiled government and fighters led by Emirati troops had neared Hodeida in recent days. The port is some 150 kilometers (90 miles) southwest of Sanaa, Yemen's capital, which has been in Houthi hands since September 2014. The Saudi-led coalition entered the war in March 2015.

The United Nations and other aid groups already had pulled their international staff from Hodeida ahead of the assault. The U.N. Security Council was scheduled to meet Thursday to discuss the offensive.

The port has remained open, however. Several ships arrived in recent days, including oil tankers, and there was no word from the coalition or the U.N. to stop work, according to a senior port official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Aid groups nevertheless warned of disaster.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in Yemen's civil war, which has displaced 2 million others and helped spawn a cholera epidemic. Saudi-led airstrikes have killed large numbers of civilians and damaged vital infrastructure.

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The U.N. and Western nations say Iran has supplied the Houthis with weapons, from assault rifles to the ballistic missiles they have fired deep into Saudi Arabia, including at the capital, Riyadh.

The coalition has blocked most ports, letting supplies into Hodeida in coordination with the U.N. The air campaign and fighting have disrupted other supply lines, causing an economic crisis that makes food too expensive for many to afford.

Late Wednesday, the Saudi and Emirati governments announced what they called a "multi-faceted plan" to protect civilians in Hodeida, including establishing routes for food, medical supplies and oil shipments from Saudi Arabia's southern city of Jizan and the UAE's capital, Abu Dhabi.

Associated Press writer Samy Magdy in Cairo contributed to this report.

AP Investigation: Fish billed as local isn't always local

By **ROBIN MCDOWELL, MARGIE MASON and MARTHA MENDOZA, Associated Press**

MONTAUK, N.Y. (AP) — Even after winter storms left East Coast harbors thick with ice, some of the country's top chefs and trendy restaurants were offering sushi-grade tuna supposedly pulled in fresh off the coast of New York.

But it was just an illusion. No tuna was landing there. The fish had long since migrated to warmer waters.

In a global industry plagued by fraud and deceit, conscientious consumers are increasingly paying top dollar for what they believe is local, sustainably caught seafood. But even in this fast-growing niche market, companies can hide behind murky supply chains that make it difficult to determine where any given fish comes from. That's where national distributor Sea To Table stepped in, guaranteeing its products were wild and directly traceable to a U.S. dock — and sometimes the very boat that brought it in.

However, an Associated Press investigation found the company was linked to some of the same practices it vowed to fight. Preliminary DNA tests suggested some of its yellowfin tuna likely came from the other side of the world, and reporters traced the company's supply chain to migrant fishermen in foreign waters who described labor abuses, poaching and the slaughter of sharks, whales and dolphins.

The New York-based distributor was also offering species in other parts of the country that were illegal to catch, out of season and farmed.

Over the years, Sea To Table has become a darling in the sustainable seafood movement, building an impressive list of clientele, including celebrity chef Rick Bayless, Chopt Creative Salad chain, top universities and the makers of home meal kits such as HelloFresh.

"It's sad to me that this is what's going on," said Bayless, an award-winning chef who runs eight popular restaurants and hosts a PBS cooking series. He said he loved the idea of being directly tied to fishermen — and the pictures and "wonderful stories" about their catch. "This throws quite a wrench in all of that."

As part of its reporting, the AP staked out America's largest fish market, followed trucks and interviewed fishermen who worked on three continents. During a bone-chilling week, they set up a camera that shot more than 36,000 time-lapse photos of a Montauk harbor, showing no tuna boats docking. At the same time, AP worked with a chef to order fish supposedly coming from the seaside town. The boat listed on the receipt hadn't been there in at least two years.

Reporters also tracked Sea To Table's supply chain to fishermen abroad who earn as little as \$1.50 a day working 22-hour shifts without proper food and water.

"We were treated like slaves," said Sulisty, an Indonesian fisherman forced to work on a foreign trawler that delivered fish to a Sea To Table supplier. He asked that only one name be used, fearing retaliation. "They treat us like robots without any conscience."

Sea To Table owner Sean Dimin emphasized his suppliers are strictly prohibited from sending imports to customers and added violators would be terminated.

"We take this extremely seriously," he said.

Dimin said he communicated clearly with his customers that some fish labeled as freshly landed at one port was actually caught and trucked in from other states, but some chefs denied this. Federal officials

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described it as mislabeling.

A century ago, small-scale fisheries dotted America's coasts and fed the country's demand for seafood. But as time passed, overfishing, strict government regulations and outsourcing to developing countries changed the industry, making it nearly impossible for local fishermen to compete.

The U.S. seafood market is worth \$17 billion annually, with imports making up more than 90 percent of that. Experts say one in five fish is caught illegally worldwide, and a study last year by the University of California, Los Angeles and Loyola Marymount University found nearly half of all sushi samples tested in L.A. didn't match the fish advertised on the menu.

Sea To Table offered a worry-free local solution that arrived from dock to doorstep by connecting chefs directly with more than 60 partners along U.S. coasts. While its mission is clear, scaling up to a national level while naming specific boats and docks is currently unrealistic. Still, the company is predicting rapid growth from \$13 million in sales last year to \$70 million by 2020, according to a confidential investor report obtained by the AP.

As its business expanded, AP found Sea To Table has been saying one thing but selling another.

For caterers hosting a ball for Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, who had successfully pushed through a law to combat seafood mislabeling, knowing where his fish came from was crucial.

The Montauk tuna arrived with a Sea To Table leaflet describing the romantic, seaside town and an email from a salesperson saying the fish was caught off North Carolina. But the boxes came from New York and there was no indication it had been landed in another state and driven more than 700 miles to Montauk. A week later the caterer ordered the Montauk tuna again. This time the invoice listed a boat whose owner later told AP he didn't catch anything for Sea To Table at that time.

"I'm kind of in shock right now," said Brandon LaVielte of Lavish Roots Catering. "We felt like we were supporting smaller fishing villages."

Some of Sea To Table's partner docks, it turns out, are not docks at all. Their seafood was advertised as "just landed" from wholesalers and retailers like Santa Barbara Fish Market — which also has imports — and Red's Best in Boston. Both collect seafood at harbors and companies up and down their coasts.

Sea To Table also promoted fresh blue crab from Maryland in January, even though the season closed in November. In addition, the company said it never sells farmed seafood, citing concerns about antibiotics and hormones. But red abalone advertised from central California are actually grown in tanks — it's been illegal to harvest commercially from the ocean since 1997. Rhode Island and Washington state also supply aquacultured seafood, such as oysters and mussels.

Dimin said farmed shellfish "is a very small part of our business, but it's something that we're open and clear about." When asked to provide evidence that the company has been transparent about its use of farmed shellfish, he paused and then replied, "There's nothing to hide there."

However, days later, he said he decided to drop aquaculture from his business because it contradicts his "wild only" guarantee.

Private companies that mislead consumers, clients and potential investors could face lawsuits or criminal liability. Both the Food and Drug Administration and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are charged with enforcing laws to prevent fish fraud. Sellers who know, or even should have known, that fish is mislabeled could be found guilty of conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government, mail fraud and wire fraud. The crimes carry potential fines and jail time.

Carl Safina, an award-winning author and leading marine conservationist at New York's Stony Brook University, said companies that prey on consumers' good intentions "deserve to be out of business immediately."

A half dozen commercial fishermen and dealers in various regions of the country voiced concerns and, in some cases, anger about Sea To Table. Others have lashed out in the past using social media. Most spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for their safety and their businesses in an industry where relationships often overlap.

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Eric Hodge, a small-scale fisherman from Santa Barbara, said he considered partnering with Sea To Table a few years ago. He quickly changed his mind after seeing canary rockfish on the distributor's chef lists when the fish was illegal to catch. He also learned Sea To Table was buying halibut from the fish market, which relies heavily on imports. He said he spoke to the company about his concerns.

"Honestly, they know. I just don't think they care," Hodge said. "They are making money on every shipment, and they are not going to ask questions. And in seafood, that's a bad way to go about it because there is so much fraud."

The idea for Sea To Table began with a family vacation to Trinidad and Tobago more than two decades ago. Following a fishing trip there, Michael Dimin and his son, Sean, eventually started shipping fresh catch from the Caribbean nation to chefs in New York. Later, they shifted their model to work exclusively with small-scale American coastal fishermen.

Restaurants and other buyers demanding sustainable products were drawn to the company by a marketing campaign that provided a story not just about where the fish came from, but the romantic image of an American pastime. And they were willing to pay a lot — sometimes more than \$20 a pound — for high-end species.

The New York Times, National Geographic, Bon Appetit magazine and many others singled out Sea To Table as the good guys in a notoriously bad industry. Larry Olmsted, author of the bestselling book "Real Food, Fake Food," recommended it as an answer to fraud in a Forbes article.

After learning about the problems, Olmsted said he was disappointed, and that it made no difference to him if part of the business was legitimate: "It either is reliable, or it's not."

Sea To Table partnered with sustainability giants such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the Marine Stewardship Council and the James Beard Foundation, which collaborated on events and referred to the distributor as an industry favorite. They expressed concern that suppliers who knowingly mislabel catch will damage the movement.

Sea To Table's products are sold in almost every state, reaching everywhere from Roy's seafood restaurants to Tacombi taco chain. It can be found at eateries inside the Empire State Building in New York and Chicago's O'Hare airport, direct to consumers from its own website and even on Amazon for home cooks to order. In addition, more than 50 college campuses such as Yale, Ohio State and the University of Massachusetts have signed up. So have some of the biggest make-it-yourself meal kits, including Home Chef and Sun Basket, a rapidly growing market that Sea To Table says generates a third its revenues.

Whether they know it or not, a company spending money at any point in a long chain that begins with an abused fisherman and ends with a diner is inadvertently supporting the problem. Customers who responded to AP said they were frustrated and confused.

"Not ok," Ken Toong, who is responsible for UMass Dining, said of Sea To Table. "We believed them."

AP's investigation began with one of Sea To Table's nearby suppliers. Located on New York's eastern coast beyond the posh Hamptons, Bob Gosman Company opened in Montauk as a mom-and-pop clam shack more than six decades ago.

Now run by cousins Bryan and Asa Gosman, it is a small empire sitting on a multi-million dollar property. Oceanfront restaurants, shops and motels bustle with tourists in the summer. And its fish market, where 70 percent of the tuna is imported, has become one of the biggest wholesalers in the area.

Gosman's gets most of its tuna along with other species from a place in the state where fish can always be found, regardless of the season: The New Fulton Fish Market. The nine-acre refrigerated warehouse just outside Manhattan is the second-largest facility of its kind, moving millions of pounds of seafood each night, much of it flown in from across the globe.

Beautiful maroon slabs of imported high-grade tuna were on display for several nights in December, January and February, as well as other times throughout last year, when AP reporters roamed the market. The frigid building buzzed with workers on forklifts zigzagging across slick concrete floors, stacking orders waiting to be picked up.

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In the early hours, often between 2 a.m. and 4 a.m., boxes of fish bearing foreign shipping labels from all over the world were arranged into piles with "Gosman" scribbled across them in black marker. They were later hoisted onto a waiting truck with the same name.

After a three-hour drive east, the AP watched the loads arrive at the company's loading dock in Montauk, just as the sun was rising on the tip of Long Island.

The tuna, swordfish and other species were then ferried inside Gosman's warehouse. They came from Blue Ocean in Brazil, Vietnam's Hong Ngoc Seafood Co., and Land, Ice and Fish in Trinidad and Tobago. Occasionally, boxes showed up from Luen Thai Fishing Venture and Marshall Islands Fishing Venture, part of a Hong Kong-based conglomerate that's a major supplier of sushi-grade tuna. Despite recent conservation partnerships, Luen Thai has a checkered past, including shark finning and a bribery scandal that resulted in the jailing of a former Cook Islands marine resources minister in 2016.

Bryan Gosman said Sea To Table stressed it would not take imports. But with no yellowfin tuna landed in New York during the coldest winter months — which a federal official confirmed — it was impossible to provide high-quality loins from Montauk.

"So in the beginning, there were times when we were trying to hustle around fish," Gosman said. "Buying fish at different places, so it could be a legitimate business plan that they're trying to follow."

Eventually, with Dimin's blessing, Gosman said he started getting fish from as far away as North Carolina and trucking it up to New York.

They stopped that arrangement in March. Gosman said it wasn't profitable. Dimin said they wanted to avoid the "complexity of communicating" their sourcing.

Meanwhile, in the dead of winter, AP had turned to a chef to order \$500 worth of fish on their behalf. Sea To Table provided a receipt and verbal assurances that the seafood — which arrived overnight in a box bearing the company's name and logo — had been landed in Montauk the day before.

The invoice even listed the "Standin Up" as the boat that caught it. But the vessel's owner said it was in another state at the time, hundreds of miles away.

"I know my name is being used," said Robert Devlin, who was upset by the news. "A lot of people do fraud that way."

The AP also shipped tuna samples supposedly from Montauk to two labs for analysis: Preliminary DNA testing suggested the fish likely came from the Indian Ocean or the Western Central Pacific. There are limitations with the data because using genetic markers to determine the origins of species is still an emerging science, but experts say the promising new research will eventually be used to help fight illegal activity in the industry.

Bryan Gosman said they keep Sea To Table's fish separate, but acknowledged there's always a chance some imported tuna can slip through with domestic.

"Can things get mixed up? It could get mixed up," he said. "Is it an intentional thing? No, not at all."

The investigation didn't end in Montauk. One of the boxes in Gosman's stack at the Fulton fish market was stamped with a little blue tuna logo above the words "Land, Ice and Fish," out of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is where the AP traced companies in Sea To Table's supply chain to slave-like working conditions and the destruction of marine life.

The global seafood industry is known for providing cheap fish that comes with another price. Unscrupulous foreign companies operate with virtually no oversight in vast swaths of international waters, as AP reported in a series of stories in 2015. Those reports helped free more than 2,000 enslaved fishermen in Indonesia.

Though it's nearly impossible to tell where a specific fish ends up, or what percentage of a company's seafood is fraudulent, experts say even one bad piece taints the entire supply chain.

On learning that Sea To Table's supply chain could be tracked to businesses engaged in labor and environmental abuses, Dimin said it was "abhorrent and everything we stand against."

He said he was temporarily suspending operations with two partners to conduct an audit.

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During the investigation, reporters interviewed and obtained written complaints from more than a dozen current and former Indonesian fishermen — including Sulistyo — who were connected to companies in Sea To Table's supply chain.

Sulistyo said his trawler plied waters between Africa and the Caribbean. Occasionally, it stopped in Trinidad and unloaded swordfish, yellowfin and bigeye tuna at Land, Ice and Fish.

Some crew members who docked there said they were beaten and forced to work when they were sick or hurt. At times, they said, migrant workers died on board and were tossed in the freezer with their catch while the boat continued to fish.

"You are out 500 miles or a thousand miles from shore, he is the law at that point," John Duberg of Land, Ice and Fish said of individual captains. "And if he feels he has a misbehaving crew member, he may have to take disciplinary actions."

Marine life was treated with even less respect. Some men said they were ordered to pull in as many sharks as they could catch and slice off their fins, which are a delicacy in Asia. The bodies were tossed back into the ocean, a practice banned by many countries.

Whales also were killed, their heads sometimes chopped off and their teeth extracted as good luck charms. The workers showed photos and videos of fishermen posing with mutilated sharks and whales. While some men appeared to be celebrating, others said it left them feeling sickened.

Sulistyo endured the abuse and long hours for a year before jumping to another ship in 2017, demanding to be taken to port. He returned to Indonesia and was classified as a victim of trafficking by the International Organization for Migration.

After hearing that just 30 pounds of tuna could be sold in America for more than \$600 — the amount Sulistyo earned during his entire year of work — he stared at the ground in disgust.

"I want to say to the Americans who eat that fish, please appreciate what we did to catch this fish with our sweat, with our lives," Sulistyo said. "Please remember that."

AP journalists Julie Jacobson in New York and Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia contributed to this report.

US seeks to assuage Asian allies after North Korea summit

By **JOSH LEDERMAN** and **CHRISTOPHER BODEEN**, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The United States and its Asian allies worked Thursday to paper over any semblance of disagreement over President Donald Trump's concession to Kim Jong Un that the U.S. will halt military exercises with South Korea, with Trump's top diplomat insisting the president hadn't backed down from his firm line on North Korea's nukes.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, meeting with top South Korean and Japanese diplomats, put a more sober spin on several moves by Trump after his summit with Kim that had fueled unease in Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. He said Trump's curious claim that the North's nuclear threat was over was issued with "eyes wide open," and brushed off a North Korean state-run media report suggesting Trump would grant concessions even before the North fully rids itself of nuclear weapons.

"We're going to get denuclearization," Pompeo said in the South Korean capital. "Only then will there be relief from the sanctions."

Pompeo flew from Seoul to China's capital, Beijing, later Thursday for a meeting with President Xi Jinping, whose country is believed to wield considerable influence with North Korea as its chief ally and economic lifeline. Pompeo was also due to meet with top diplomats and hold a joint news conference with Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

At a daily briefing, foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang reiterated China's support for a political settlement, while also pointing to an eventual lifting of United Nations Security Council economic sanctions.

"We believe that the sanctions themselves are not the end," Geng said.

China has been praised by Trump for ramping up economic pressure on the North that the U.S. believes

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helped coax Kim to the negotiating table.

On the joint U.S.-South Korea drills that Trump — after meeting Kim — said would be terminated, Pompeo emphasized a key caveat: If the mercurial North Korean leader stops negotiating in good faith, the “war games” will be back on.

The words of reassurance from Pompeo came as diplomacy continued at an intense pace after Tuesday’s summit in Singapore, the first between a sitting American president and North Korea’s leader in six decades of hostility. In the village of Panmunjom along the North-South border, the rival Koreas on Thursday held their first high-level military talks since 2007, focused on reducing tensions across their heavily fortified border.

Yet even as U.S. and South Korean officials sought to parlay the momentum from the dramatic summit into more progress on the nuclear issue, there were persistent questions about whether Trump had given away too much in return for too little.

Trump’s announcement minutes after the summit’s conclusion that he would halt the “provocative” joint military drills were a shock to South Korea and caught much of the U.S. military off guard, too. Pyongyang has long sought an end to the exercises it considers rehearsals for an invasion, but U.S. treaty allies Japan and South Korea view them as critical elements of their own national security.

So Pompeo had some explaining to do as he traveled to Seoul to brief the allies on what transpired in Singapore.

In public, at least, South Korea’s leader cast the summit’s outcome as positive during a short meeting with Pompeo at the Blue House, South Korea’s presidential palace. President Moon Jae-in, an avowed supporter of engagement with North Korea, called it “a truly historic feat” that had “moved us from the era of hostility towards the era of dialogue, of peace and prosperity.”

Still, there were signs as Pompeo met later with the top Japanese and South Korean diplomats that concerns about the freeze had not been fully resolved. South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, speaking in Korean, told reporters afterward that the military drills issue “was not discussed in depth.”

“This is a matter that military officials from South Korea and the United States will have to discuss further and coordinate,” Kang said.

The U.S. has stationed combat troops in South Korea since the end of the Korean War and has used them in a variety of drills. The next scheduled major exercise, involving tens of thousands of troops, normally would be held in August.

The summit in Singapore did mark a reduction in tensions — a sea change from last fall, when North Korea was conducting nuclear and missile tests, and Trump and Kim were trading threats and insults that stoked fears of war.

Kim is now promising to work toward a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and state media heralded the meeting as victorious, with photos of Kim standing side-by-side with Trump on the world stage splashed across newspapers in Pyongyang. On Thursday, North Koreans finally got a glimpse of video of Trump and Kim together, as official Korean Central Television broadcast the first footage of Kim’s trip to Singapore.

Trump seemed equally ecstatic. As he landed Wednesday in Washington following the summit, he declared on Twitter that America and the world can “sleep well tonight.”

“There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea,” Trump wrote, even though North Korea has yet to give up any of its fissile material, estimated by independent experts to be enough for between about a dozen and 60 nuclear bombs.

Pompeo rejected the suggestion that Trump’s Pollyannaish assertion was premature. He said Trump was proceeding “with eyes wide open” to the prospect that diplomacy may falter, and that Trump was merely reflecting the historic nature of his confab with Kim. The Korean War ended in 1953 without a peace treaty, leaving the United States and North Korea in a technical state of war.

With the Trump-Kim summit concluded, the baton was being passed to lower-level U.S. and North Korean officials, who Pompeo said would likely resume meeting as early as the next week to hash out details of a disarmament deal, sure to be a complex and contentious process. He said the U.S. was hopeful North

Korea would take "major" disarmament steps before the end of Trump's first term in office, which concludes in January 2021.

In the brief, four-point joint statement signed at the summit, North Korea committed "to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" — a promise it has made and reneged on several times in the past 25 years.

The statement made no mention of verification, despite Trump's longstanding insistence on "complete, verifiable and irreversible" denuclearization. But Pompeo bristled at reporters who pressed him about that apparent omission, calling questions on the topic "insulting and ridiculous."

The omission is irrelevant, Pompeo said, adding that he was confident the North Koreans fully understood that verification would be a necessity. He pointed out that the statement makes reference to a previous agreement that did mention verification, and argued that as a result, the Trump-Kim statement automatically "incorporates" verification without having to state it outright.

Lederman reported from Seoul. Associated Press writers Kim Tong-hyung and Youkyung Lee in Seoul, Gillian Wong in Beijing, Matthew Pennington in Washington and Ken Moritsugu in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Follow AP's summit coverage here: <http://apne.ws/MPbJ5Tv>

Report on FBI actions in Clinton email case set for release

By ERIC TUCKER and CHAD DAY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department's internal watchdog is expected to criticize the FBI's handling of the Hillary Clinton email investigation, stepping into a political minefield while examining how a determinedly nonpartisan law enforcement agency came to be entangled in the 2016 presidential race.

The inspector general's report is set for release Thursday afternoon. It's likely to be painstakingly detailed, the culmination of an 18-month review into one of the most consequential FBI investigations in recent history.

President Donald Trump will look to the inspector general report to provide a fresh line of attack against two former top FBI officials, Director James Comey and his deputy, Andrew McCabe, as he claims that a politically tainted bureau tried to undermine his campaign and, through the Russia investigation, his presidency. Trump will almost certainly use the report to validate his firing of Comey last year.

But the report could do more to back Democratic claims that the FBI contributed to Clinton's defeat, most notably by reopening in the final days of the race its investigation into whether she mishandled classified information. That development unfolded as Trump's own campaign — unbeknownst at the time to the American public — also came under FBI investigation for possible coordination with Russia.

Inspector General Michael Horowitz, a former federal prosecutor appointed by President Barack Obama, prepared the report. Supporters from both parties regard him as apolitical. His most significant report before this one was the 2012 study of the botched Obama-era gun operation known as Fast and Furious.

The Clinton report will examine key actions by FBI leaders. Those include Comey's decision to publicly announce in July 2016 his recommendation against criminal charges for Clinton, and his disclosure to Congress days before the election that the investigation was being revived because of newly discovered emails.

People familiar with the report's findings say the inspector general has reached unflattering conclusions for many FBI officials. They were not authorized to discuss the report by name ahead of its release and requested anonymity. An earlier inspector general report criticized McCabe and led to his firing on allegations that he misled internal investigators about his role in a news media disclosure. He denies those charges.

Trump, seeking to discredit special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, has eagerly awaited the report in hopes that it would skewer the judgment of Comey and make clear that his termination — central to the question of whether the president sought to obstruct justice — was justified. The White House initially

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pointed to Comey's handling of the Clinton investigation as the rationale for the firing, though Trump complicated that claim days later when he said he was thinking of "this Russia thing" when he dismissed him.

Though Trump has repeatedly lambasted the FBI as politically biased against him, the inspector general's report — no matter how critical — is unlikely to endorse that conclusion, especially since some of the actions being examined broke from protocol in ways that may have harmed Clinton.

Comey's news conference disclosing the investigation's conclusion was unusual since charging announcements are normally made by the Justice Department, not the FBI. Cases that end without charges are rarely discussed publicly.

In this instance, Comey said that though the FBI found Clinton and her aides to be "extremely careless" in handling classified material, "no reasonable prosecutor" could have brought a case against her. At a congressional hearing last May, he said he was concerned that the Justice Department could not "credibly" announce the conclusion of its investigation, in part because the attorney general at the time, Loretta Lynch, had met aboard her plane with former President Bill Clinton.

Lynch described the meeting as a chance encounter unrelated to the case, but Clinton's critics seized on it to question her objectivity.

Also investigated was Comey's decision, against the recommendation of the Justice Department, to reveal to Congress that the FBI was reopening the investigation following the discovery of new emails. The FBI obtained a warrant nine days before the presidential election to review those emails, found on the laptop of former Rep. Anthony Weiner, and ultimately determined that there was nothing in them that changed its original conclusion.

Again, Clinton aides, Democrats and former Justice Department officials from both parties criticized Comey, saying he should not have publicly discussed an investigative action especially before he knew whether the emails were significant. People familiar with the report say it criticizes the FBI for not moving quickly enough to review the new emails.

Comey has said he felt compelled to alert Congress to the new emails, after having previously testified that the investigation was done.

Comey said he faced the tough choice of speaking out or concealing the information. "And I could be wrong, but we honestly made a decision between those two choices that even in hindsight — and this has been one of the world's most painful experiences — I would make the same decision."

During the inspector general's probe, officials discovered anti-Trump text messages between an FBI lawyer and an agent on the Clinton case who was later assigned to Mueller's team. That agent, Peter Strzok, was removed from the team once the texts were brought to Mueller's attention.

The investigation also looked at whether McCabe should have recused himself from the Clinton case since his wife received campaign contributions from the political action committee of then-Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, a Clinton ally, in her failed state Senate run.

The FBI has said that McCabe received ethics approvals and did not oversee the Clinton investigation at the time of the contributions. Trump has repeatedly cited the contributions in denouncing McCabe.

Trump claim raises eyebrows: NKorea no longer a nuke threat?

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — America and the world can "sleep well tonight," President Donald Trump declared on Wednesday, boasting that his summit with Kim Jong Un had ended any nuclear threat from North Korea though the meeting produced no details on how or when weapons might be eliminated or even reduced.

While Trump claimed a historic breakthrough at the most significant diplomatic event of his presidency, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, was more measured. He said that Trump's tweet was made "with eyes wide open" to the possibility diplomacy could falter, and that the U.S. wants North Korea to take "major" nuclear disarmament steps within the next two years — before the end of Trump's first term in 2021.

And while North Korean state media had claimed that Trump and Kim agreed to "step-by-step" actions — an apparent euphemism for phased sanctions relief in exchange for phased denuclearization — Pompeo

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ruled that out. He insisted that Trump had been explicit about the sequencing from the start.

"We're going to get denuclearization," Pompeo said. "Only then will there be relief from the sanctions."

Shortly after arriving in Seoul to brief U.S. treaty allies Japan and South Korea, Pompeo also cautioned that the U.S. would resume "war games" with close ally South Korea if the North stops negotiating in good faith.

The president had announced a halt in the drills after his meeting with Kim on Tuesday, a concession long sought by Pyongyang but generally opposed by Seoul and Tokyo. After a three-way meeting with Pompeo and Japan's top diplomat, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha suggested the U.S. still had some explaining to do, telling reporters that the issue of the drills "was not discussed in depth."

"This is a matter that military officials from South Korea and the United States will have to discuss further and coordinate," Kang said in Korean.

The summit in Singapore did mark a reduction in tensions — a sea change from last fall, when North Korea was conducting nuclear and missile tests and Trump and Kim were trading threats and insults that stoked fears of war. Kim is now promising to work toward a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

But the details of what is sure to be a complex and contentious process have yet to be settled.

Despite the uncertainties, Trump talked up the outcome of what was the first meeting between a U.S. and North Korean leader in six decades of hostility. The Korean War ended in 1953 without a peace treaty, leaving the two sides in a technical state of war.

"Just landed - a long trip, but everybody can now feel much safer than the day I took office," Trump tweeted early Wednesday. "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea. Meeting with Kim Jong Un was an interesting and very positive experience. North Korea has great potential for the future!"

Pompeo said the brief, four-point joint statement that emerged from the summit did not encapsulate all the progress the U.S. and North Korea had made. He said negotiations would recommence "in the next week or so."

He bristled at questions from reporters about the vague wording of the statement where North Korea "commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" — a promise it has made several times before in the past 25 years and reneged on. Although Trump before the summit had insisted on "complete, verifiable and irreversible" denuclearization, the deal he signed with Kim made no mention of those last two conditions.

Irrelevant, Pompeo argued Thursday in Seoul, noting that because the deal makes reference to a previous agreement that did include verification, it automatically "incorporates" verification without having to state it outright.

On Thursday, the rival Koreas held rare high-level military talks to discuss reducing tensions across their heavily fortified border. It's possible North Korean officials will seek a firm commitment from the South on stopping its military drills with the United States.

Seoul's Defense Ministry said the talks would focus on carrying out agreements from a summit between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in where they vowed to take materialized steps to reduce military tensions and eliminate the danger of war.

In public, at least, South Korea's leader sought to put a positive spin on the summit's outcome. Meeting briefly with Pompeo on Thursday morning, Moon said he was eager to hear how the United States and North Korea could "fully and expeditiously implement this great agreement."

"The summit was a truly historic feat which moved us from the era of hostility towards the era of dialogue, of peace and prosperity," Moon said through a translator

Pompeo, the former CIA director, planned to fly to Beijing later Thursday to update the Chinese government about the talks.

While Trump was facing questions at home and among allies about whether he gave away too much in return for too little, North Korean state media heralded claims of a victorious meeting with the U.S. president. Photos of Kim standing side-by-side with Trump on the world stage were splashed across newspapers.

Trump's own chest-thumping tweet seemed reminiscent of the "Mission Accomplished" banner flown behind President George W. Bush in 2003 when he spoke aboard a Navy ship following the U.S. invasion

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of Iraq. The words came back to haunt the administration, as the war dragged on throughout Bush's presidency.

Trump's claim that North Korea no longer poses a nuclear threat is questionable considering Pyongyang's significant weapons arsenal.

Independent experts say the North could have enough fissile material for between about a dozen and 60 nuclear bombs. Last year it tested long-range missiles that could reach the U.S. mainland, although it remains unclear if it has mastered the technology to deliver a nuclear warhead that could re-enter the atmosphere and hit its target.

"Before taking office people were assuming that we were going to War with North Korea," Trump tweeted. "President (Barack) Obama said that North Korea was our biggest and most dangerous problem. No longer - sleep well tonight!"

Actually, concerns about North Korean missiles and nuclear weapons reached a peak last year, during Trump's first year in office, as the North conducted more tests and Trump and Kim aimed ever more fiery rhetoric at each other.

Christopher Hill, chief U.S. negotiator with North Korea in the George W. Bush administration, suggested in an interview that it's "a little premature" for Trump to say Kim is someone the U.S. can trust.

"Kim Jong Un has proved to be a pretty ruthless leader in North Korea, and I'm not sure this sort of speed dating of a 45-minute one-on-one meeting ... would suggest that there's nothing to be concerned about," he said.

Freezing the regular military exercises with South Korea is a major concession to North Korea that has long claimed the drills were invasion preparations. Trump's announcement appeared to catch the Pentagon and officials in Seoul off guard, and some South Koreans were alarmed. Trump cast the decision as a cost-saving measure, but also called the exercises "inappropriate" while talks continue.

Pompeo, speaking to reporters just after he arrived in Seoul, said he was there when Trump talked about it with Kim, and the president "made very clear" that the condition for the freeze was that good-faith talks be ongoing. He told reporters that if the U.S. concludes they no longer are, the freeze "will no longer be in effect."

"He was unambiguous about that," Pompeo said.

In North Korea on Wednesday, Pyongyang's first reports on the summit stressed to the nation's people that Trump had agreed to Kim's demand to halt the military exercises and suggested that Trump also said he would lift sanctions as negotiations progressed.

"President Trump appreciated that an atmosphere of peace and stability was created on the Korean Peninsula and in the region, although distressed with the extreme danger of armed clash only a few months ago, thanks to the proactive peace-loving measures taken by the respected Supreme Leader from the outset of this year," the North's state-run Korean Central News Agency said in a summary of the meeting.

In Japan, the prospect of canceled U.S.-South Korean drills was met with concern.

"The U.S.-South Korea joint exercises and U.S. forces in South Korea play significant roles for the security in East Asia," Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera told reporters Wednesday. He said he planned to continue sharing the view with Washington and Seoul.

The U.S. has stationed combat troops in South Korea since the end of the Korean War and has used them in a variety of drills. The next scheduled major exercise, involving tens of thousands of troops, normally would be held in August.

Lederman reported from Seoul, South Korea. Anne Flaherty and Noreen Nasir in Washington, Foster Klug and Adam Schreck in Singapore, Eric Talmadge in Pyongyang, Kim Tong-hyung and Youkyung Lee in Seoul, and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed.

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House GOP leaders kick around various immigration proposals

By LISA MASCARO and ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republican leaders are trying to craft legislation on immigration issues that have stalled in Congress for years, the outcome of a truce between the party's conservative and moderate factions.

The measure is a work in progress, though leaders hope to unveil it soon. So far, it's hewing close enough to President Donald Trump's immigration agenda that Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., says the president is supportive of the approach.

Some of the proposals being considered, according to public comments by lawmakers and information from GOP aides who discussed the private talks on condition of anonymity:

NEW MERIT-BASED VISA CATEGORY

Republicans are considering a new merit-based visa category that would assign points to applicants based on various factors, such as education or military service. It would be available to the young "Dreamer" immigrants as well as other immigrants.

The Dreamers number up to 1.8 million young people living in the U.S. illegally since childhood. Some 700,000 participate in the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. Those who don't participate in the program never signed up for DACA or didn't qualify at the time because of their age or other factors, including when they arrived in the U.S.

The new merit-based visas would be valid for several years, and if immigrants remain in good standing they could eventually gain permanent legal status through a green card. As in the current system, those with green cards can become eligible to apply for citizenship. The path would take about 10 years, one GOP aide said.

NEW RESTRICTIONS ON LEGAL IMMIGRATION

To make up for the increased number of immigrants through the new merit system, there would be new restrictions on legal immigration. Among them would be an end to the diversity visa lottery, which now allows some 50,000 immigrants a year to gain legal status, many of them coming from nations in Africa. There would also be new limits on visas for extended family members, including siblings and adult children of new immigrants, the aide said.

TOTAL FUNDING FOR BORDER WALL

The full \$25 billion Trump has sought for the border wall with Mexico, with all the money provided up front, rather than doled out over several years.

PREVENTING FAMILY SEPARATIONS AT BORDER

Lawmakers are considering ways to prevent family separations, which have increased during the Trump administration. It is unclear what approach the legislation will take.

One idea is to revisit longstanding rules under the so-called Flores agreement, a decades-old legal settlement that prevents children who enter the country illegally from being held in custody for long periods. Critics say that leaves few options but to separate families as parents are being detained. The White House wants to change the rules. But advocates for immigrants have warned against simply allowing longer detentions for the kids.

OTHER PROPOSALS

A range of other ideas remain in flux including provisions that would make it easier to deport immigrants who commit crimes and to end to the practice of releasing those immigrants who are here illegally but commit smaller or misdemeanor offenses.

Separately, lawmakers are beginning to craft legislation that would deal with immigrant agricultural workers as well as stiffer requirements for workplaces to comply with the employment verification system. That bill is not expected until July.

Videos show Vegas police helping people duck, escape gunfire

By KEN RITTER, Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Some of the first Las Vegas police officers to respond to the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history huddled with people taking cover, organized escape routes, carried wounded victims to safety and ducked behind barriers as bullets rained around them, according to video released Wednesday.

"It's coming from the Mandalay Bay!" an officer is heard saying on one video.

"Stay down!" he tells unseen people during bursts of rapid gunfire, while a dispatcher on his police radio says multiple people have gunshot wounds. "Over here! Get behind the police car!"

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department released 28 clips of police body-camera video ranging from a few seconds to more than two hours, totaling about 10 hours of footage. It was the sixth batch of information released under court order in a public records lawsuit from media organizations, including The Associated Press.

Names of the officers were not provided. Police and the FBI have declined to comment on any of the material released months after the Oct. 1 shooting, which killed 58 people and injured hundreds of others attending an outdoor concert.

Video, audio and documents have not shed light on a motive for the massacre. Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo, the elected head of the Police Department, has said the investigation has not identified one.

One 28-minute clip shows an officer helping terrified concertgoers duck beneath the stage of the country music festival on the Las Vegas Strip to escape helicopter-sounding gunfire. He carried a wounded woman to a makeshift triage center in a parking lot, banding her bleeding leg with a tourniquet and driving her to a hospital.

"You gotta go! We're in the firing zone! He can see us from here!" the unidentified officer tells people near the stage after the concert turned to chaos.

Another clip has a radio dispatcher reporting "multiple casualties" before an officer parks and jumps from his patrol vehicle. He and other officers use it as a shield from the gunfire.

More shots are fired, and someone among the officers says, "I'm down, I got shot!"

Another video, lasting about 30 minutes and not identified with a time stamp, shows officers in a hallway outside the Mandalay Bay hotel suite where authorities say gunman Stephen Paddock killed himself before police reached him. The back of an officer's hand was sweating as he uncaps a bottle of water.

Another snippet shows the view from the collar of a male officer armed with a rifle while he and other officers search the hotel's casino floor.

The department also released 511 additional audio clips from 911 calls — a similar number to those made public last week.

In one, an unidentified man whispers to an emergency dispatcher that he's hiding in a broom closet at the Planet Hollywood resort, several blocks away from the shooting.

"We want to know if it's safe," he says in the call time-stamped two hours and 30 minutes after the gunfire began.

The information released by police has provided sometimes graphic and heartbreaking details of people screaming for help, falling during rapid gunfire and helping each other escape the carnage as gunfire rained down from the windows of a hotel room on the 32nd floor.

Newly released video bolstered written reports from officers who raced from casino to casino on the Las Vegas Strip debunking reports of multiple shooters and bomb threats.

A preliminary police report released in January said Paddock, a 64-year-old high-stakes gambler, researched police SWAT tactics, rented hotel rooms overlooking other outdoor concerts and investigated potential targets in at least four U.S. cities.

Lombardo has said he expects a final investigative report will be released next month. The FBI plans to release a report by the anniversary of the shooting.

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Big hurdles for bold push to split California into 3 states

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE, Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Californians will face a choice this November of whether to divide the nation's most populous state into three, an effort that would radically shake up not only the West Coast, but the entire nation.

The "Cal 3" initiative is driven by venture capitalist Tim Draper, who has tried and failed in the past to place an effort to break up California on the ballot, including a bid in 2016 to create six separate states. Backers of the measure argue California has become "ungovernable" because of its economic and geographic diversity as well as its population approaching 40 million people.

Election officials say this year's effort gathered the roughly 365,000 signatures it needed to land on the general election ballot. It will be officially certified later this month. Even if it wins passage from voters, the measure would face significant hurdles.

THE SPLIT

California would break into three states — Northern California, California and Southern California. The measure aims to create states with relatively equal populations and economic strengths.

The new Northern California would include 40 counties, including Sacramento, San Jose and San Francisco as well as the state's wine country and rural northern areas.

Keeping the name California would be a group of six counties centered around Los Angeles, with a total population of 12.3 million people.

Southern California, meanwhile, would include Orange and San Diego Counties as well what's now known as California's Central Valley and Inland Empire.

NATIONAL REACH

It's not just California that would feel the effects of such a change.

Turning one state into three would create four new U.S. senators, a move that would significantly boost Californians' influence in Washington. The number of representatives in the U.S. House could change slightly based on each state's population breakdown. Three separate Californias would also shake up the Electoral College, which picks the president.

Although California as it exists today is heavily Democratic, one of the new Californias might not be. The newly proposed Southern California includes traditionally Republican areas such as Orange County. Democratic voters currently edge out Republicans in the 12 counties, but not by much. That could potentially boost the GOP's West Coast representation in Congress.

WHO'S BEHIND IT

Draper is a Silicon Valley venture capitalist known for investing in companies such as Skype, Tesla and Hotmail and has poured millions of dollars into efforts to break up California.

Draper argues that California has become "nearly ungovernable" because of its diverse economies and population. He and backers also argue that voters outside of large urban areas such as Los Angeles are underserved in Sacramento because so many state lawmakers come from major cities.

"Breaking the states into three smaller, more manageable states means those states will be more responsible and more responsive," said Peggy Grande, a Cal 3 spokeswoman.

WHO DECIDES

Passing at the ballot box is just the first hurdle. That would require support from a simple majority of voters.

The measure then directs the governor to ask Congress for the ultimate OK — likely a tall order. If Congress gave a green light, it would then be up the Legislature to determine exactly how the split would happen, including how the state's debts would be divided. Each of the three states would determine their own governance structure.

Lawmakers would only have 12 months after congressional approval to set the new rules; otherwise the state's debts would automatically split between the three new ones.

Beyond those difficulties, lawsuits would surely follow.

WHAT CRITICS SAY

Critics of the measure take a different tack, calling it an unworkable and costly approach to solving California's problems.

An opposition effort called OneCalifornia argues the proposal would cause "political chaos" and greater inequality. The California Chamber of Commerce, meanwhile, said such a monumental change would be costly and complicated, which would only serve to create new problems.

Lt. Gov Gavin Newsom, the Democratic nominee for governor, said Tuesday he opposes the measure.

Worker protections seen at risk in Trump health care shift

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration's latest move against "Obamacare" could jeopardize legal protections on pre-existing medical conditions for millions of people with employer coverage, particularly workers in small businesses, say law and insurance experts.

At issue is Attorney General Jeff Sessions' recent decision that the Justice Department will no longer defend key parts of the Obama-era Affordable Care Act in court. That includes the law's unpopular requirement to carry health insurance, but also widely supported provisions that protect people with pre-existing medical conditions and limit what insurers can charge older, sicker customers.

Two independent experts said Wednesday that the administration appears to be taking aim at provisions of the ACA that protect people in employer plans, not only the smaller pool of consumers who buy a policy directly from an insurer. The new Trump administration position was outlined last week in a legal brief filed by the Justice Department in a Texas case challenging the Obama health law.

Workers "could face the prospect of insurance that doesn't cover their pre-existing conditions when they enroll in a plan with a new employer," said Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

University of Michigan law professor Nicholas Bagley said the administration does not appear to have thought through all the consequences of moving against one provision of a health law that has many complicated interlocking parts.

"The lack of care on the brief is jaw-dropping," said Bagley, who supports the Obama health law but considers himself a "free agent" critic of both sides. "There is no question that the Trump administration has to clarify what the scope of its injunction would be and grapple with the consequences of mowing down parts of the ACA.

"For someone with a pre-existing condition thinking about switching jobs, the answer to the question could make a life-changing difference," added Bagley.

Both Bagley and Levitt said their questions about the administration's intentions arose from language in the Justice Department brief that specifically singles out sections of the health law that apply to employer plans. The ACA strengthened previous protections already in federal law that limited the circumstances and length of time under which an employer could exclude coverage for a worker's pre-existing health problems.

The Trump administration had no immediate rebuttal to the issues raised by the two experts.

Instead, the Health and Human Services Department pointed to comments earlier in the week by Secretary Alex Azar, who told senators that the Justice Department brief was a legal and constitutional argument, not a policy statement.

"We share the view of working to ensure that individuals with pre-existing conditions can have access to affordable health insurance," Azar said. "The president has always shared that and we look forward to working with Congress under all circumstances towards achieving that."

Nearly 160 million workers and family members have coverage through employers, although the number covered by small employers is much smaller.

A health policy expert with a business organization that represents large employers said he doubted there would be much of an impact on major companies, which are better able to pool risk and have long been accustomed to covering all employees regardless of health issues.

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"There will not be a change with anyone who is with a very large employer," said James Gelfand of the ERISA Industry Committee, as the group is known. ERISA is the name of a federal law that governs employee benefits for big companies.

However, Gelfand said the impact could "spill over" to small businesses.

Separately, senior Republicans in Congress are wasting no time in trying to distance themselves from any effort by the administration to undermine popular protections for their constituents. Democrats are accusing Republicans of yet another effort to "sabotage" coverage, and plan to take the issue into the fall midterm elections.

"No American should be denied health coverage based on their pre-existing medical conditions," Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said Wednesday. Hatch chairs the Finance Committee, which oversees health care and tax law. He supported repeal of the ACA's insurance mandate, but draws a line on pre-existing conditions.

"Everybody I know in the Senate — everybody — is in favor of maintaining coverage for pre-existing conditions," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, earlier in the week. "There's no difference of opinion about that whatsoever."

Added Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., "There's no way Congress is going to repeal protections for people with pre-existing conditions who want to buy health insurance. The Justice Department argument in the Texas case is as far-fetched as any I've ever heard."

The lawsuit, filed in February by Texas and other GOP-led states, is in many ways a replay of the politically divided litigation that ended with the Supreme Court upholding the health care overhaul in 2012. In this case, California is leading a group of Democrat-led states in defending the law.

The Trump administration's stance is a rare departure from the Justice Department's practice of defending federal laws in court.

Primary election lesson for GOP: Don't cross the president

By LISA MASCARO and MEG KINNARD, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Don't cross President Donald Trump.

That's the lesson many Republicans are drawing from Rep. Mark Sanford's surprise defeat Tuesday in his primary election in South Carolina. The victor, state Rep. Katie Arrington, repeatedly highlighted Sanford's criticism of the president.

The outcome is a cautionary tale for Republicans in Congress who try to work with Trump while also maintaining their independence. One wrong turn — or in Sanford's case, many — and they could face the wrath of a president who is quick to attack detractors as enemies, even in his own party.

"That's ultimately what the race devolved down to, which was, was I Trump enough?" Sanford told reporters on Capitol Hill.

"It's a very tribal environment right now," he said. "Are you for or against Trump?"

He said he hoped his defeat would not dissuade other members from speaking out against Trump. Agreeing to disagree is "a sign of health in our political system."

Sanford is the second incumbent House Republican to lose a primary this year, though the defeat of Rep. Robert Pittenger in North Carolina came despite his staunch support for the president.

Still, Sanford is only the latest casualty in the intra-party conflict that has roiled the GOP in the Trump era. Trump is known to remember slights from lawmakers.

Rep. Martha Roby, for example, was forced into a runoff last week in Alabama after her opponents seized on her own rift with the president. In 2016, after the release of a tape in which candidate Trump bragged about grabbing women, Roby said she wouldn't vote for him for president.

Recent results have a message, said Rep. Barry Loudermilk in neighboring Georgia. Be a team player or Trump will support someone who will be.

"It doesn't make me nervous, but it probably gives pause to some who want to openly criticize the president," he said.

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Trump celebrated Sanford's defeat on Twitter, claiming success in ousting a foe. In a highly unusual move for a president, he had tweeted an endorsement of Arrington on Tuesday afternoon when polls were still open in South Carolina.

"My political representatives didn't want me to get involved in the Mark Sanford primary thinking that Sanford would easily win - but with a few hours left I felt that Katie was such a good candidate, and Sanford was so bad, I had to give it a shot," he said.

The transformation of the GOP under Trump makes some lawmakers uneasy.

It's "becoming a cultish thing, isn't it?" said retiring Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, who has an on-off relationship with Trump. "And it's not a good place for any party to end up with a cult-like situation."

To be sure, the president's track record of picking winners and losers in elections is not perfect. He also backed Gov. Henry McMaster, who replaced Nikki Haley in South Carolina, but McMaster was forced into a primary runoff with Greenville businessman John Warren.

And Trump famously backed Roy Moore, the former Alabama judge accused of sexual misconduct with teenage girls, in a special election earlier this year that delivered the state's first Democrat to the U.S. Senate in a generation.

But Trump's preference for populist candidates like Corey Stewart, the Confederate-statue-supporting Republican who won the GOP nomination for Senate in Virginia on Tuesday, increasingly seems to be remaking the GOP, if not Congress, in his image. Stewart will face Sen. Tim Kaine, the Democratic Party's 2016 vice presidential nominee, in the fall.

As former Speaker John Boehner said recently, "There is no Republican Party. There's a Trump Party."

Recent polls have found that more than 80 percent of Republican voters approve of the job Trump is doing, and that makes GOP lawmakers hesitant to criticize him.

"Yes, of course it's his party," said Doug Heye, a former top House GOP leadership aide who is now a party strategist. "That's only more true today, given his high popularity among Republican voters."

He said lawmakers would be wise to keep their differences with the president low-key and within the range of policy, not personality, so as not to alienate Republican primary voters protective of the commander in chief. "What they will not support is someone they view as going after the president personally," Heye said.

Sanford, the former South Carolina governor, had never lost an election before Tuesday, even after a high-profile extramarital affair with a woman in Argentina. But he was never a strong Trump fan.

He demurred during the run-up to the 2016 election when asked if he'd support Trump and spoke out against the president after the election on issues such as limiting Muslim immigrants. He also voted against a border wall proposal, called Trump's proposed tariffs on aluminum and steel "an experiment with stupidity" and was unrelenting in calling for Trump to release his tax returns.

Arrington, the first-term state lawmaker who defeated him on Tuesday, aired ads that featured clips of Sanford speaking critically about Trump's actions.

Still, she didn't initially support Trump's candidacy either. "LOVE MITT ROMNEY!!!!!!" Arrington wrote on Facebook in 2016. She later told AP that while she supported Florida Sen. Marco Rubio in the 2016 GOP primary, she eventually backed Trump and "proudly" attended his inauguration.

House Speaker Paul Ryan downplayed the rift between Sanford and Trump Wednesday and said there are always going to be winners and losers in the same party during primary season.

"That's just what happens in contested primaries," said the speaker, who is retiring rather than seek re-election.

Others, though, said Sanford's defeat is an up-close example of how Republicans must tread carefully in the Trump era.

Trump ally Rep. Chris Collins of New York offered advice to fellow GOP lawmakers: Say something nice before you bring Trump any complaints.

"I would start by praising the president ... and then say, 'But here's an issue in my local area where I have some disagreement or I'd like to be something different,'" Collins said.

Talking to Trump should be like interactions with your spouse or children when you have a problem that needs airing, he said. Don't just come out immediately "with smash mouth football."

Loudermilk said it's best for lawmakers to take their concerns privately to the White House, as he said he has done behind the scenes on Trump's proposed tariffs. "If it's something I disagree on, it doesn't necessarily mean you have to go out and broadcast it to the world."

Kinnard reported from Columbia, South Carolina. Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Kevin Freking contributed from Washington.

Follow Mascaro on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/LisaMascaro> and Kinnard at <https://twitter.com/@Meg-KinnardAP>

GOP leaders sell immigration bills, with Trump's blessing

By ALAN FRAM and LISA MASCARO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican leaders began the problematic task of finding support for an immigration compromise Wednesday, telling lawmakers that President Donald Trump was backing the still-evolving bill. But cracks within the party were on full display and it seemed that pushing the measure through the House next week would be a challenge.

"If it was a resolution on apple pie, you're going to lose some votes, some Republican votes," said Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Fla.

A day after top Republicans said the House would vote next week on two competing immigration measures, it was widely assumed that a hard-right measure would lose. That bill would give young "Dreamer" immigrants just limited opportunities to remain in the U.S. while imposing tough restrictions on legal immigration and bolstering border security.

GOP leaders, negotiating with quarreling moderates and conservatives, were still writing the second bill. Republicans said it would contain a way for Dreamers to qualify for permanent residence and potentially become citizens, while accepting conservatives' demands to finance Trump's proposed border wall with Mexico and restrictions on legal immigration.

With Republicans battling to keep their House majority in November's elections, merely staging the immigration votes, win or lose, achieves some political objectives. The plan helped party leaders block unhappy moderates trying to force the House to consider immigration bills considered too liberal by many Republicans, and will let lawmakers assert that they tried addressing the issue.

If both bills lose, "at least you know where everyone stands," said Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio, a member of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus.

Democrats seemed likely to solidly oppose both packages. A day after House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Democrats would fight any measure advancing Trump's immigration policies, the leader of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus said her group's goal was to have "zero Democratic support" for the GOP bills.

Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham, D-N.M., said the Republican measures "are going to make it clearer than ever that Dreamers are pawns for a wall. That is going to be a very difficult thing to defend" in the November elections, she said.

The bills represent the GOP's attempt to address Dreamers, young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children. Trump last year terminated the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, which has temporarily shielded hundreds of thousands of them from deportation. Federal courts have kept the program functioning for now.

Even if the compromise measure passed the House, its fate in the Senate was in doubt. Democrats there have enough votes to scuttle any bill.

Trump's backing — especially if he announced it publicly — could help nail down some support. But GOP "no" votes seemed likely, including by some conservatives dubious about granting what they consider amnesty to people in the U.S. illegally.

In fact, former Trump White House strategist Steve Bannon told a group of House conservatives Wednes-

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day that "if the House votes for amnesty, then it will deflate the base and they'll stay home," said Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, who invited Bannon. King said Bannon warned that could cost Republicans House control.

Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., a Freedom Caucus member, said it was "a pretty big compromise" for him to support the conservative immigration bill because he doesn't consider it restrictive enough. He said he'd examine details of the middle-ground legislation leaders were crafting before deciding whether to back it and said Trump's support didn't sell him.

"I'm glad that the president is finding favor with it, but the president hasn't seen the legislative text either," Perry said.

Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., the Freedom Caucus chairman, said the compromise bill "has a potential of garnering enough moderates to perhaps offset some of the conservatives' defections."

At a closed-door meeting of House Republicans, Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said he'd spoken to Trump and "the president seemed very supportive" of the compromise, Rep. Chris Collins, R-N.Y., told reporters. That was echoed by Rep. Brett Guthrie, R-Ky., who said, "I know the president, according to Paul today, supports it."

White House senior adviser Stephen Miller told the Republican Study Committee, a large group of House conservatives, that the administration supports the conservative and middle-ground immigration measures, Republicans said.

Meanwhile, GOP moderates who'd been trying to force votes on four different immigration measures acknowledged they'd been outmaneuvered by party leaders. The centrists fell two signatures short of 218 — a House majority — needed for a rarely used petition that would have triggered the votes in late June.

Top Republicans said the process could have led to a coalition of Democrats and a few Republicans passing bills helping Dreamers without strong enough enforcement provisions — a political fiasco for the GOP. The moderates ended up with 23 GOP signatures and all 193 Democrats.

"It's very obvious" that when some lawmakers stated support for the petition, "they were having several conversations with leadership immediately after that," said Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Calif., a top moderate.

Rep. Carlos Curbelo, R-Fla., another petition leader, said when leaders announced their plans for two votes, some Republicans backing the petition decided to "continue giving these negotiations a chance."

Reporter Kevin Freking contributed.

Fed raises key rate and sees possible acceleration in hikes

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve took note of a resilient U.S. economy Wednesday by raising its benchmark interest rate for the second time this year and signaling that it may step up its pace of rate increases.

The Fed now foresees four rate hikes this year, up from the three it had previously forecast. The action means consumers and businesses will face higher loan rates over time.

The central bank raised its key short-term rate by a modest quarter-point to a still-low range of 1.75 percent to 2 percent. With the economy now nine years into an expansion, the move reflects the steadiness of growth, the job market's strength and inflation that's finally reaching the Fed's 2 percent target level.

Economists said the Fed left little doubt that it's prepared to increase the pace of its credit tightening to guard against high inflation later on.

"The labor market is getting tighter, and price pressures are picking up," said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate.com. "The Fed is prepared to be quicker about pushing rates higher."

It was the Fed's seventh rate increase since 2015, and it followed an increase in March this year.

The announcement helped resolved a debate in financial markets over whether the Fed under Jerome Powell, who succeeded Janet Yellen as chairman in February, might see a need to signal a possible acceleration in rate hikes. The statement the Fed issued Wednesday after its latest policy meeting ended suggested that he does.

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Besides raising its projection for rate increases this year from three to four, the Fed removed a key sentence from the previous statement that had been viewed as foreseeing a need to keep rates low for an extended period. The Fed's new projection for the pace of rate hikes shows four this year, three in 2019 and one in 2020.

At a news conference, Powell sought to portray the Fed's actions as evidence mainly that the economy is doing well and not that the central bank is eager to accelerate its rate increases.

"The economy is in great shape," Powell said.

He acknowledged that the Fed is hearing concerns from some business executives about the Trump administration's combative trade policies, including anecdotal cases in which companies have postponed hiring or major purchases.

But Powell added, "For now, we don't see that in the numbers at all."

Trump has slapped tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, has threatened additional tariffs on Chinese imports and has directed his administration to consider further duties on imported cars. Those moves have inflated steel and aluminum costs.

Powell appeared at ease Wednesday in fielding questions ranging from the intricacies of monetary policy to banking regulation and even to whether marijuana should be legalized. (He said that as Fed chairman, he had no position on that.)

And he announced that in the interest of public transparency, he will begin next year to hold a news conference after each of the Fed's eight policy meetings each year, rather than only once a quarter.

"This does not signal anything about the future pace of interest rates hikes," the chairman cautioned.

Since the Fed began holding quarterly news conferences in 2011, it has announced major policy moves only at the quarterly meetings, which have all been followed by a news conference by leader of the Fed.

The central bank's new median forecast projects the Fed's benchmark rate at 3.1 percent by the end of 2019, up from 2.9 percent in the previous forecast. For 2020, the Fed foresees a median of 3.4 percent. That means that by then, it thinks its key rate will finally exceed the 2.9 percent it sees as neutral — as neither stimulating nor restraining growth. Should the Fed's expectations prove accurate, its policy would then be intended to slow the economy.

The Fed now envisions stronger growth this year — 2.8 percent, up from the 2.7 percent it predicted in March. Unemployment, now at an 18-year low of 3.8 percent, would drop to 3.6 percent by year's end and to 3.5 percent in 2019 and 2020 — levels not seen in 49 years. Inflation by the Fed's preferred gauge would hit its 2 percent target this year and edge up to 2.1 percent over the next two years.

A gradual rise in inflation is coinciding with newfound economic strength. Consumer and business spending is powering the economy, in part a result of the tax cut President Donald Trump pushed through Congress late last year. With employers hiring at a solid pace month after month, unemployment has reached 3.8 percent. Not since 1969 has the jobless rate been lower.

Beginning in 2008 in the midst of the financial crisis, the Fed had kept its key rate unchanged at a record low near zero for seven years. It then raised rates once in 2015, once in 2016, three times in 2017 and now twice this year.

The Fed aims to achieve its mandates of maximizing employment and stabilizing prices by lowering rates to spur growth during times of economic weakness and raising rates to slow growth if the economy threatens to overheat. When the Fed tightens credit, it aims to do so without derailing the economy. But if it miscalculates and overdoes the credit tightening, it can trigger a recession.

At nine years, the economic expansion is now the second-longest in history. It will become the longest if it lasts past June 2019, at which point it would surpass the expansion that lasted from March 1991 to March 2001.

The Fed's pace of rate hikes for the rest of the year could end up reflecting a tug of war between a sturdy economy and the risks to growth, including from a potential trade war that could break out between the United States and such key trading partners as China, the European Union, Canada and Mexico. All those countries have vowed to retaliate against any U.S. tariffs with their own penalties against U.S. goods.

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After AT&T's win, here comes the expected Comcast-Fox bid

By MAE ANDERSON, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After AT&T-Time Warner comes the deluge.

Comcast bid \$65 billion for Fox's entertainment business on Wednesday, a day after a federal judge has cleared AT&T's \$85 billion takeover of Time Warner.

If Comcast succeeds in outbidding Disney for Fox, it would give a major cable distributor control even more channels on its lineup and those of its rivals. There are fears that it could lead to higher cable bills or hinder online alternatives.

But U.S. District Judge Richard Leon cleared the AT&T deal Tuesday despite similar concerns. The ruling signaled that federal regulators might have a hard time stopping companies from getting bigger by gobbling up rivals and the content they own.

Comcast isn't likely the only mega-media bid in the works. There will probably be a rush to consolidate. Cowen analyst Gregory Williams said the ruling could unleash "pent up" demand for mergers and acquisitions "across the Pay-TV landscape."

Even if a company doesn't need to get bigger right away, it might need to do so to prevent being overshadowed by a competitor.

Here's a look at some of the proposed combinations that could transform the media landscape and change how people get their entertainment.

FOX WITH DISNEY OR COMCAST

Disney has made a \$52.4 billion all-stock offer for the bulk of Twenty-First Century Fox, including the studios behind the "Avatar" movies, "The Simpsons" and "Modern Family," along with National Geographic. Marvel would get back the characters previously licensed to Fox, reuniting X-Men with the Avengers.

Now Comcast has struck back with a larger \$65 billion offer, all in cash. If Comcast succeeds in snapping up Fox, it could diminish the appeal of a planned Disney streaming service, which would heavily feature movies and shows from Marvel and the "Star Wars" franchise.

David Turetsky, a professor at the State University of New York at Albany, warns that the AT&T ruling is based on "specific facts and evidence" that may or may not apply in other cases. Still, there are many similarities between a Comcast-Fox combination and the AT&T-Time Warner deal that just passed judicial muster.

Comcast made its bid after the close of trading, but Wall Street was braced for a bidding war. Shares in Fox increased 7.5 percent to an all-time high of \$43.41. Disney gained almost 2 percent, while Comcast edged down six cents to \$32.32.

SPRINT AND T-MOBILE

In April, the two telecom companies announced a \$26.5 billion combination. The deal would combine the nation's third- and fourth-largest wireless companies and bulk them up to a similar size to Verizon and AT&T, the industry giants.

The worry is that with just three major carriers, there would be less incentive to keep innovating on prices and service. T-Mobile and Sprint might even raise prices now that they don't have to try to poach customers off each other.

A 2014 attempt to combine fell apart amid resistance from the Obama administration. But the industry is different just four years later. Wireless carriers aren't just competing with each other, but also with Comcast and others as the wireless, broadband and video industries converge. AT&T is about to get larger with CNN, HBO and other channels from Time Warner. Beyond combining with each other, T-Mobile and Sprint might need its own content acquisition to compete.

CBS AND VIACOM

CBS has resisted pressure from its controlling shareholder, National Amusements, to merge with Viacom, which also is controlled by National Amusements. The two companies used to be one but separated in 2005.

A combination would reunite CBS's television business with Viacom's production studios, similar to the arrangements now in place at NBC owner Comcast and ABC owner Disney. (On the flip side, the Fox television network and studios would separate under a deal with either Comcast or Disney.)

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With Viacom, the \$6-a-month CBS All Access streaming service might have a larger library, as Viacom owns MTV, Nickelodeon, Comedy Central and other cable networks.

VERIZON

Verizon, which bought AOL and Yahoo in recent years, could be on the prowl for other entertainment properties. Verizon wants to challenge Google and Facebook in the huge and lucrative field of digital advertising — and having more content could help. There's speculation that CBS could be a potential target. With its main wireless rival AT&T becoming even more of a content powerhouse, Verizon might feel the need to grow.

Cowen's Williams suggests, however, that rather than buy an entertainment or media company, Verizon might buy a company that bolsters its network or infrastructure. Cable company Charter or satellite TV company Dish are "ideal candidates," he wrote in a research note.

SMALLER MOVIE STUDIOS

Rumors have long swirled that Lionsgate might be a potential takeover target by anyone from Amazon to Verizon or even a combined CBS-Viacom entity. Nothing has materialized yet for the owner of the "Twilight" and "Hunger Games" franchises. As a smaller studio, Lionsgate needs to get bigger to compete in the current landscape.

Similarly, Viacom-owned Paramount studio has been on the chopping block before. After years of troubles, it has recently rebounded with the horror film "A Quiet Place" and comedy "Book Club." That could make it a lucrative takeover target by a company seeking content creators.

Comcast challenges Disney with \$65B bid for Fox

By MAE ANDERSON, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Comcast made a \$65 billion bid Wednesday for Fox's entertainment businesses, setting up a battle with Disney to become the next mega-media company.

The bid comes just a day after a federal judge cleared AT&T's takeover of Time Warner and rejected the government's argument that it would hurt competition in cable and satellite TV and jack up costs to consumers for streaming TV and movies. The ruling signaled that Comcast could win regulatory approval, too; its bid for Fox shares many similarities with the AT&T-Time Warner deal.

Comcast says its cash bid is 19 percent higher than the value of Disney offer as of Wednesday. The Wall Street Journal and others reported earlier that Comcast had lined up \$60 billion in cash to challenge Disney for media mogul Rupert Murdoch's company. Disney's offer was for \$52.5 billion when it was made in December, though the final value will depend on the stock price at the closing.

"This is a golden offer that will put considerable pressure on (Disney CEO Bob) Iger and Disney to step up their game on another bid," GBH Insights analyst Dan Ives said. "This is even higher than the Street thought, which speaks to Comcast really wanting these key assets."

The battle for Twenty-First Century Fox comes as traditional entertainment companies try to amass more content to compete better with technology companies such as Amazon and Netflix for viewers' attention — and dollars.

If the Comcast bid succeeds, a major cable distributor would control even more channels on its lineup and those of its rivals. That could lead to higher cable bills or make it more difficult for online alternatives to emerge, though there is not yet evidence of either happening following other mergers. For Disney, a successful Comcast bid could make Disney's planned streaming service less attractive, without the Fox video.

Content is becoming more important as ways to deliver content proliferate. Cable companies like Comcast are no longer competing only with satellite alternatives such as DirecTV, but also stand-alone services such as Netflix and cable-like online bundles through Sony, AT&T and others.

Disney already started its own sports streaming service and plans an entertainment-focused one late next year featuring movies and shows from its own studios, which include Marvel, Pixar and "Star Wars" creator Lucasfilm.

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With the Fox deal, Disney would get more content for those services — through the studios behind the Avatar movies, “The Simpsons” and “Modern Family,” along with National Geographic. Marvel would get back the characters previously licensed to Fox, reuniting X-Men with the Avengers.

Comcast, meanwhile, has been leading the way in marrying pipes with the entertainment that flows through them. It bought NBCUniversal’s cable channels and movie studio in 2013 and added Dreamworks Animation in 2016.

The Philadelphia company has been tinkering with the traditional cable bundle, offering stand-alone subscriptions for some types of video along with smaller bundles of cable channels delivered over the internet. Comcast has said it will add Netflix to some cable bundles.

With Fox, Comcast would expand a portfolio that already includes U.S. television rights to the Olympics and comedy offerings such as “Saturday Night Live.” Comcast already owns such cable channels as CNBC, Bravo and SyFy.

Whichever company prevails would also control Fox’s cable and international TV businesses. That’s key for Comcast, which currently doesn’t have an international presence. The Fox television network and some cable channels including Fox News and Fox Business Network would stay with Murdoch’s family under either deal, as with the newspaper and book businesses under a separate company, News Corp.

Fox shareholders are set to vote on the Disney bid on July 10. Despite Comcast’s higher offer, it’s not immediately clear whether Fox’s board would entertain it. According to regulatory filings, an unnamed company, widely thought to be Comcast, previously made an offer for Fox. But Fox went with Disney because of concerns it would face more regulatory scrutiny with the other company.

That was before U.S. District Judge Richard Leon ruled in AT&T’s favor and rejected the government’s argument that its takeover of Time Warner would hurt competition in pay TV and cost consumers hundreds of millions of dollars more to stream TV and movies. The government worried that AT&T, as DirecTV’s owner, could charge Comcast and other rival distributors higher prices for Time Warner channels like CNN or HBO. In turn, that could drive up what consumers pay. AT&T and Time Warner argue they’re simply trying to stay afloat in the new streaming environment.

Disney wouldn’t face the same issues because it isn’t a television distributor as the way Comcast and AT&T are. But if Disney gets Fox, the combined movie studios would account for 45 percent of worldwide box office revenue, according to BTIG analyst Richard Greenfield. That could raise regulatory objections. A larger studio could use its power to keep its movies in more theaters longer, dampening competition from rival studios.

Disney and Comcast had already been at battle in the U.K. over Sky TV. Fox has a 39 percent stake in that company and has been trying to buy outright, with the intention of selling the full company to Disney as part of that deal. U.K. regulators have given the OK to that offer if Fox sells Sky News. Regulators there also have cleared Comcast’s \$30.7 billion offer for the 61 percent of Sky that Murdoch doesn’t own.

In addition to the \$35-per-share cash offer, Comcast agreed to pay a \$2.5 billion termination fee if the deal doesn’t pass regulatory muster. It also agreed to reimburse Fox for the \$1.5 billion-plus break-up fee it agreed to pay to Disney if their deal doesn’t go through.

Disney and Fox did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Antarctica’s ice sheet is melting 3 times faster than before

By **SETH BORENSTEIN, AP Science Writer**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The melting of Antarctica is accelerating at an alarming rate, with about 3 trillion tons of ice disappearing since 1992, an international team of ice experts said in a new study.

In the last quarter century, the southern-most continent’s ice sheet — a key indicator of climate change — melted into enough water to cover Texas to a depth of nearly 13 feet (4 meters), scientists calculated. All that water made global oceans rise about three-tenths of an inch (7.6 millimeters).

From 1992 to 2011, Antarctica lost nearly 84 billion tons of ice a year (76 billion metric tons). From 2012 to 2017, the melt rate increased to more than 241 billion tons a year (219 billion metric tons), according to

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the study Wednesday in the journal Nature .

"I think we should be worried. That doesn't mean we should be desperate," said University of California Irvine's Isabella Velicogna, one of 88 co-authors. "Things are happening. They are happening faster than we expected."

Part of West Antarctica, where most of the melting occurred, "is in a state of collapse," said co-author Ian Joughin of the University of Washington.

The study is the second of assessments planned every several years by a team of scientists working with NASA and the European Space Agency. Their mission is to produce the most comprehensive look at what's happening to the world's vulnerable ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland.

Outside experts praised the work as authoritative.

Unlike single-measurement studies, this team looks at ice loss in 24 different ways using 10 to 15 satellites, as well as ground and air measurements and computer simulations, said lead author Andrew Shepherd of the University of Leeds in England.

It's possible that Antarctica alone can add about half a foot (16 centimeters) to sea level rise by the end of the century, Shepherd said. Seas also rise from melting land glaciers elsewhere, Greenland's dwindling ice sheet and the fact that warmer water expands.

"Under natural conditions we don't expect the ice sheet to lose ice at all," Shepherd said. "There are no other plausible signals to be driving this other than climate change."

Shepherd cautioned that this is not a formal study that determines human fingerprints on climate events.

Forces "that are driving these changes are not going to get any better in a warming climate," said University of Colorado ice scientist Waleed Abdalati, a former NASA chief scientist who wasn't part of the study team.

In Antarctica, it's mostly warmer water causing the melt. The water nibbles at the floating edges of ice sheets from below. Warming of the southern ocean is connected to shifting winds, which are connected to global warming from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas, Shepherd said.

More than 70 percent of the recent melt is in West Antarctica.

The latest figures show East Antarctica is losing relatively little ice a year — about 31 tons (28 metric tons) — since 2012. It was gaining ice before 2012.

So far scientists are not comfortable saying the trend in East Antarctica will continue. It is likely natural variability, not climate change, and East Antarctica is probably going to be stable for a couple decades, said study co-author Joughin.

Another study in Nature on Wednesday found that East Antarctic ice sheet didn't retreat significantly 2 million to 5 million years ago when heat-trapping carbon dioxide levels were similar to what they are now.

Twila Moon, a research scientist at the National Snow and Ice Data Center who wasn't part of the studies, said "ice-speaking, the situation is dire."

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter: @borenbears . His work can be found here .

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

Saudi-led forces open assault on Yemen port city of Hodeida

By JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's exiled government launched a fierce assault Wednesday on the crucial port city of Hodeida, the biggest offensive of the years-long war in the Arab world's poorest nation for the main entry point for food in a country already teetering on the brink of famine.

The attack on the Red Sea port aimed to drive out Iranian-aligned Shiite rebels known as Houthis, who have held Hodeida since 2015, and break the civil war's long stalemate. But it could set off a prolonged

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street-by-street battle that inflicts heavy casualties.

The fear is that a protracted fight could force a shutdown of Hodeida's port at a time when a halt in aid risks tipping millions into starvation. Some 70 percent of Yemen's food enters via the port, as well as the bulk of humanitarian aid and fuel supplies. Around two-thirds of the country's population of 27 million relies on aid and 8.4 million are already at risk of starving.

Before dawn Wednesday, convoys of vehicles appeared to be heading toward the rebel-held city as heavy gunfire rang out. The assault, part of an operation dubbed "Golden Victory," began with coalition airstrikes and shelling by naval ships, according to Saudi-owned satellite news channels and state media.

Bombardment was heavy, with one aid official reporting 30 strikes in 30 minutes.

"Some civilians are entrapped, others forced from their homes," said Jolien Veldwijk, the acting country director of the aid group CARE International, which works in Hodeida. "We thought it could not get any worse, but unfortunately we were wrong."

The initial battle plan appeared to involve a pincer movement. Some 2,000 troops who crossed the Red Sea from an Emirati naval base in the African nation of Eritrea were awaiting orders to move in from the west after Yemeni government forces seize Hodeida's port, Yemeni security officials said.

Emirati forces with Yemeni government troops moved in from the south near Hodeida's airport, while others sought to cut off Houthi supply lines to the east, the officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to brief journalists.

Yemen's exiled government "has exhausted all peaceful and political means to remove the Houthi militia from the port of Hodeida," it said in a statement. "Liberation of the port of Hodeida is a milestone in our struggle to regain Yemen from the militias."

Four Emirati soldiers were killed in Wednesday's assault, the United Arab Emirates' state-run news agency said, but gave no details of how they died.

The Houthi-run Al Masirah satellite news channel claimed rebel forces hit a Saudi coalition ship near Hodeida with two missiles. The Saudi-led coalition did not immediately acknowledge the incident.

Forces loyal to Yemen's exiled government and fighters led by Emirati troops had neared Hodeida in recent days. The port is some 150 kilometers (90 miles) southwest of Sanaa, Yemen's capital, which has been in Houthi hands since September 2014. The Saudi-led coalition entered the war in March 2015.

The United Nations and other aid groups already had pulled their international staff from Hodeida ahead of the assault.

The port remained open, however. Several ships arrived in recent days, including oil tankers, and there was no word from the coalition or the U.N. to stop work, according to a senior port official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Aid groups nevertheless warned of disaster.

Robert Mardini, the regional director for the Red Cross, said the push on Hodeida "is likely to exacerbate an already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen."

"The population has already been weakened to extreme levels," he said.

David Miliband, the head of the International Rescue Committee, called the offensive "an attack on the political and diplomatic process to bring peace to Yemen." He said the U.N. Security Council must act to secure a cease-fire before the people of Hodeida "suffer the same fate as those in Aleppo, Mosul or Raqqa."

More than 10,000 people have been killed in Yemen's civil war, which has displaced 2 million others and helped spawn a cholera epidemic. Saudi-led airstrikes have killed large numbers of civilians and damaged vital infrastructure.

The U.N. and Western nations say Iran has supplied the Houthis with weapons, from assault rifles to the ballistic missiles they have fired deep into Saudi Arabia, including at the capital, Riyadh.

The coalition has blocked most ports, letting supplies into Hodeida in coordination with the U.N. The air campaign and fighting have disrupted other supply lines, causing an economic crisis that makes food too expensive for many to afford.

The U.N. says some 600,000 people live in and around Hodeida, and "as many as 250,000 people may

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lose everything — even their lives” in the assault. Already, Yemeni security officials said some were fleeing the fighting.

“We hear sounds of explosions. We are concerned about missiles and shells. Some workers have left to their villages for fear of the war,” said Mohammed, a Hodeida resident who gave only his first name for fear of reprisals.

The new U.N. envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, tweeted that he was “extremely concerned” by the violence, calling on all parties to exercise restraint. Griffiths’ recent appointment as envoy and his push for new negotiations may have encouraged the Saudi-led coalition to strengthen its hand ahead of any peace talks with the Houthis.

Late Wednesday, the Saudi and Emirati governments announced what they called a “multi-faceted plan” to protect civilians in Hodeida, including establishing routes for food, medical supplies and oil shipments from Saudi Arabia’s southern city of Jizan and the UAE’s capital, Abu Dhabi.

The attack came as Washington was focused on President Donald Trump’s summit this week with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The U.S. has been supplying targeting information to the Saudi-led coalition, as well as refueling their warplanes, but was not involved in military operations at the port, Pentagon spokesman Maj. Adrian Rankine Galloway said.

“We do not provide any additional support to the Saudi coalition’s military operations,” he said.

Associated Press writers Ahmed al-Haj in Sanaa, Yemen; Maggie Michael in Aden, Yemen; Samy Magdy in Cairo and Lolita C. Baldor in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/jongambrellAP> . His work can be found at <http://apne.ws/2galNpz> .

Nevada pimp wins GOP primary, rejoices with Hollywood madam

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Pimp Dennis Hof, owner of half a dozen legal brothels in Nevada and star of the HBO adult reality series “Cathouse,” won a Republican primary for the state Legislature on Tuesday, ousting a three-term lawmaker.

Hof defeated hospital executive James Oscarson. He’ll face Democrat Lesia Romanov in November, and will be the favored candidate in the Republican-leaning Assembly district.

Hof celebrated his win at a party in Pahrump, Nevada, with “Hollywood Madam” Heidi Fleiss at his side. “It’s all because Donald Trump was the Christopher Columbus for me,” Hof told The Associated Press in a phone call. “He found the way and I jumped on it.”

Hof, who wrote a book titled “The Art of the Pimp,” has dubbed himself “The Trump of Pahrump,” and held a rally with longtime Trump adviser Roger Stone. Hof was in the limelight in 2015, when former NBA player Lamar Odom was found unconscious at Hof’s Love Ranch brothel in Crystal, Nevada, after a four-day, \$75,000 stay.

If Hof wins in November, he wouldn’t be the only brothel owner in elected office — Lance Gilman, the owner of the famous Mustang Ranch in northern Nevada, is a Storey County Commissioner.

Voters in November will decide on closing down brothels in at least one of the seven Nevada counties where they legally operate. The question will be on the ballot in Lyon County, where Hof owns four brothels. Activists are also gathering signatures to try to get a measure on the ballot in Nye County, where Hof owns two more brothels in the desert outside the city of Pahrump.

He painted the anti-brothel efforts as political retribution that’s tied to his opponent, but Oscarson and the referendum backers deny any connection.

Most brothels operate in rural areas of Nevada. They’re banned in the counties that contain Las Vegas and Reno.

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Hof said Tuesday he's downsizing his business by selling off some brothels to focus more on politics. Oscarson and Hof previously faced off in 2016 when Hof ran for the seat as a Libertarian. Oscarson won with 60 percent of the vote.

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North American trio beats Morocco to host 2026 World Cup

By **ROB HARRIS** and **GRAHAM DUNBAR**, AP Sports Writers

MOSCOW (AP) — North America will host the 2026 World Cup after FIFA voters overwhelmingly opted Wednesday for the financial and logistical certainty of a United States-led bid over a risky Moroccan proposal for the first 48-team tournament.

The soccer showpiece will return to the U.S. for the first time since 1994 after gaining 134 votes, while Morocco got 65 at the FIFA Congress in Moscow, where the 2018 tournaments starts on Thursday.

"Thank you for entrusting us with this privilege," U.S. Soccer Federation President Carlos Cordeiro told the congress. "The beautiful game transcends borders and cultures."

U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted after the victory : "Congratulations, - a great deal of hard work!"

While Trump has been feuding with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau over tariffs and policy after the G-7 meeting and with Mexican leaders about his proposed border wall, the heads of state are not heavily involved in this World Cup bid. Even if Trump wins re-election, his presidency would end before the 2026 World Cup.

The vote by national football federations was public, in contrast to secrecy surrounding the 2010 vote when FIFA's elected board members picked Russia to host in 2018 and Qatar in 2022, defeating the U.S.

The regional bid proved more appealing this time and the North Americans even collected 11 votes from Africa.

"The United bid was strong and if it was just the United States, I think Morocco would have beaten them," said Cameroon federation official Kevin Njomo, whose country voted for Morocco. "People have a soft spot for Mexico, especially looking at Mexico as a little bit under-developed and giving them a chance. Canada is a good tourist destination.

"But I think where it had the advantage was the World Cup would be more profitable in America and it is a capitalist world."

North America is optimistically promising to deliver \$14 billion in revenue helped, while the tournament won't require major construction work required on the 16 planned stadiums, all of which already exist.

The U.S. proposed staging 60 out of the 80 games in 2026, when 16 teams will be added to the tournament, leaving Canada and Mexico with ten fixtures each. But FIFA President Gianni Infantino suggested the split of games could change.

"They have made a decision among themselves but ultimately it will be up to FIFA to decide," Infantino said.

Morocco appeared too hazardous as a potential host when all 14 venues had to be built or renovated as part of a \$16 billion investment in new infrastructure. The vote leaves Morocco reeling from a fifth failure in a World Cup hosting vote, with the continent's sole tournament coming in 2010 in South Africa.

Moroccan Prime Minister Saad Eddine El Othmani shared the national disappointment but tweeted his thanks to the bid organizers for "this common dream."

Moroccan sports journalist Omar Chraybi acknowledged that "technically speaking, it's understandable - the U.S. bid capacity surpasses Morocco's." Yet he didn't lose hope, saying, "The world still looks at Africa as an underdog, but we can't afford to give up."

While Morocco's combined tickets and hospitality revenue projected to be \$1.07 billion, according to FIFA analysis, North America would generate \$2 billion more.

Canada will host men's World Cup matches for the first time, while Mexico gets its first taste of the

event since 1986.

"To have a message coming from football that says actually Mexico, Canada and the United States together can organize the biggest sporting and social event together," Infantino said. "It is a nice message."

The 87,000-capacity MetLife Stadium outside New York — home of the NFL's Giants and Jets — is proposed for the final. It's just miles from where federal prosecutors spearheaded an ongoing investigation into FIFA corruption. More than 40 soccer officials and businesses indicted, convicted or pleaded guilty.

The bribery scandal put the governing body on the brink, Infantino told the congress ahead of Wednesday's vote.

"FIFA was clinically dead as an organization," Infantino said, reflecting on his election in 2016 before announcing plans to another four-year term in 2019. "Two years later, FIFA is alive and well, full of joy and passion and with a vision for its future."

The North American victory suggests current FIFA leaders don't hold grudges against a country whose government has jailed corrupt sports leaders.

"When they help us fight against corruption, of course, we are pleased," Infantino said.

The North America bid also had to overcome concerns about the impact of policies from the Trump administration, including attempts to implement a ban on travel by residents of six majority-Muslim countries.

FIFA now has the final say on which cities are selected to host games and whether all three countries are guaranteed a place at the tournament. Victor Montagliani, the Canadian who leads CONCACAF, wants them to take three of the seven guaranteed qualification slots reserved for the region as host. Both the United States and Canada failed to qualify for this year's World Cup.

There is also a chance to send an eighth team via an inter-continental playoff. North America will host the six-team playoff tournament in November 2025 to decide the last two places in the 48-team lineup.

Amira El Masaiti in Rabat, Morocco contributed to this report.

AP World Cup coverage: www.apnews.com/tag/WorldCup

Michael Cohen hunts for new lawyers in FBI probe

By TOM HAYS, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Cohen, President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, is searching for a new legal team to represent him in an FBI investigation of his business dealings.

A person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Cohen's current legal team plans to stop handling the case and that Cohen has begun a hunt for new attorneys.

It wasn't immediately clear what prompted the change or who would take over. The person, who wasn't authorized to discuss the matter and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, also noted that Cohen has not yet held any discussions with prosecutors about potentially cooperating in the investigation.

Cohen has been represented since 2017 by Stephen Ryan, a Washington lawyer initially hired to prepare him for congressional testimony about alleged Russian interference in the presidential election.

After FBI agents raided Cohen's office in April, Ryan and his New York partner, Todd Harrison, went to court to try to keep investigators from seeing some of the confiscated files on the grounds that they were protected by attorney client privilege. The pair, along with lawyers for Trump, has been working for weeks to identify documents that should be withheld from prosecutors.

The legal teams were facing a deadline of the end of this week to get much of that work complete.

Neither Cohen, Ryan nor Harrison immediately responded to messages Wednesday.

Federal prosecutors in New York have publicly said they are investigating alleged fraud in Cohen's business dealings, but haven't disclosed details.

When agents searched Cohen's home, office and safety deposit box and seized his phones this spring, they sought a wide variety of information, including his involvement in arranging a secret \$130,000 payment to the porn actress Stormy Daniels, who said she had a sexual tryst with Trump years ago.

Cohen has maintained that he's innocent of wrongdoing, and Trump has called the raid on his lawyer an assault on attorney client privilege.

The news that Cohen was making a switch in his legal representation was first reported by ABC News. It isn't unusual for high-profile figures facing potential criminal charges to look for attorneys who have deep experience in the court where the case is expected to be tried, and a track record of negotiating with local prosecutors.

Daniels' lawyer, Michael Avenatti, who is suing him in an attempt to get the actress released from a confidentiality agreement, gloated over the news in a tweet.

"Not a good look and a disaster for Mr. Cohen and Mr. Trump," he said.

Spain replaces fired Lopetegui with Hierro for World Cup

By TALES AZZONI, AP Sports Writer

With only two days to go before Spain's opening match at the World Cup, Julen Lopetegui was fired as national team coach after accepting a job to lead Real Madrid next season.

Spanish soccer federation president Luis Rubiales, who made the announcement on Wednesday in Krasnodar, later said Fernando Hierro would replace Lopetegui as coach for Spain's match against Portugal in Sochi on Friday.

The 50-year-old Hierro, a former national team player and Real Madrid captain, will be taking on his first major coaching job. He had been acting as the federation's sports director and was already in Russia with the national team.

"I couldn't have said 'no,' I wouldn't forgive myself," Hierro said. "We still have a great opportunity in front of us. We have to remain positive and move forward."

Rubiales said firing Lopetegui wasn't the best solution but it was needed after the federation was caught by surprise by Madrid's announcement.

"The federation cannot be left out of a negotiation by one of its workers and be informed five minutes before the press release," Rubiales said. "We have been compelled to act."

Rubiales, who took over as president last month, said Lopetegui disrespected the federation's values and it was the only decision he could make.

"It's a difficult situation, but we are not the ones who determined the action that had to be taken. The federation has its values and it has to maintain them," Rubiales said. "It may look like a weakness now, but with time this will make us stronger."

Rubiales said he tried to keep the Madrid announcement from being made public but it wasn't possible. He said he had to make the decision — which was supported by the federation's board of directors — to "send a clear message" that things have to be done properly.

There were reports that players tried to persuade Rubiales to change his mind and keep Lopetegui on the job.

"We are the national team. We represent this emblem, these colors, our fans, a country," Spain captain Sergio Ramos wrote on Twitter. "Our responsibility and commitment is to you. Yesterday, today and tomorrow, together."

Because he was fired, Madrid won't have to pay the 2 million euros (\$2.3 million) of the termination clause on Lopetegui's contract. Rubiales said that although the federation's financial situation was not ideal, money was "not the most important thing in a moment like this."

Lopetegui did not attend the news conference but spoke briefly with reporters as he started his trip back home.

"I am very sad, but we have a magnificent team and I hope we win the World Cup," he said.

Hierro was to lead his players for the first time in a practice session later Wednesday.

The former defender spent most of his career with Real Madrid but finished his playing days with English club Bolton in 2005. He played in four World Cups with Spain, from 1990 to 2002, and in two European Championships, 1996 and 2000.

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Hierro was Carlo Ancelotti's assistant at Real Madrid after Zinedine Zidane left the post in 2014. He coached second-division club Real Oviedo two seasons ago and was Malaga's general manager after leaving his sports director position with the Spanish federation in 2011.

"I've been near a ball for 30 years," Hierro said.

After Madrid's announcement that it hired Lopetegui, critics immediately began questioning some of the coach's decisions with the national team, including his choice to leave some Barcelona players such as Sergi Roberto out of the World Cup squad. There were also questions about how Lopetegui would be able to fully focus on the national team while also having to discuss off-season signings for his new club.

There are six Madrid players in Spain's team for the World Cup.

Lopetegui's name had not been mentioned by Spanish media among the probable candidates for the Madrid job, which opened up after Zidane unexpectedly quit. Last month, Lopetegui agreed to extend his contract with the national team through 2020.

"I admire and respect Lopetegui a lot. He is a top coach, and that made it harder to make this decision," Rubiales said. "Winning is important, but above that, we need to know how things have to be handled."

It was a difficult departure for the 51-year-old Lopetegui, who took over from Vicente del Bosque after the 2016 European Championship and had been credited with reviving a team that was on the decline after winning Euro 2008, the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012.

By successfully blending talented youngsters and veterans from its golden generation, Lopetegui kept Spain unbeaten through 20 matches in charge, comfortably leading the team to the World Cup from a qualifying group that included Italy.

He won European championships with Spain's under-19 and under-21 teams in the early 2010s, but had a lackluster stint with Portuguese team Porto in his only job with a major club.

Rubiales has already left his impression after taking over a federation which was in the hands of embattled official Angel Maria Villar for nearly three decades. He was elected president over Juan Luis Larrea, the federation's former treasurer and its interim leader since Villar was suspended following his arrest last year on suspicion of corruption.

In one of his first actions, Rubiales canceled a previously arranged "vacation" trip by officials to the World Cup that would cost nearly 2 million euros (\$2.3 million). He got the money reimbursed and spent only about 500,000 euros (\$590,000) with new travel arrangements for sponsors and federation officials.

"We are all affected," Rubiales said about Lopetegui's departure. "We have to think about what is best for the entity, for the federation and the team, and from this afternoon we will all be together to go forward."

More AP World Cup coverage: www.apnews.com/tag/WorldCup

Tales Azzoni on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/tazzoni>

In SC primary, ardent Trump backer defeats Rep. Mark Sanford

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and CHRISTINA L. MYERS, Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — President Donald Trump is crediting his Election-Day tweet in part for the defeat of a South Carolina Republican congressman who has been critical of his administration.

Trump tweeted Wednesday that his advisers didn't want him to get involved in the Republican primary, thinking Rep. Mark Sanford "would easily win."

But Trump says Rep. Katie Arrington "was such a good candidate, and Sanford was so bad, I had to give it a shot."

Arrington narrowly defeated Sanford after Trump tweeted that Sanford had been unhelpful, adding, "He is better off in Argentina."

That was a reference to Sanford's surprise disappearance from the state as governor, which he later revealed was to further his affair with an Argentine woman.

Sanford's loss was perhaps the most dramatic result in primaries across five states Tuesday.

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He becomes the second incumbent House Republican to lose a primary this year — the latest victim of intense divisions among the GOP in the Trump era.

Sanford's voting record is generally conservative, but his criticism of Trump as unworthy and culturally intolerant made him a target of dedicated Trump supporters who often elevate loyalty over policy.

Arrington blasted Sanford as a "Never Trumper," and Trump tweeted a startlingly personal attack hours before polls closed, calling Sanford "MIA and nothing but trouble ... he's better off in Argentina."

Even for a political figure with no shortage of confidence in challenging party decision-making, the attack was a bold case of going after a sitting member of Congress. It's almost certain to make other Republicans even more reluctant to take him on, even as Trump stirs divisions on trade, foreign policy and the Russia investigation.

Sanford said Tuesday night that "I stand by every one of those decisions to disagree with the president."

Sanford had never lost a political race in South Carolina, and his defeat Tuesday came amid a roller-coaster political career. Despite the scandal over the affair, he completed his second term as governor and voters sent him to Congress two years later.

In her victory speech, Arrington asked Republicans to come together, saying "We are the party of President Donald J. Trump."

Four other states voted Tuesday, including several races that will be key to determining which party controls the House of Representatives next year.

In other races:

IN SOUTH CAROLINA, INCUMBENT GOVERNOR FACES RUN-OFF

Sanford was not the only establishment Republican to face a challenge Tuesday. South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, a close ally of Trump, was forced into a runoff after failing to muster the required 50 percent vote to win outright.

McMaster, an early supporter of the president's 2016 campaign, had Trump's full endorsement, marked by a weekend tweet.

But while Trump remains very popular in the state, McMaster has been shadowed by a corruption probe involving a longtime political consultant. McMaster received the most votes of the four Republicans running, but will face Greenville businessman John Warren in a second contest June 26.

McMaster, the former lieutenant governor, assumed the governorship last year after Nikki Haley resigned to become U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

GOP'S 'VICIOUS' VIRGINIA VICTOR

Trump is tweeting that people shouldn't underestimate his loyalist Corey Stewart, who won Virginia's Republican primary to face Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine. The president tweeted Wednesday that Stewart has "a major chance of winning!"

Stewart, known for his ardent defense of Trump and of Confederate symbols, said he plans a "vicious" campaign against Kaine, who has a huge fundraising advantage going into the general election.

Kaine gives passionate campaign speeches, but Trump's tweet calls him a "total stiff."

As Trump's top campaign aide in Virginia, Stewart accused the Republican Party of inadequately defending the candidate after the release of a recording in which Trump bragged about groping women.

Stewart also has called efforts to remove Confederate monuments "an attempt to destroy traditional America."

A HOUSE BELLWETHER IN VIRGINIA

Democratic State Sen. Jennifer Wexton was the clear winner in a six-way primary in a northern Virginia district considered key to the House battleground map this fall, and will challenge Republican Rep. Barbara Comstock.

Democrats in two other districts they hope to retake nominated women: Abigail Spanberger in central

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Virginia and Elaine Luria in the district that includes Virginia Beach.

In Comstock's district, Wexton was the best-known in the field, and was viewed as the Democratic Party's establishment choice. She had the endorsement of Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam.

Comstock, a moderate Republican who easily beat back a challenge from conservative Shak Hill, is one of the Democrats' top targets in November. The second-term House member's district leans Republican, though Democrat Hillary Clinton received more votes there than Trump did in 2016.

Though Wexton favors a ban on the sale of assault weapons, she defied what has been the tendency in some swing districts to nominate Democrats with liberal profiles on other key issues. She has not called for a single-payer, government-run health insurance system, as some Democratic House primary winners in California, Nebraska and Pennsylvania have.

Democrats need to gain 23 seats to win the majority in the House.

TURNING THE LePAGE

Maine voters are deciding on a successor to term-limited, conservative Republican Gov. Paul LePage. But first they had to wrestle with a new balloting system. Maine on Tuesday debuted its statewide ranked-choice voting, which allows voters to rank candidates first to last on their ballot.

The system insured that counting was slow and winners difficult to call. But businessman Shawn Moody won the GOP nomination after midnight. He maintained a wide lead through the night, but risked not winning the race outright under the new rules.

The Associated Press did not call the Democratic primary as none of the seven candidates was close to the majority needed to be declared the outright winner, so more tabulations are required next week under ranked-choice voting. Last-place candidates will be eliminated and votes reallocated until there is a winner, a process that may take more than a week.

NEVADA, NORTH DAKOTA: SEE YOU IN NOVEMBER

Nevada and North Dakota are home to two of the most pivotal Senate races this year. What they didn't have were competitive Senate primaries.

Nevada Sen. Dean Heller, the only Republican seeking re-election in a state that Hillary Clinton carried in 2016, and Democratic Rep. Jacky Rosen sailed through their primaries, and already have begun focusing their criticism on each other in what is expected to be among the most competitive Senate races this year.

There was also the return of Sharron Angle, the conservative who once ominously threatened to "take out" then-Sen. Harry Reid. Angle, who lost to Reid in her 2010 bid for Senate, lost her primary challenge to Rep. Mark Amodei on Tuesday.

Centrist Steve Sisolak won a bruising battle between Clark County commissioners vying to be Nevada's first Democratic governor in two decades. Fellow board member Chris Giunchigliani ran as a progressive, knocking Sisolak for his positive rating from the National Rifle Association in light of the mass shooting in Las Vegas in October. Republican Attorney General Adam Laxalt easily cleared the GOP field.

Nevada election officials blamed new touch-screen voting machines for glitches that affected a small number of voters and delayed the count of ballots in rural Pershing County. In no case were voters unable to successfully cast a ballot, the Nevada Secretary of State's office said.

In North Dakota, GOP Rep. Kevin Cramer will face moderate Democratic Sen. Heidi Heitkamp. She is seeking re-election in a state Trump carried by 36 percentage points in 2016.

BROTHELS ON THE BALLOT

Pimp Dennis Hof, the owner of half a dozen legal brothels in Nevada and star of the HBO adult reality series "Cathouse," won a Republican primary for state Legislature, ousting a three-term lawmaker.

Voters in November will also be voting on closing down brothels in at least one of the seven Nevada counties where they're legally operating, and activists are trying to get the measure on the ballot in another district.

This story has been corrected to reflect that Sanford completed his second term as South Carolina governor and did not resign.

Associated Press writers Meg Kinnard and Christina Myers in Columbia, S.C.; Marine Villeneuve in Augusta, Maine; Patrick Whittle in Portland, Maine; Alan Suderman in Richmond, Va.; Matthew Barakat in McLean, Va.; Scott Sonner in Reno, Nev.; Michelle Price in Las Vegas; and James MacPherson in Bismarck, N.D., contributed to this report.

Thefts rise after California reduces criminal penalties

By DON THOMPSON, Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California voters' decision to reduce penalties for drug and property crimes in 2014 contributed to a jump in car burglaries, shoplifting and other theft, researchers reported.

Larcenies increased about 9 percent by 2016, or about 135 more thefts per 100,000 residents than if tougher penalties had remained, according to results of a study by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California released Tuesday.

Thefts from motor vehicles accounted for about three-quarters of the increase. San Francisco alone recorded more than 30,000 auto burglaries last year, which authorities largely blamed on gangs. Shoplifting may be leveling off, researchers found, but there is no sign of a decline in thefts from vehicles.

Proposition 47 lowered criminal sentences for drug possession, theft, shoplifting, identity theft, receiving stolen property, writing bad checks and check forgery from felonies that can bring prison terms to misdemeanors that often bring minimal jail sentences.

While researchers can link the measure to more theft, they found it did not lead to the state's increase in violent crime.

Violent crime spiked by about 13 percent after Proposition 47 passed, but researchers said the trend started earlier and was mainly because of unrelated changes in crime reporting by the FBI and the Los Angeles Police Department.

The FBI broadened its definition of sexual crimes in 2014, while the LAPD improved its crime reporting after previously underreporting violent crimes. If it weren't for those changes, researchers found California's violent crime rate would have increased 4.7 percent from 2014 to 2016.

Researchers compared California's crime trends to those in other states with historically similar trends. They found the increase in California's violent crime rate was less than that of comparison states, but larcenies jumped in California as they declined elsewhere.

California still has historically low crime rates despite recent changes in the criminal justice system aimed at reducing mass incarceration and increasing rehabilitation and treatment programs, said Lenore Anderson, executive director of Californians for Safety and Justice, who led the drive to pass Proposition 47.

"This report shows we are making progress," she said in a statement calling for less spending on prisons and more on programs to help reduce the cycle of crime.

The ballot measure led to the lowest arrest rate in state history in 2015 as experts said police frequently ignored crimes that brought minimal punishment.

Jail bookings in 12 sample counties dropped about 8 percent, driven by a reduction in bookings for Proposition 47 crimes, while cite and releases increased, researchers found.

Offenders convicted of those crimes were about 3 percent less likely to be convicted of a new crime within two years, but the researchers said it's not clear if that was because they didn't commit new crimes or because they were less likely to be arrested and prosecuted because of the lower penalties.

Reduced penalties mean fewer drug addicts now seem to be getting treatment, then "are stealing to support their habit," said San Luis Obispo County Chief Probation Officer Jim Salio, president of Chief Probation Officers of California.

Morgan Hill Police Chief David Swing, president of the California Police Chiefs Association, said researchers' findings "are consistent with what police chiefs across the state have seen since 2014" and show the

need for a proposed initiative intended for the November ballot that would partly roll back the 2014 law. It would allow prison sentences for serial thieves, reinstate DNA collections from those convicted of the crimes where penalties were reduced, and bar the earlier release of criminals convicted of additional violent, serious and sexual crimes.

Trump-Kim summit raises new questions over South Korean role

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press**

SINGAPORE (AP) — When South Korea's president shuttled between North Korea and the United States to broker their first-ever summit, he faced both praise and criticism over whether he was a peace-making mediator or was helping North Korea find ways to weaken U.S.-led economic sanctions.

A day after President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un held their summit in Singapore, is it clearer whether Moon Jae-in played a positive or negative role? A quick answer: Probably not.

Assessments of Moon's diplomacy have become more divisive and complex, with Trump criticized in both South Korea and the U.S. for the concessions he made to North Korea, while others believe the summit will successfully prolong the current mood of detente.

Meeting for about five hours, Trump and Kim exchanged an historic handshake, took a short stroll together, patted each other's backs and signed a summit agreement. Trump promised to provide security guarantees to the North and suspend joint military drills with the South as long as negotiations with the North continue in "good faith." Kim, in return, agreed to work toward a vague "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

Those moves were unthinkable even several months ago, when the two unpredictable leaders threatened to nuke each other and traded a series of harsh personal insults.

Moon issued a statement after the summit calling it a "huge step forward" toward peace that "helped break down the last remaining Cold War legacy on Earth."

He acknowledged that many difficulties are likely to lie ahead but vowed to work together with the U.S., North Korea and others to bring lasting peace to the Korean Peninsula.

"We will never go back to the past again and never give up on this bold journey. History is a record of people who take action and rise to a challenge," he said.

But conservatives in South Korea slammed the summit, saying it failed to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions. They said both Trump and Moon should be blamed for not specifying steps and deadlines for North Korea's nuclear disarmament, allowing it time to perfect its weapons program.

"High expectations were met by low results," said Nam Sung-wook, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Korea University. "Moon, and then Trump, were quick to bite on North Korea's invitation for talks. When Trump realized there wasn't going to be anything substantial in return, it was impossible for him to back out because he had already gone too far."

U.S. officials had worked hard to get North Korea to agree to "complete, verifiable and irreversible" disarmament, and said they would not offer any major concessions until it took meaningful steps. Despite those efforts, Trump announced after the summit that he had agreed to suspend U.S. military drills with South Korea, something North Korea has long demanded.

On Wednesday, North Korean state media said Trump had also agreed to the North's desire for a step-by-step disarmament process with corresponding U.S. concessions at each step, rather than immediate disarmament as the U.S. had initially sought.

Trump's agreement to suspend the military drills apparently came without prior consultation with South Korea, baffling many who believe the U.S.-South Korea alliance, forged in blood during the 1950-53 Korean War, should remain strong throughout the push for a negotiated end to the nuclear tensions.

"Why did South Korea and the U.S. form an alliance and stage military drills before the nuclear crisis flared? It's because North Korea has been belligerent," said Kim Taewoo, former president of the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul. He said cancellation of the drills "is really a bad idea ... and (Trump) betrayed our people."

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Asked to respond to Trump's decision, Moon spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom said the allies must consider a "variety of ways to further facilitate dialogue" during the nuclear negotiations. He said South Korea is still trying to figure out the exact meaning and intent of Trump's comments.

Since taking office in May last year, Moon, a son of North Korean refugees, has sought to take the lead in diplomatic efforts to end the North Korean nuclear standoff, which had been dominated by world powers including the U.S. and China.

Provocative nuclear and missile tests by North Korea last year initially gave Moon little diplomatic room to maneuver. But he kept trying to reach out to North Korea, and eventually found a role as a mediator after Kim offered in January to send a delegation to the South Korean Winter Olympics.

After successful cooperation at the Olympics, Moon sent special envoys to North Korea who later traveled to Washington with Kim's proposal for a summit with Trump. Moon held talks with Kim in April at which Kim agreed to work toward "complete denuclearization." He met Kim again in May when Trump said he was withdrawing from the planned summit with Kim — a decision Trump quickly reversed.

Experts now expect a temporary peace to continue since North Korea has probably won what it wanted from Tuesday's summit and Trump is unlikely to back down from summit deals that he wants to portray as a diplomatic triumph.

Analyst Hong Min at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification said critics of the joint statement signed by Trump and Kim are missing a bigger point.

He said it's meaningful in itself that the leaders of the United States and North Korea met, talked and signed an agreement that will carry more weight and significance than any pact previously made between the wartime foes. The agreement's aspirational language on denuclearization was a "strategic decision" to reduce pressure on both sides and keep the process going, Hong said.

Trump and Kim agreed that their countries will quickly engage in follow-up talks led by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and a "relevant high-level" North Korean official.

Bong Youngshik, a professor at Seoul's Yonsei University, said it's too early to predict how Trump's cancellation of the military drills will play out in future nuclear negotiations. He said North Korea is likely to consider Trump's decision a temporary measure while it remains in negotiations with Washington.

Moon may not face any immediate serious political repercussions at home since North Korea will likely take gradual steps toward disarmament to prevent others from thinking it reneged on its pledge. But if Trump seeks re-election in 2020, his government is likely to apply more pressure on North Korea to make substantial progress in denuclearization, which could bring the nuclear issue to another critical point, said Shin Beomchul of Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

Kim Tong-hyung reported from Seoul, South Korea.

AP Investigation: Fish billed as local isn't always local

By **ROBIN MCDOWELL, MARGIE MASON and MARTHA MENDOZA, Associated Press**

MONTAUK, N.Y. (AP) — Even after winter storms left East Coast harbors thick with ice, some of the country's top chefs and trendy restaurants were offering sushi-grade tuna supposedly pulled in fresh off the coast of New York.

But it was just an illusion. No tuna was landing there. The fish had long since migrated to warmer waters.

In a global industry plagued by fraud and deceit, conscientious consumers are increasingly paying top dollar for what they believe is local, sustainably caught seafood. But even in this fast-growing niche market, companies can hide behind murky supply chains that make it difficult to determine where any given fish comes from. That's where national distributor Sea To Table stepped in, guaranteeing its products were wild and directly traceable to a U.S. dock — and sometimes the very boat that brought it in.

However, an Associated Press investigation found the company was linked to some of the same practices it vowed to fight. Preliminary DNA tests suggested some of its yellowfin tuna likely came from the other side of the world, and reporters traced the company's supply chain to migrant fishermen in foreign waters

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who described labor abuses, poaching and the slaughter of sharks, whales and dolphins.

The New York-based distributor was also offering species in other parts of the country that were illegal to catch, out of season and farmed.

Over the years, Sea To Table has become a darling in the sustainable seafood movement, building an impressive list of clientele, including celebrity chef Rick Bayless, Chopt Creative Salad chain, top universities and the makers of home meal kits such as HelloFresh.

"It's sad to me that this is what's going on," said Bayless, an award-winning chef who runs eight popular restaurants and hosts a PBS cooking series. He said he loved the idea of being directly tied to fishermen — and the pictures and "wonderful stories" about their catch. "This throws quite a wrench in all of that."

As part of its reporting, the AP staked out America's largest fish market, followed trucks and interviewed fishermen who worked on three continents. During a bone-chilling week, they set up a camera that shot more than 36,000 time-lapse photos of a Montauk harbor, showing no tuna boats docking. At the same time, AP worked with a chef to order fish supposedly coming from the seaside town. The boat listed on the receipt hadn't been there in at least two years.

Reporters also tracked Sea To Table's supply chain to fishermen abroad who earn as little as \$1.50 a day working 22-hour shifts without proper food and water.

"We were treated like slaves," said Sulisty, an Indonesian fisherman forced to work on a foreign trawler that delivered fish to a Sea To Table supplier. He asked that only one name be used, fearing retaliation. "They treat us like robots without any conscience."

Sea To Table owner Sean Dimin emphasized his suppliers are strictly prohibited from sending imports to customers and added violators would be terminated.

"We take this extremely seriously," he said.

Dimin said he communicated clearly with his customers that some fish labeled as freshly landed at one port was actually caught and trucked in from other states, but some chefs denied this. Federal officials described it as mislabeling.

A century ago, small-scale fisheries dotted America's coasts and fed the country's demand for seafood. But as time passed, overfishing, strict government regulations and outsourcing to developing countries changed the industry, making it nearly impossible for local fishermen to compete.

The U.S. seafood market is worth \$17 billion annually, with imports making up more than 90 percent of that. Experts say one in five fish is caught illegally worldwide, and a study last year by the University of California, Los Angeles and Loyola Marymount University found nearly half of all sushi samples tested in L.A. didn't match the fish advertised on the menu.

Sea To Table offered a worry-free local solution that arrived from dock to doorstep by connecting chefs directly with more than 60 partners along U.S. coasts. While its mission is clear, scaling up to a national level while naming specific boats and docks is currently unrealistic. Still, the company is predicting rapid growth from \$13 million in sales last year to \$70 million by 2020, according to a confidential investor report obtained by the AP.

As its business expanded, AP found Sea To Table has been saying one thing but selling another.

For caterers hosting a ball for Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, who had successfully pushed through a law to combat seafood mislabeling, knowing where his fish came from was crucial.

The Montauk tuna arrived with a Sea To Table leaflet describing the romantic, seaside town and an email from a salesperson saying the fish was caught off North Carolina. But the boxes came from New York and there was no indication it had been landed in another state and driven more than 700 miles to Montauk. A week later the caterer ordered the Montauk tuna again. This time the invoice listed a boat whose owner later told AP he didn't catch anything for Sea To Table at that time.

"I'm kind of in shock right now," said Brandon LaVielle of Lavish Roots Catering. "We felt like we were supporting smaller fishing villages."

Some of Sea To Table's partner docks, it turns out, are not docks at all. Their seafood was advertised

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as “just landed” from wholesalers and retailers like Santa Barbara Fish Market — which also has imports — and Red’s Best in Boston. Both collect seafood at harbors and companies up and down their coasts.

Sea To Table also promoted fresh blue crab from Maryland in January, even though the season closed in November. In addition, the company said it never sells farmed seafood, citing concerns about antibiotics and hormones. But red abalone advertised from central California are actually grown in tanks — it’s been illegal to harvest commercially from the ocean since 1997. Rhode Island and Washington state also supply aquacultured seafood, such as oysters and mussels.

Dimin said farmed shellfish “is a very small part of our business, but it’s something that we’re open and clear about.” When asked to provide evidence that the company has been transparent about its use of farmed shellfish, he paused and then replied, “There’s nothing to hide there.”

However, days later, he said he decided to drop aquaculture from his business because it contradicts his “wild only” guarantee.

Private companies that mislead consumers, clients and potential investors could face lawsuits or criminal liability. Both the Food and Drug Administration and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are charged with enforcing laws to prevent fish fraud. Sellers who know, or even should have known, that fish is mislabeled could be found guilty of conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government, mail fraud and wire fraud. The crimes carry potential fines and jail time.

Carl Safina, an award-winning author and leading marine conservationist at New York’s Stony Brook University, said companies that prey on consumers’ good intentions “deserve to be out of business immediately.”

A half dozen commercial fishermen and dealers in various regions of the country voiced concerns and, in some cases, anger about Sea To Table. Others have lashed out in the past using social media. Most spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for their safety and their businesses in an industry where relationships often overlap.

Eric Hodge, a small-scale fisherman from Santa Barbara, said he considered partnering with Sea To Table a few years ago. He quickly changed his mind after seeing canary rockfish on the distributor’s chef lists when the fish was illegal to catch. He also learned Sea To Table was buying halibut from the fish market, which relies heavily on imports. He said he spoke to the company about his concerns.

“Honestly, they know. I just don’t think they care,” Hodge said. “They are making money on every shipment, and they are not going to ask questions. And in seafood, that’s a bad way to go about it because there is so much fraud.”

The idea for Sea To Table began with a family vacation to Trinidad and Tobago more than two decades ago. Following a fishing trip there, Michael Dimin and his son, Sean, eventually started shipping fresh catch from the Caribbean nation to chefs in New York. Later, they shifted their model to work exclusively with small-scale American coastal fishermen.

Restaurants and other buyers demanding sustainable products were drawn to the company by a marketing campaign that provided a story not just about where the fish came from, but the romantic image of an American pastime. And they were willing to pay a lot — sometimes more than \$20 a pound — for high-end species.

The New York Times, National Geographic, Bon Appetit magazine and many others singled out Sea To Table as the good guys in a notoriously bad industry. Larry Olmsted, author of the bestselling book “Real Food, Fake Food,” recommended it as an answer to fraud in a Forbes article.

After learning about the problems, Olmsted said he was disappointed, and that it made no difference to him if part of the business was legitimate: “It either is reliable, or it’s not.”

Sea To Table partnered with sustainability giants such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the Marine Stewardship Council and the James Beard Foundation, which collaborated on events and referred to the distributor as an industry favorite. They expressed concern that suppliers who knowingly mislabel catch will damage the movement.

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Sea To Table's products are sold in almost every state, reaching everywhere from Roy's seafood restaurants to Tacombi taco chain. It can be found at eateries inside the Empire State Building in New York and Chicago's O'Hare airport, direct to consumers from its own website and even on Amazon for home cooks to order. In addition, more than 50 college campuses such as Yale, Ohio State and the University of Massachusetts have signed up. So have some of the biggest make-it-yourself meal kits, including Home Chef and Sun Basket, a rapidly growing market that Sea To Table says generates a third its revenues.

Whether they know it or not, a company spending money at any point in a long chain that begins with an abused fisherman and ends with a diner is inadvertently supporting the problem. Customers who responded to AP said they were frustrated and confused.

"Not ok," Ken Toong, who is responsible for UMass Dining, said of Sea To Table. "We believed them."

AP's investigation began with one of Sea To Table's nearby suppliers. Located on New York's eastern coast beyond the posh Hamptons, Bob Gosman Company opened in Montauk as a mom-and-pop clam shack more than six decades ago.

Now run by cousins Bryan and Asa Gosman, it is a small empire sitting on a multi-million dollar property. Oceanfront restaurants, shops and motels bustle with tourists in the summer. And its fish market, where 70 percent of the tuna is imported, has become one of the biggest wholesalers in the area.

Gosman's gets most of its tuna along with other species from a place in the state where fish can always be found, regardless of the season: The New Fulton Fish Market. The nine-acre refrigerated warehouse just outside Manhattan is the second-largest facility of its kind, moving millions of pounds of seafood each night, much of it flown in from across the globe.

Beautiful maroon slabs of imported high-grade tuna were on display for several nights in December, January and February, as well as other times throughout last year, when AP reporters roamed the market. The frigid building buzzed with workers on forklifts zigzagging across slick concrete floors, stacking orders waiting to be picked up.

In the early hours, often between 2 a.m. and 4 a.m., boxes of fish bearing foreign shipping labels from all over the world were arranged into piles with "Gosman" scribbled across them in black marker. They were later hoisted onto a waiting truck with the same name.

After a three-hour drive east, the AP watched the loads arrive at the company's loading dock in Montauk, just as the sun was rising on the tip of Long Island.

The tuna, swordfish and other species were then ferried inside Gosman's warehouse. They came from Blue Ocean in Brazil, Vietnam's Hong Ngoc Seafood Co., and Land, Ice and Fish in Trinidad and Tobago. Occasionally, boxes showed up from Luen Thai Fishing Venture and Marshall Islands Fishing Venture, part of a Hong Kong-based conglomerate that's a major supplier of sushi-grade tuna. Despite recent conservation partnerships, Luen Thai has a checkered past, including shark finning and a bribery scandal that resulted in the jailing of a former Cook Islands marine resources minister in 2016.

Bryan Gosman said Sea To Table stressed it would not take imports. But with no yellowfin tuna landed in New York during the coldest winter months — which a federal official confirmed — it was impossible to provide high-quality loins from Montauk.

"So in the beginning, there were times when we were trying to hustle around fish," Gosman said. "Buying fish at different places, so it could be a legitimate business plan that they're trying to follow."

Eventually, with Dimin's blessing, Gosman said he started getting fish from as far away as North Carolina and trucking it up to New York.

They stopped that arrangement in March. Gosman said it wasn't profitable. Dimin said they wanted to avoid the "complexity of communicating" their sourcing.

Meanwhile, in the dead of winter, AP had turned to a chef to order \$500 worth of fish on their behalf. Sea To Table provided a receipt and verbal assurances that the seafood — which arrived overnight in a box bearing the company's name and logo — had been landed in Montauk the day before.

The invoice even listed the "Standin Up" as the boat that caught it. But the vessel's owner said it was in another state at the time, hundreds of miles away.

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"I know my name is being used," said Robert Devlin, who was upset by the news. "A lot of people do fraud that way."

The AP also shipped tuna samples supposedly from Montauk to two labs for analysis: Preliminary DNA testing suggested the fish likely came from the Indian Ocean or the Western Central Pacific. There are limitations with the data because using genetic markers to determine the origins of species is still an emerging science, but experts say the promising new research will eventually be used to help fight illegal activity in the industry.

Bryan Gosman said they keep Sea To Table's fish separate, but acknowledged there's always a chance some imported tuna can slip through with domestic.

"Can things get mixed up? It could get mixed up," he said. "Is it an intentional thing? No, not at all."

The investigation didn't end in Montauk. One of the boxes in Gosman's stack at the Fulton fish market was stamped with a little blue tuna logo above the words "Land, Ice and Fish," out of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is where the AP traced companies in Sea To Table's supply chain to slave-like working conditions and the destruction of marine life.

The global seafood industry is known for providing cheap fish that comes with another price. Unscrupulous foreign companies operate with virtually no oversight in vast swaths of international waters, as AP reported in a series of stories in 2015. Those reports helped free more than 2,000 enslaved fishermen in Indonesia.

Though it's nearly impossible to tell where a specific fish ends up, or what percentage of a company's seafood is fraudulent, experts say even one bad piece taints the entire supply chain.

On learning that Sea To Table's supply chain could be tracked to businesses engaged in labor and environmental abuses, Dimin said it was "abhorrent and everything we stand against."

He said he was temporarily suspending operations with two partners to conduct an audit.

During the investigation, reporters interviewed and obtained written complaints from more than a dozen current and former Indonesian fishermen — including Sulistyio — who were connected to companies in Sea To Table's supply chain.

Sulistyio said his trawler plied waters between Africa and the Caribbean. Occasionally, it stopped in Trinidad and unloaded swordfish, yellowfin and bigeye tuna at Land, Ice and Fish.

Some crew members who docked there said they were beaten and forced to work when they were sick or hurt. At times, they said, migrant workers died on board and were tossed in the freezer with their catch while the boat continued to fish.

"You are out 500 miles or a thousand miles from shore, he is the law at that point," John Duberg of Land, Ice and Fish said of individual captains. "And if he feels he has a misbehaving crew member, he may have to take disciplinary actions."

Marine life was treated with even less respect. Some men said they were ordered to pull in as many sharks as they could catch and slice off their fins, which are a delicacy in Asia. The bodies were tossed back into the ocean, a practice banned by many countries.

Whales also were killed, their heads sometimes chopped off and their teeth extracted as good luck charms. The workers showed photos and videos of fishermen posing with mutilated sharks and whales. While some men appeared to be celebrating, others said it left them feeling sickened.

Sulistyio endured the abuse and long hours for a year before jumping to another ship in 2017, demanding to be taken to port. He returned to Indonesia and was classified as a victim of trafficking by the International Organization for Migration.

After hearing that just 30 pounds of tuna could be sold in America for more than \$600 — the amount Sulistyio earned during his entire year of work — he stared at the ground in disgust.

"I want to say to the Americans who eat that fish, please appreciate what we did to catch this fish with our sweat, with our lives," Sulistyio said. "Please remember that."

AP journalists Julie Jacobson in New York and Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia contributed to this

report.

Who's that selling steaks off a truck? It's Amazon

By JOSEPH PISANI, AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donna Brunswick drove to a Costco last month to pick up 2 pounds of raw flank steak — not at the wholesale club, but from a truck in the parking lot.

"Typically you wouldn't buy meat off a random truck," says Brunswick, a technical manager in Atlanta.

But she says \$20 for the slab of beef was a good deal. And she liked the filet mignon she bought from it in December when it was that day's offering. "The truck meat was delicious," she says.

The meat didn't just fall off the back of a random truck. It was sold by Amazon, which already sells just about anything online but now also hawks discounted seafood, Panini presses and more from what it calls the Treasure Truck.

It's a quirky way for the online retailer to connect with shoppers in person, expand its physical presence and promote itself. Amazon has also used the trucks to try to bring people into Whole Foods, the grocery chain it bought last year. The service debuted two years ago and the trucks now roam nearly 40 cities in the United States and England .

The inspiration, says Treasure Truck Director Margot Johnson, was the ice cream truck, another store on wheels that pops up unexpectedly.

While Treasure Truck sales are a tiny piece of the giant online retailer's business, the value to Amazon may be in the app downloads the trucks generate, their ability to test what products are hot sellers, and the buzz they create, says Aaron Cheris, who heads Bain & Co.'s retail practice.

"Amazon does a lot of things because they can," Cheris says.

What's sold on the trucks? The item is a secret until the day the trucks roll out. People who sign up get a morning text announcing the deal of the day. At the circus-like trucks, which light up and blast music, Amazon workers play games with shoppers and help them take selfies. They have custom designs, like a lobster and lighthouse on the Boston truck; cowboy boots in Dallas; and a race car in Indianapolis. A bubble-blowing machine is usually going.

"It's so kitschy," says Evelyn Molina, who bought a \$20 bouquet of roses, lilies and other flowers from the Miami Treasure Truck. Molina, who blogs about parenthood at MommyMafia.com, decided to treat herself since it was parked near her workout spot.

The first Treasure Truck hit the streets of Amazon's Seattle hometown in 2016. It expanded to 25 U.S. cities by last fall, and then a dozen British cities, including London and Manchester, late last year. Amazon won't say if it plans to expand further.

The trucks go out a couple times a week and spend a few hours roving between the parking lots of malls, office complexes or banks. Amazon rents those spaces, but it can also park in front of its own Whole Foods stores.

Molina got a \$5 Whole Foods coupon when she picked up a "Star Wars" toy in December from a truck parked nearby. The coupon had to be used that day, so she bought grapes, chicken tortilla soup and other groceries.

"They totally got me," Molina says.

Amazon picks what's sold on the trucks, Johnson says. There are holiday-related goods, such as the Godiva chocolates and dozen red roses it sold before Valentine's Day; trendy items, like the Instant Pot pressure cooker; or food, such as uncooked shrimp or raw chicken wings. (The trucks have refrigeration, Johnson says.)

But roving stores come with their own perils. Philadelphia's Treasure Truck went up in flames last month while parked away for the night. No one was hurt, and Amazon says it is investigating how the fire started.

And then there's weather: Amazon can cancel outings due to rain, snow or other bad conditions.

In early May, the truck in Austin, Texas, was canceled because of heavy rain. Cleo McAllister was bummed she couldn't get her hands on the \$15 moving-and-talking doll version of a Porg, the bird-like creatures

from "Star Wars: The Last Jedi." She didn't want to buy it elsewhere, since the Treasure Truck price was at least \$10 cheaper than other stores, including Amazon.com itself. She lucked out several days later, when the Porgs were back. She's bought other things from the Treasure Truck as well.

"It's an excuse to get out of the office and do something at lunch instead of sit at my desk," says McAlister, an office manager.

But she hasn't been tempted by the steaks or seafood.

"I'm just not one to buy food off the back of a truck," she says.

Contact Joseph Pisani at <http://twitter.com/josephpisani>

Unforgotten: Oil company preserves hidden slave cemeteries

By KEVIN MCGILL, Associated Press

CONVENT, La. (AP) — A major oil company is taking steps to honor once-forgotten slaves buried on its land west of New Orleans in an area where sugar plantations once abounded, an effort that some hope will grow into a larger movement to recognize and protect such cemeteries around the country.

The Shell Oil Company marked, blocked off and spruced up the tracts near its Convent refinery west of New Orleans and held dedication ceremonies in March, about five years after archaeologists confirmed the presence of slave burial grounds in 2013. The company also has been working with the nearby River Road African American Museum to arrange commemorative events and accommodate visitors.

It's the latest example of the South's decades-long path to acknowledging unsavory aspects of its history.

For Kathe Hambrick, the director of the River Road museum, the work is the culmination of years of efforts to ensure that Shell honored and remembered those buried on what used to be the Monroe and Bruslie sugar plantations, just two of many plantations that once abounded along the road. Hambrick said there are likely hundreds more such graveyards between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

Some of the restored plantations are themselves undergoing a rediscovery, moving away from their romanticized "Gone With the Wind" portrayals of the past to offer a more realistic look at the South's history of human bondage. One, the Whitney Plantation in the town of Wallace, opened in 2015 as a full-fledged museum with an unvarnished look at the cruelties of slavery.

"We ought to work together to figure out how ... to evaluate the things that we want to preserve, protect and teach about in terms of how this country was really developed," said A.P. Tureaud Jr., the son of a revered New Orleans civil rights lawyer who counts slaves and slaveowners among his ancestors.

Tureaud, who traveled from his current home in New York to attend March dedication ceremonies for the Monroe and Bruslie sites, has joined with Hambrick in an effort to give slave gravesites federal protection. The two have brought their idea to the attention of U.S. Rep. Cedric Richmond, whose district includes most of New Orleans.

Vincent deForest, a civil rights activist who helped preserve two slave cemeteries in Washington, D.C., said he and others are urging the Congressional Black Caucus to get involved. DeForest would like to see the National Parks Service undertake a study to identify ways to preserve such sites in every state.

"The wholeness of the living is diminished when the ancestors are not honored," deForest said, quoting one of his favorite epitaphs.

Sandra Arnold, a fellow at the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University, is leading a project to compile a database of slave burial grounds, but notes there is a dearth of records.

"It's as if their humanity is erased," Arnold said.

Thurston Hahn, an archaeologist with Baton Rouge-based Coastal Environments Inc., said it's reasonable to believe many of the slave graveyards along the River Road have been farmed over or covered by levees or petrochemical plants.

"The problem with the slave cemeteries — we just do not know where they are," he said.

It's a problem researchers working farther south, in the Louisiana city of Thibodaux, can relate to.

Anthropologists and geophysics experts from Tulane University are among those using radar and soil samples in hopes of discovering the burial sites of dozens of African-American victims of Reconstruction-

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era racial violence that came to be known as the Thibodaux Massacre.

The descendants of massacre victims and Confederate plantation owners have formed a committee to honor the victims of that violence and, if possible, find a mass grave. If a grave is eventually discovered, they want any remains exhumed and reburied on consecrated ground.

No such grave has yet been discovered.

The Monroe and Bruslie sites were found during land surveys commissioned by Shell as it prepared for a construction project that has since been abandoned for economic reasons not related to the cemetery discoveries.

Ground-penetrating radar and the careful scraping away of topsoil exposed variations of color and texture in the dirt, indicating the presence of graves, Hahn said. The remains of the slaves were not uncovered and the number of graves could only be estimated.

"We don't want to disturb them at all," Hahn said. "We are just looking for a shaft that the gravedigger dug to put the burial in."

Hugues Bourgogne, general manager of the Convent refinery, said Shell wants to honor and respect those buried at the sites. In addition to protecting, preserving and marking the cemeteries, Shell has installed iron benches where visitors can sit, reflect and pay their respects.

Visitation opportunities are limited, however. One day a year will be set aside for planned activities at the sites and Shell will work with descendants and other interested groups to arrange safe access at other times, he said.

Malaika Favorite, an artist and lifelong area resident, says she knows she has ancestors who were enslaved and buried at plantations, but hasn't been able to isolate the burial sites. Now she feels a little closer to doing that.

"Just making this step with the graves here is a step forward," she said. "And we need more of that."

Associated Press writers Stacey Plaisance and Janet McConnaughey contributed to this report.

Experts: Protections on pre-existing conditions at risk

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration's latest move against "Obamacare" could jeopardize legal protections on pre-existing medical conditions for millions of people with employer coverage, particularly workers in small businesses, say law and insurance experts.

At issue is Attorney General Jeff Sessions' recent decision that the Justice Department will no longer defend key parts of the Obama-era Affordable Care Act in court. That includes the law's unpopular requirement to carry health insurance, but also widely supported provisions that protect people with pre-existing medical conditions and limit what insurers can charge older, sicker customers.

Two independent experts said Wednesday that the administration appears to be taking aim at provisions of the ACA that protect people in employer plans, not only the smaller pool of consumers who buy a policy directly from an insurer. The new Trump administration position was outlined last week in a legal brief filed by the Justice Department in a Texas case challenging the Obama health law.

Workers "could face the prospect of insurance that doesn't cover their pre-existing conditions when they enroll in a plan with a new employer," said Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

University of Michigan law professor Nicholas Bagley said the administration does not appear to have thought through all the consequences of moving against one provision of a health law that has many complicated interlocking parts.

"The lack of care on the brief is jaw-dropping," said Bagley, who supports the Obama health law but considers himself a "free agent" critic of both sides. "There is no question that the Trump administration has to clarify what the scope of its injunction would be and grapple with the consequences of mowing down parts of the ACA.

"For someone with a pre-existing condition thinking about switching jobs, the answer to the question could make a life-changing difference," added Bagley.

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Both Bagley and Levitt said their questions about the administration's intentions arose from language in the Justice Department brief that specifically singles out sections of the health law that apply to employer plans. The ACA strengthened previous protections already in federal law that limited the circumstances and length of time under which an employer could exclude coverage for a worker's pre-existing health problems.

The Trump administration had no immediate rebuttal to the issues raised by the two experts.

Instead, the Health and Human Services Department pointed to comments earlier in the week by Secretary Alex Azar, who told senators that the Justice Department brief was a legal and constitutional argument, not a policy statement.

"We share the view of working to ensure that individuals with pre-existing conditions can have access to affordable health insurance," Azar said. "The president has always shared that and we look forward to working with Congress under all circumstances towards achieving that."

Nearly 160 million workers and family members have coverage through employers, although the number covered by small employers is much smaller.

A health policy expert with a business organization that represents large employers said he doubted there would be much of an impact on major companies, which are better able to pool risk and have long been accustomed to covering all employees regardless of health issues.

"There will not be a change with anyone who is with a very large employer," said James Gelfand of the ERISA Industry Committee, as the group is known. ERISA is the name of a federal law that governs employee benefits for big companies.

However, Gelfand said the impact could "spill over" to small businesses.

Separately, senior Republicans in Congress are wasting no time in trying to distance themselves from any effort by the administration to undermine popular protections for their constituents. Democrats are accusing Republicans of yet another effort to "sabotage" coverage, and plan to take the issue into the fall midterm elections.

"No American should be denied health coverage based on their pre-existing medical conditions," Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said Wednesday. Hatch chairs the Finance Committee, which oversees health care and tax law. He supported repeal of the ACA's insurance mandate, but draws a line on pre-existing conditions.

"Everybody I know in the Senate — everybody — is in favor of maintaining coverage for pre-existing conditions," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, earlier in the week. "There's no difference of opinion about that whatsoever."

Added Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., "There's no way Congress is going to repeal protections for people with pre-existing conditions who want to buy health insurance. The Justice Department argument in the Texas case is as far-fetched as any I've ever heard."

The lawsuit, filed in February by Texas and other GOP-led states, is in many ways a replay of the politically divided litigation that ended with the Supreme Court upholding the health care overhaul in 2012. In this case, California is leading a group of Democrat-led states in defending the law.

The Trump administration's stance is a rare departure from the Justice Department's practice of defending federal laws in court.

Asian stocks slump after Fed signals faster rate hikes

By **YOUKYUNG LEE, AP Business Writer**

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Asian stocks slumped Thursday after the U.S. Federal Reserve raised its key interest rate and said it would pick up the pace of future increases. South Korea's market benchmark tumbled 1.6 percent on the first trading day after a meeting of U.S. and North Korean leaders.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 0.4 percent to 22,886.15 while South Korea's Kospi sank to 2,430.15. Hong Kong's Hang Seng index dropped 0.6 percent to 30,541.22. China's Shanghai Composite Index was down 0.3 percent to 3,041.22. Australia's S&P-ASX 200 slipped 0.2 percent to 6,012.80. Stocks in Taiwan, Singapore and other Southeast Asian markets also were lower.

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FED: The Fed's rate hike was its second this year. The American central bank raised its outlook for increases this year from three to four. Chairman Jerome Powell said the U.S. economy is in great shape but investors worry faster rate hikes could stifle growth.

ANALYST'S TAKE: Expectations for further Fed tightening and U.S.-Chinese trade tensions "provide Asian markets with poor intraday leads," said Jingyi Pan of IG in a report.

KOREA TALKS: South Korean investors sold after President Donald Trump's meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Trump boasted the meeting ended any nuclear threat from North Korea and South Korean President Moon Jae-in tried to put a positive spin on the outcome, but the meeting produced no details on how or when North Korea's nuclear weapons might be eliminated or even reduced.

WALL STREET: The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 0.4 percent to 2,775.63. The Dow Jones industrial average lost 0.5 percent to 25,201.20. The Nasdaq composite slipped 0.1 percent to 7,695.70. The Russell 2000 index of smaller-company stocks shed 0.3 percent to 1,676.54 points.

CURRENCIES: The dollar slipped to 110.23 yen from 110.33 yen. The euro rose to \$1.1802 from \$1.1793.

OIL: Benchmark U.S. crude fell 2 cents to \$66.62 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose 0.4 percent to \$66.64 a barrel in New York on Wednesday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, lost 23 cents to \$76.51 per barrel in London. It gained 1.1 percent to \$76.74 per barrel on Wednesday.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 14, the 165th day of 2018. There are 200 days left in the year. This is Flag Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 14, 1943, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, ruled 6-3 that public school students could not be forced to salute the flag of the United States.

On this date:

In 1775, the Continental Army, forerunner of the United States Army, was created.

In 1777, the Second Continental Congress approved the design of the original American flag.

In 1801, former American Revolutionary War general and notorious turncoat Benedict Arnold, 60, died in London.

In 1928, the Republican National Convention, meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, nominated Herbert Hoover for president on the first ballot.

In 1934, Max Baer defeated Primo Carnera with an 11th round TKO to win the world heavyweight boxing championship in Long Island City, New York.

In 1940, German troops entered Paris during World War II; the same day, the Nazis began transporting prisoners to the Auschwitz (OWSH'-vitz) concentration camp in German-occupied Poland.

In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a measure adding the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance.

In 1968, Dr. Benjamin Spock and three other peace activists were convicted in Boston of conspiring to encourage young men to evade the draft during the Vietnam War. (The verdicts were later overturned by an appeals court.) The Iron Butterfly single "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" was released by Atco Records.

In 1972, the Environmental Protection Agency ordered a ban on domestic use of the pesticide DDT, to take effect at year's end.

In 1982, Argentine forces surrendered to British troops on the disputed Falkland Islands.

In 1985, the 17-day hijack ordeal of TWA Flight 847 began as a pair of Lebanese Shiite (SHEE'-eyet) Muslim extremists seized the jetliner shortly after takeoff from Athens, Greece.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton nominated Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Ten years ago: Iran rejected a six-nation offer of incentives to stop enriching uranium, prompting President George W. Bush and French President Nicolas Sarkozy (sar-koh-ZEE') to jointly warn Tehran anew

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during a news conference in Paris against proceeding toward a nuclear bomb.

Five years ago: The Associated Press reported that Minnesota resident Michael Karkoc (KAHR'-kahts), 94, had been a top commander of a Nazi SS-led unit accused of burning villages filled with women and children, then lied to American immigration officials to get into the United States after World War II. (Polish authorities are currently seeking to extradite Karkoc, now 99 years old; Germany shelved its investigation after deciding Karkoc was unfit to stand trial. Karkoc's family denies he was involved in any war crimes.) Major League Baseball came down hard on the Los Angeles Dodgers and Arizona Diamondbacks, handing out eight suspensions and a dozen fines as punishment for a bench-clearing brawl on June 11.

One year ago: A rifle-wielding gunman opened fire on Republican lawmakers at a congressional baseball practice in Alexandria, Virginia, wounding House Whip Steve Scalise (skuh-LEES') and several others; the assailant died in a battle with police. Fire ripped through the 24-story Grenfell Tower in West London, killing 71 people.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Marla Gibbs is 87. House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, D-Md., is 79. Country-rock musician Spooner Oldham is 75. Rock singer Rod Argent (The Zombies; Argent) is 73. President Donald Trump is 72. Singer Janet Lennon (The Lennon Sisters) is 72. Rock musician Barry Melton is 71. Rock musician Alan White (Yes) is 69. Actor Eddie Mekka is 66. Actor Will Patton is 64. Olympic gold medal speed skater Eric Heiden (HY'-dun) is 60. Jazz musician Marcus Miller is 59. Singer Boy George is 57. Rock musician Chris DeGarmo is 55. Actress Traylor Howard is 52. Actress Yasmine Bleeth is 50. Actor Faizon Love is 50. Actor Stephen Wallem is 50. International Tennis Hall of Famer Steffi Graf is 49. Actor Sullivan Stapleton is 41. Screenwriter Diablo Cody is 40. Actor Lawrence Saint-Victor is 36. Actor Torrance Coombs is 35. Actor J.R. Martinez is 35. Actor-singer Kevin McHale is 30. Actress Lucy Hale is 29. Pop singer Jesy Nelson (Little Mix) is 27. Country singer Joel Crouse is 26. Actor Daryl Sabara is 26.

Thought for Today: "The flag is the embodiment not of sentiment, but of history." — President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924).