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Northwestern Energy is doing some work south of Groton. They needed to bypass the Groton Substation for hook up a temporary line; thus, the city experienced a city-wide outage this morning.

CLOSED: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

Groton Chiropractic Clinic

Carol McFarland-Kutter, D.C.
1205 N 1st St., Groton 397-8204

Groton Area Schedule of Events

Saturday, December 8, 2018

Ringneck LD and PF Debate at Aberdeen Central High School

Robotics at Rapid City Stevens High School

10:00am: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Tournament vs. LaMoure/Litchville-Marion @ LaMoure High School

2:00pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Double Header vs. Leola-Frederick @ Frederick High School (JV Girls game at 2pm JV Boys game at 3pm Varsity Girls game at 4:30pm Varsity Boys game at 6pm)

Sunday, December 9, 2018

(2:00pm- 6:00pm: Open Gym, GHS Arena

Grades JK-8 2pm - 4pm; Grades 6-12 4pm - 6pm)

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FUNDRAISER

ALLFORHUNT shirts: Defy all odds

December 3-7, 2018

Custom shirt made to help a \$15,000 goal on GOFUNDME.com that has not been reached yet, please help us reach our goal. Thanks.



	Men's	youth	Women's	youth
S			S	
M			M	
L			L	
XL			XL	
XXL			XXL	

\$24/shirt

*20/shirt if you order more than one

Name _____

Thank you for helping a great cause. Your money will go toward Hunter's family. You can also donate money at <https://www.gofundme.com/allforhunt>.

Apply your form of payment with this form to the office, or business office at Groton Area High School by Friday, December, 7.

A GoFundMe page has been established for the Schaller family, started by Peyton Johnson. Thus far, in nine days, \$11,880 has been raised of the \$15,000 goal. To donate, [click here](#).



#allforHunt Fundraiser - Keychains \$10
All proceeds to go to the family. You can order at the Groton High School office, Professional Management Services, Lori's Pharmacy or BK Custom T's



ALL FOR HUNT



HUNTING FOR A BIGGER REASON

I can do all things through Christ
Philippians 4:13
who strengthens me.



This is a Fundraiser for Hunter Schaller and his family organized by Peyton Johnson and family. Designed by Peyton Johnson.

Orders are due by December 19th and will be ready the week of January 7th.

[Click here to place an order](#)

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Those who helped with the Hunter Schaller fundraiser at the Legion Wednesday evening are pictured above, left to right: Jill Krueger, Sandy Leonhardt, Christina McComsey, Angie Sombke, Crystal Strom, Tammie Hanson, Marcy Blackmun and Lisa Harry. (Lisa Harry's Facebook page photo)

Help Wanted

Looking for full-time and part-time labor in Hecla area. Pressure washing livestock trailers and hog barns. Also working in hog barns as needed, training is provided. Must be able to lift at least 50 lbs. Would require some evenings. Must have good work ethic and references. Full-time benefits of health insurance and 401K, part-time has 401K. Contact Cole at 994-2201.

Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Coyotes 54, Cheetahs 53 ½ Chipmunks 52, Foxes 50 ½ Jackelopes 48, Shih Tzus 42
Men's High Games: Brad Waage 225, 214, Randy Stanley 199, Roger Colestock 192
Women's High Games: Vicki Walter 184, 175, Lori Wiley 166, Darci Spanier 162
Men's High Series: Brad Waage 616, Roger Colestock 539, Randy Stanley 522
Women's High Series: Vicki Walter 519, Darci Spanier 464, Lori Wiley 422

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

December 10, 2018 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of November 12, 2018 school board meeting as drafted.
2. Approval of North Central Special Education Co-Op (NCSEC) agenda items...*as fiscal agent*.
3. Approval of November 2018 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of November 2018 District bills for payment.
5. Approval of November 2018 School Transportation report.
6. Acknowledge Receipt of Public School Exemption #19-12.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Second reading and adoption of recommended amendment to MS/HS Student Handbook regarding dual credit enrollment.
3. School Board Committee Reports:
 - a. **Building, Grounds, & Transportation:** Clint Fjelstad, Merle Harder
 - b. **Personnel, Policy, & Curriculum:** Deb Gengerke, Kara Pharis
 - c. **Negotiations:** Grant Rix, Steve Smith, Marty Weismantel
4. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Consider request from Emmanuel Lutheran and United Methodist Church youth groups for use of school buses.
2. Appoint ASBSD Legislative Action Network member for 2019 legislative session

ADJOURN

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Today in Weather History

December 7, 1963: Winds of 50 to 60 mph resulted in blowing snow all day on the 7th, which reduced visibilities to near zero and produced snow drifts several feet deep in many areas. Snowfall in eastern South Dakota was generally from 3 to 7 inches with 1 to 2 inches in the western part of the state. Storm total snowfall included 8 inches at Sisseton, 5 inches at Watertown and Wheaton, 4 inches at Aberdeen, and 2 inches at Mobridge.

December 7, 1971: Heavy snow of 7 to 12 inches fell in north-central South Dakota on the 7th. Timber Lake and Eagle Butte each reported 12 inches of snow. Strong winds accompanied the snow and caused extensive drifting. Drifts up to 15 feet were reported in sheltered areas near Lemmon. Seven inches fell at Mobridge, and 11 inches fell at Selby. McIntosh received 4 inches.

December 7, 1740: By all accounts, the Merrimack River in New Hampshire flooded on this day. The flood is likely the first recorded in New Hampshire. "The snow melted, and a freshet occurred in the Merrimack River, nothing like it having been experienced there for seventy years. At Haverhill, the stream rose fifteen feet, and many houses were floated off." (Perley, Sidney, 1891, *Historic storms of New England* p. 49-51).

December 7, 2006: A rare tornado tore through Kensal Rise in London. This T4 on the TORRO scale, equivalent to an F2 on the Fujita scale, injured six people and damaged 150 homes. According to the BBC, the last tornado which caused significant damage in London was in December 1954, in West London.

1740 - In early December two weeks of mild and rainy weather culminated in the worst flood in fifty years in the Lower Connecticut River Valley. The Merrimack River swelled to its highest level, and in Maine the raging waters swept away mills, carried off bridges, and ruined highways. (David Ludlum)

1935 - Severe flooding hit parts of the Houston, TX, area. Eight persons were killed as one hundred city blocks were inundated. Satsuma reported 16.49 inches of rain. The Buffalo and White Oak Bayous crested on the 9th. (6th-8th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Heavy rain fell across eastern Puerto Rico, with 19.41 inches reported at Las Piedras. Flooding caused five million dollars damage. Another in a series of storms hit the northwestern U.S., with wind gusts above 100 mph reported at Cape Blanco OR. While snow and gusty winds accompanied a cold front crossing the Rockies, strong westerly winds, gusting to 93 mph at Boulder CO, helped temperatures in western Kansas reach the 60s for the sixth day in a row. Freezing drizzle in northeastern slowed traffic to 5 mph on some roads in Morrow County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - An outbreak of cold arctic air brought up to 18 inches of snow to the Colorado Rockies, with 14 inches at Boulder CO, and seven inches at Denver. Heavy snow blanketed New Mexico the following day, with 15 inches reported near Ruidoso. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm moving out of the Central Rocky Mountain Region spread snow across Kansas and Oklahoma into Arkansas and Tennessee. Snowfall totals ranged up to 7.5 inches at Winfield KS. Freezing rain on trees and power lines cut off electricity to 24,000 homes in northeastern Arkansas, and 40,000 homes in the Nashville TN area were without electricity for several hours. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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Today



Sunny

High: 24 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 8 °F

Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 26 °F

Saturday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 14 °F

Sunday




Partly Sunny

High: 25 °F

Today: Sunshine

Highs: 20s to near 30
Lows: Single digits to teens

Warmer weather still on the way

 National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 12/7/2018 4:30 AM Central

Published on: 12/07/2018 at 4:33AM

Plenty of cloud free weather today and tonight. But, it will still be rather chilly outside, with high temperatures only in the 20s to around 30 degrees. A developing southerly wind tonight will help keep temperatures from plummeting below zero.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 20 °F at 12:14 AM

Low Outside Temp: 10 °F at 8:05 AM

High Gust: 16 mph at 6:37 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 60° in 1918

Record Low: -27° in 2013

Average High: 28°F

Average Low: 9°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.11

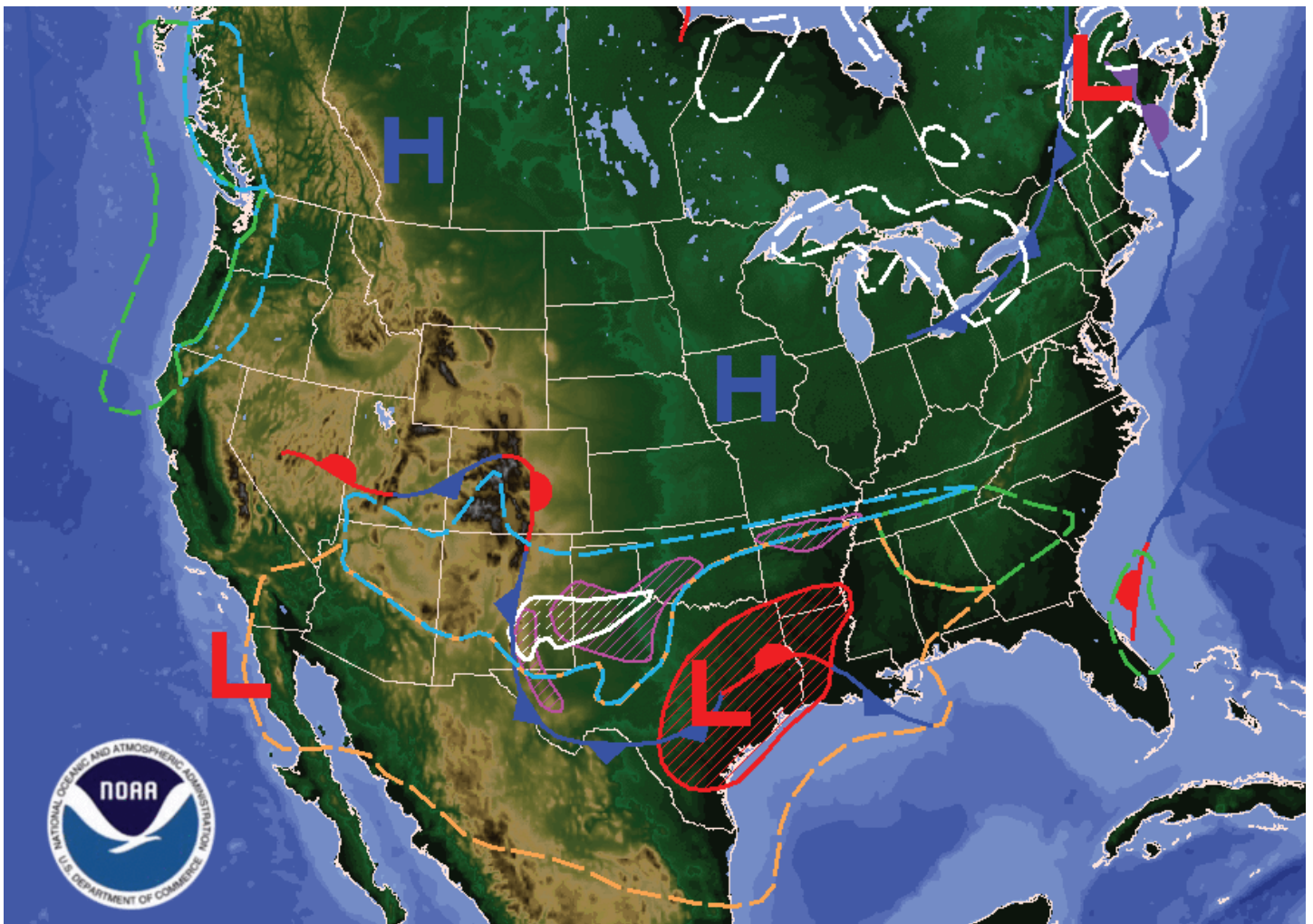
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.31

Precip Year to Date: 15.81

Sunset Tonight: 4:51 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:01 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Fri, Dec 07, 2018, issued 4:52 AM EST
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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A GIFT FOR ETERNITY

Timothy had done very well in his first semester at college. Excitement was building in the family as the day approached when he would be home for Christmas. His mother wanted to make it a special event, one he would remember for years to come.

Lets give Timothy a wristwatch for Christmas, she said. Hes done so well and I want him to know how much we appreciate all of his hard work.

But, protested his father, what happened to that crush proof, waterproof, shock proof, scratch proof watch we gave him when he left for college?

He cant find it, said his mother.

In giving us the gift of His Son, God gave us Someone Who will be with us forever. A Gift that will be with us until the end of our lives and throughout eternity. An indestructible, ever-present Presence.

Jesus promised us to be sure of this I am with you always and everywhere, even to the end of the age.

Some would ask, What does it mean that He will be with us? Did he not leave His disciples when He ascended into heaven? No, He didn't.

When He left them physically He sent the Holy Spirit to be His presence with them personally. We know He was called Immanuel God with us when He was born. We know He is with us now through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Its easy, Father, for us to lose sight of You and Your messages at this time of the year. But help us to pause, pray frequently and sense Your presence within us. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

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2018 Groton SD Community Events

- Groton Lion's Club Bingo- Wednesday Nights 6:30pm at the Groton Legion (Year Round)
- Nov./Dec./Jan./Feb./Mar. 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)
- Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- SDSU Golf at Olive Grove
- 6/15/2019 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 7/4/2019 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 7/14/2019 Summer Fest
- 9/7/2019 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/12/2019 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/11/2019 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2018 Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/10/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 12/01/2018 Olive Grove Golf Course 2018 Holiday Party
- Best Ball Golf Tourney
- SDSU Golf Tourney
- Sunflower Golf Tourney
- Santa Claus Day
- Fireman's Stag
- Tour of Homes
- Crazy Dayz/Open Houses
- School Events

News from the Associated Press

US to ease oil drilling controls protecting imperiled bird

By **MATTHEW BROWN**, Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — The Trump administration moved forward Thursday with plans to ease restrictions on oil and natural gas drilling, mining and other activities that were put in place to protect an imperiled bird species across millions of acres in the American West.

Land management documents released by the U.S. Interior Department show the administration intends to open more public lands to leasing and allow waivers for drilling to encroach into the habitat of greater sage grouse.

Critics warned the changes could wipe out grouse colonies as drilling disrupts breeding grounds. Federal officials under President Barack Obama in 2015 had adopted a sweeping set of land use restrictions intended to stop the birds' decline.

Interior Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt said the agency was responding to requests by states to give them more flexibility in how public lands are managed. He said the goal to conserve sage grouse was unchanged.

"I completely believe that these plans are leaning forward on the conservation of sage grouse," Bernhardt told The Associated Press. "Do they do it in exactly the same way? No. We made some change in the plans and got rid of some things that are simply not necessary."

The changes drew a sharp backlash from conservation groups and wildlife advocates, who warned excessive use of drilling waivers could push sage grouse onto the list of threatened and endangered species.

"If you allow exception after exception, that might make sense for a particular project in a particular spot, but you add them all together and you have death by a thousand cuts," said National Wildlife Association Vice President Tracy Stone-Manning.

Sage grouse range across about 270,000 square miles (700,000 square kilometers) in parts of 11 Western U.S. states and two Canadian provinces. Their numbers plummeted in recent decades.

In 2015, after determining the Obama administration's plans were sufficient to keep the bird from slipping toward extinction, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pledged to revisit its status in five years.

The agency revealed Thursday that it no longer plans that 2020 status review, often a first step toward determining if greater protections are needed.

Spokeswoman Jennifer Strickland told the AP that the Fish and Wildlife Service is not legally required to complete a review. Instead, it will work with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to document the effectiveness of the conservation plans.

Under President Donald Trump, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has vowed to lift obstacles to drilling, and grouse protections have long been viewed by the energy industry as an obstacle to development.

The new plans remove the most protective habitat designations for about 13,000 square miles (34,000 square kilometers) of public land. Those areas, considered essential to the species' survival, were a centerpiece of the Obama policy. The Trump administration also wants to drop some requirements to prioritize leasing for oil and gas outside sage grouse habitat.

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, a Republican, said Thursday's announcement showed federal officials heeded the state's desire for changes to the 2015 plans.

"This is a great example of federal leaders listening to state leaders, valuing their expertise, and changing their plans based on that input," Herbert said in a statement.

But U.S. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nevada, said the Interior Department "has decided to put the interests of the oil and gas industry ahead of the best interests of Nevadans."

"This new plan undermines the delicate balance Western states had struck to ensure the protection of sage grouse populations and strengthen economic development across the western United States," she said.

Sage grouse are large, ground-dwelling birds known for an elaborate mating ritual in which males strut

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around breeding grounds with large, puffed-out air sacs protruding from their chests.

They once numbered in the millions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now estimates there are 200,000 to 500,000 of the birds after energy development, disease and other causes decimated populations in some areas.

The Trump administration's proposal would reverse or modify the Obama-era protections in seven states — Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, California, Idaho and Oregon. No significant changes were proposed in Montana, Washington or the Dakotas.

The oil and gas industry chafed at the old rules. Once Trump took office, industry representatives lobbied the administration to give more recognition to changes in drilling practices that reduce land disturbance.

"We can do both — protect sage grouse and move forward with responsible energy development," said Kathleen Sgamma with the Western Energy Alliance, which represents more than 300 oil and gas companies. "We've reduced the size of well pads, reduced the numbers of wells. And we had done all these things and the prior administration assumed development was taking place like it was 20 years ago."

Governors from several Western states previously raised concerns over a related federal directive from the Bureau of Land Management that would limit a type of land swap that can be used to preserve habitat for the birds.

Without land swaps and related forms of compensation to offset habitat damage, the governors said it would be harder to help the sage grouse.

In response, the Interior Department Thursday revised the directive to say federal officials would consider state-mandated or voluntary proposals for land swaps or similar offsets.

"Where there's a state requirement, we require in our permits that they comply with state requirements," Bernhardt said.

The governors and the public get another chance to weigh in before a final decision is expected in early 2019.

Associated Press writer Dan Elliott in Denver and Scott Sonner in Reno, Nevada, contributed to this report.

Follow Matthew Brown at <https://twitter.com/matthewbrownap>

Smithfield fined for Sioux Falls wastewater violations

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota agency has fined Smithfield Foods more than \$53,000 for wastewater violations at the company's Sioux Falls plant.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources says Virginia-based Smithfield violated its surface water discharge permit in August.

The penalty includes \$26,900 for surface water quality violations and more than \$26,000 for laboratory costs incurred by the agency.

Smithfield reported in August that a problem at its Sioux Falls wastewater plant was causing higher-than-allowed ammonia levels to be discharged into the Big Sioux River. The agency says the ammonia levels violated the permitted daily maximum limit for seven days.

The Argus Leader reports Smithfield has been operating in compliance with its permit since Aug. 20. Smithfield says there was no risk to humans and no reports of fish or wildlife being affected.

Judge: Pipeline owners trespassed, but work can continue

By KEVIN MCGILL, Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A Louisiana judge ruled Thursday that a company building an oil pipeline through south Louisiana trespassed on the land of three people opposed to the project, but he allowed the work to continue while awarding the three only \$150 apiece in compensation and damages.

Judge Keith Comeaux's ruling Thursday said the land was seized for a legitimate public purpose, and that the land in dispute was of little value to its out-of-state owners. His ruling disappointed opponents of

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the nearly complete Bayou Bridge Pipeline, who said they would appeal.

Opponents had hoped the St. Martinville-based judge would order the pipeline removed from the relatively small amount of land involved, a small fraction of a 38-acre (15-hectare) tract. Barring that, they had hoped for a major damage award to discourage other corporations from illegally taking land.

Energy Transfer Partners, the project owner, has said the 162-mile (260-kilometer) pipeline is expected to be operational by year's end.

"While the court did find the company trespassed on our clients' land, the damages award validates their business decision," Pamela Spees, an attorney for the Center for Constitutional Rights, which worked with Loyola University law professor Bill Quigley and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade on the issue.

ETP issued a brief statement, noting that construction is nearly complete. "We are pleased with the ruling from Judge Comeaux and look forward to bringing the pipeline into service before the end of the year," the emailed statement said.

At the heart of the legal issues was the practice of expropriation — government allowing a private entity to take land, with fair compensation to the owners, for a legitimate public purpose, in this case transferring oil to refineries along the Mississippi River. Comeaux allowed the expropriation to proceed.

During a trial before the judge last week, company attorneys cited a company-hired expert's testimony that more pipelines benefit Louisiana's energy economy and the public at large. Pipeline opponents and the landowners argued that the pipeline project is not for the public good, but for private gain at the expense of potential environmental damage from spills.

Comeaux's ruling noted that hundreds of owners of the 38-acre tract had either not been located or had been compensated for rights of way. But three — siblings Katherine and Peter Aaslestad along with Theda Larson Wright — refused to sign right of way agreements. The three live outside Louisiana but claim deep family roots in the state.

In awarding each of the three \$75 apiece in compensation for the land, Comeaux noted that the acreage to be permanently expropriated for the pipeline route was about 1.75 acres; and the calculation of each of the three landowner's financial interest in the tract amounted to, at best, a few dollars in total. Because project owners had at one point offered \$75, Comeaux awarded that to each.

Comeaux agreed that the project owners trespassed by failing to get permission to work from the Aaslestad and Wright and by failing to start expropriation proceedings before building. However, he sided with Energy Transfer Partners in noting that the three had never been on the land prior to the expropriation. And he rejected claims of mental anguish, saying "no party has sought medical attention," adding that the three landowners "are self-admitted advocates against pipelines."

He added another \$75 apiece in damages for a total of \$150 each.

Bayou Bridge Pipeline LLC is a joint venture of Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners and Phillips 66. Energy Transfer Partners built the Dakota Access pipeline, a project that sparked a string of violent clashes between protesters and police in North Dakota in 2016 and 2017. The Bayou Bridge pipeline is the last link in a pipeline network connecting the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota with Louisiana refineries and export terminals.

'Bathroom bill' sponsor won't try again during 2019 session

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The sponsor of an unsuccessful bill to restrict the bathrooms South Dakota transgender students could use said he won't try again when he returns to the Legislature this session.

Incoming Republican Rep. Fred Deutsch told The Associated Press this week that he doesn't see the urgency under President Donald Trump. Deutsch said he proposed the bill in 2016 to push back against federal overreach during former President Barack Obama's administration.

"I've not heard of anybody else that's going to bring a bathroom bill. I hope not," said Deutsch, who is coming back to the House after deciding not run for re-election in 2016.

GOP Gov. Dennis Daugaard vetoed the 2016 bill, which brought national headlines as critics pushed back against it as discriminatory. Supporters had argued it would protect student privacy.

A bill that would have restricted which locker rooms transgender students could use was scuttled before it had its first hearing in 2017 after Daugaard issued a veto threat.

Deutsch's decision not to pursue such a policy again comes as a supportive governor will take office in January. Republican Gov.-elect Kristi Noem has said she would have signed the measure and then kept working on it.

After convening a summer group to study the issue ahead of the 2019 legislative session, Deutsch said he came to the conclusion that there's "no need to move forward with that issue at this time." The session starts Jan. 8.

Libby Skarin, policy director at the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota, said she hopes other lawmakers will follow Deutsch's lead and the issue won't surface when the Legislature meets.

"Transgender people in South Dakota didn't ask for this fight," Skarin said. "If this marks the end of these attempts, I will be very thankful."

Family Heritage Alliance Action, a key conservative group that previously raised the prospect of pursuing such legislation under a new governor in 2019, didn't immediately comment.

Union files complaint against South Dakota care facility

REDFIELD, S.D. (AP) — A workers union is alleging that the state-run South Dakota Developmental Center is chronically understaffed and puts employees at risk of injury.

The union has filed charges with the state Department of Labor and Regulation claiming unfair labor practices at the Redfield facility, where care is provided for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the Argus Leader reported.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees chapter is also alleging that the center has denied state employees their right to union representation.

The chapter represents 180 employees at the developmental center, which is overseen by the South Dakota Department of Human Services.

Kooper Caraway, a chapter representative, said staff members at the facility are often left without support when working with clients. Caraway said that exposes workers to risks in cases where an individual becomes unruly or violent.

"There've been situations lately where a (living facility) should have a staffing level of five or six people, but a cottage might only have one or two people for an overnight shift," he said.

Center employees reported 42 injuries through the first 10 months of this year, according to data provided by the state Department of Human Services. That compares to 64 employee injuries reported in 2017, and 59 worker injuries reported in 2016, according to the data.

Dan Hoblick, the department's communications officer, said the center hasn't yet been notified of the charge. He said safety is a priority at the center for both clients and staff.

The center strives to exceed federal staffing guidelines and has a practice of keeping three staff members on duty during the day and evening shifts, Hoblick said. He didn't address allegations about workers being denied representation by their union.

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

SD regents pass tuition plan for students from nearby states

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Students from six surrounding states will soon pay the same tuition rate as South Dakota residents at the state's public universities.

The Rapid City Journal reports that the South Dakota Board of Regents approved the new policy this week. Board President Kevin Schieffer says the goal is to grow enrollment, meet the state's workforce needs and attract more financial resources to the universities and the state.

The South Dakota Advantage program allows first-year and transfer students from Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa and Colorado to pay the same tuition as South Dakota residents. South

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Dakota already has a reciprocity agreement with Minnesota.

Some South Dakota universities also already have tuition agreements with neighboring states. The new program will be effective for the term starting summer 2019.

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

Authorities identify Hot Springs woman killed in crash

OELRICHS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified a Hot Springs woman who died in a crash in Fall River County last weekend.

The Highway Patrol says 72-year-old Helen Iverson was driving a minivan that crossed the center line of U.S. Highway 18 on Sunday afternoon and caused a collision with a pickup truck. She died at the scene, about 13 miles east of Oelrichs.

The 69-year-old man driving the pickup suffered minor injuries and a 72-year-old female passenger in his truck life-threatening injuries. She was hospitalized in Rapid City.

Small amount of crops still in the field in South Dakota

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A small amount of late-season crops remain in the field in South Dakota as the end of the year nears.

The federal Agriculture Department's last weekly crop report of the season says 82 percent of sunflowers, 95 percent of corn and 95 percent of sorghum have been harvested.

Sixty-nine percent of subsoil moisture supplies and 86 percent of topsoil moisture supplies are rated adequate to surplus.

Weekly reports for the 2019 season begin in April.

Hart steps down as Oscars host over his past anti-gay tweets

By JAKE COYLE, AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Just two days after being named host of the Academy Awards, Kevin Hart stepped down following an outcry over past homophobic tweets by the comedian.

Capping a swift and dramatic fallout, Hart wrote on Twitter just after midnight Friday that he was withdrawing as Oscars host because he didn't want to be a distraction. "I sincerely apologize to the LGBTQ community for my insensitive words from my past," wrote Hart.

Hart stepped aside just about an hour after refusing to apologize for tweets that resurfaced after he was announced as Oscars host on Tuesday. In a video on Instagram, Hart said the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences gave him an ultimatum: apologize or "we're going to have to move on and find another host."

"I chose to pass on the apology," Hart said. "The reason why I passed is because I've addressed this several times."

The film academy didn't respond to messages Thursday evening.

Hart has since deleted some of the anti-gay tweets, mostly dated from 2009-2011. But they had already been screen-captured and been shared online. In 2011, he wrote in a since-deleted tweet: "Yo if my son comes home & try's 2 play with my daughters doll house I'm going 2 break it over his head & say n my voice `stop that's gay."

In an earlier post Thursday, Hart wrote on Instagram that critics should "stop being negative" about his earlier anti-gay remarks.

"I'm almost 40 years old. If you don't believe that people change, grow, evolve? I don't know what to tell you," said Hart, who added, in all-caps: "I love everybody."

Hart's attitudes about homosexuality were also a well-known part of his stand-up act. In the 2010 special "Seriously Funny," he said "one of my biggest fears is my son growing up and being gay."

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"Keep in mind, I'm not homophobic, I have nothing against gay people, do what you want to do, but me, being a heterosexual male, if I can prevent my son from being gay, I will," Hart said.

GLAAD, the advocacy group for LGBTQ rights, said Thursday that it reached out to Oscars broadcaster ABC, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences and Hart's management to "discuss Kevin's anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and record."

Comedian and actor Billy Eichner said "a simple, authentic apology showing any bit of understanding or remorse would have been so simple."

It's not the first time an Oscars host has been derailed by anti-gay remarks. Ahead of the 2012 Academy Awards, producer Brett Ratner, who had been paired with host Eddie Murphy, resigned days after using a gay slur at a film screening. Murphy soon after exited, as well.

That year, a tried-and-true Oscars veteran — Billy Crystal — jumped in to save the show, hosting for his eighth time. This time, speculation has already been rampant that few in Hollywood want the gig, for which few win glowing reviews.

The film academy moved up this year's ceremony to Feb. 24, giving producers little time to find a replacement.

State spokeswoman Trump's expected choice for UN ambassador

By CATHERINE LUCEY, MATTHEW LEE and ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is expected to announce he will nominate State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert to be the next U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, officials familiar with the plans said.

Two administration officials confirmed Trump's plans Thursday. A Republican congressional aide said the president was expected to announce his decision by tweet on Friday morning. The officials were not authorized to speak publicly before Trump's announcement.

Trump has previously said that Nauert, a former Fox News Channel reporter who had little foreign policy experience before becoming State Department spokeswoman, was under serious consideration to replace Nikki Haley, who announced in October that she would step down at the end of this year. If Nauert is confirmed by the Senate, she would be a leading administration voice on Trump's foreign policy.

Trump told reporters last month that Nauert was "excellent," adding, "She's been a supporter for a long time."

Still, with Trump, no staffing decision is final until he makes the formal announcement, since he has been known to change course in the past.

Nauert, who became State Department spokeswoman under former secretary Rex Tillerson, did not respond to requests for comment.

Plucked from Fox by the White House to serve as State Department spokeswoman, Nauert catapulted into the upper echelons of the agency's hierarchy when Tillerson was fired in March and replaced with Mike Pompeo. Nauert was then appointed acting undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs and was for a time the highest-ranking woman and fourth highest-ranking official in the building.

Nauert, who did not have a good relationship with Tillerson and had considered leaving the department, told associates at the time she was taken aback by the promotion offer and recommended a colleague for the job. But when White House officials told her they wanted her, she accepted.

That role gave her responsibilities far beyond the news conferences she held in the State Department briefing room. She oversaw public diplomacy in Washington and all of the roughly 275 overseas U.S. embassies, consulates and other posts. She was in charge of the Global Engagement Center that fights extremist messaging from the Islamic State group and others, and she has a seat on the U.S. Agency for Global Media that oversees government broadcast networks such as Voice of America.

Just 18 months ago, she wasn't even in government.

Nauert was a breaking news anchor on Trump's favorite television show, "Fox & Friends," when she was tapped to be the face and voice of the administration's foreign policy. With a master's degree from

Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, she had come to Fox from ABC News, where she was a general assignment reporter. She hadn't specialized in foreign policy or international relations.

Shut out from the top by Tillerson and his inner circle, Nauert developed relationships with career diplomats. Barred from traveling with Tillerson, she embarked on her own overseas trips, visiting Bangladesh and Myanmar last year to see the plight of Rohingya Muslims, and then Israel after a planned stop in Syria was scrapped. All the while, she stayed in the good graces of the White House, even as Tillerson was increasingly on the outs.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders described Nauert in March as "a team player" and "a strong asset for the administration."

AP Investigation: Yemen's Houthi rebels tortured prisoners

By MAGGIE MICHAEL, Associated Press

MARIB, Yemen (AP) — Farouk Baakar was on duty as a medic at al-Rashid hospital the day a bleeding man was brought into the emergency room with gunshot wounds and signs of torture. He'd been whipped across the back and hung by his wrists for days.

The patient, Baakar learned, had been left for dead by the side of a highway after being held captive in a prison run by the Houthi rebels who control northern Yemen.

Baakar spent hours removing bullets and repairing ruptured intestine. He tended to the patient's recovery for 80 days and, at the end, agreed to pose for a selfie with him.

Weeks later, Houthi security officials grabbed the man again. They searched his phone and found the photo.

Then they came for Baakar.

Militiamen stormed the hospital, blindfolded Baakar and hustled him away in a pickup truck. Because he'd given medical help to an enemy of the Houthis, they told him, he was now their enemy too. He spent 18 months in prisons within the expanse of Yemen controlled by the Houthis. He says they burned him, beat him and chained him to the ceiling by his wrists for 50 days until they thought he was dead.

Baakar and his patient are among thousands of people who have been imprisoned by the Houthi militia during the four years of Yemen's grinding civil war. Many of them, an Associated Press investigation has found, have suffered extreme torture — being smashed in their faces with batons, hung from chains by their wrists or genitals for weeks at a time, and scorched with acid.

The AP spoke with 23 people who said they survived or witnessed torture in Houthi detention sites, as well as with eight relatives of detainees, five lawyers and rights activists, and three security officers involved in prisoner swaps who said they saw marks of torture on inmates.

These accounts underscore the significance of a prisoner-swap agreement reached Thursday at the start of United Nations-sponsored peace talks in Sweden between the Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government backed by Saudi Arabia and the United States.

As a confidence-building measure, the two sides agreed to release thousands of prisoners, though details must still be hammered out. But while the coalition side would release captured Houthi fighters, the rebels would largely free civilians who, like Baakar, were imprisoned in brutal sweeps aimed at suppressing opposition and obtaining captives who could be traded for ransom or exchanged for Houthi fighters held by the other side.

The Abductees' Mothers Union, an association of female relatives of detainees jailed by the Houthis, has documented more than 18,000 detainees in the last four years, including 1,000 cases of torture in a network of secret prisons, according to Sabah Mohammed, a representative of the group in the city of Marib.

The mothers' group says at least 126 prisoners have died from torture since the Houthis took over the capital, Sanaa, in late 2014.

Mosques, ancient castles, colleges, clubs and other civilian structures have served as first-stop facilities for thousands of detainees before they are moved into official prisons, according to testimonies of victims and human rights agencies. The mother's group counted 30 so-called black sites in Sanaa alone.

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Houthi leaders previously have denied that they engage in torture, though they did not respond to repeated AP requests for comment in recent weeks.

The Houthis' Human Rights Ministry said in a statement in late 2016 that "there is no policy or systematic use of torture on prisoners." It added that the ministry and prosecutors are working to "ensure the rights of prisoners and provide all legal guarantees to achieve justice and fair trials."

Amnesty International says that "horrific human rights abuses, as well as war crimes, are being committed throughout the country by all parties to the conflict."

But international outrage over the bloodshed in Yemen has largely focused on abuses carried out by the U.S.-backed and Saudi-led military coalition fighting on the side of the Yemeni government. The AP has exposed torture at secret prisons run by the UAE and their Yemeni allies and has documented the deaths of civilians from strikes by drones in the United States' campaign against al-Qaida's branch in Yemen.

Abuses by the Houthis have been less visible to the outside world as the rebels worked to eliminate dissent and silence journalists.

From the capital, Sanaa, the Houthis rule over around 70 percent of Yemen's 29 million people. The Houthis believe they are the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and, as such, have a divine right to rule Yemen. Those who oppose them are "God's enemies," worthy of punishment.

One of the former prisoners of the Houthis who spoke to the AP was a school teacher from the northern city of Dhamar who, after his release, fled to Marib, which is under control of the Houthis' opponents. He asked that he be identified only by his first name, Hussein, because he fears for the safety of family members still in rebel territory.

He was held for four months and 22 days in an underground cell. He was blindfolded the entire time, he said, but kept count of the days by following the Muslim calls to prayer. Throughout his confinement, he said, his jailers beat him with iron rods and told him he was going to die.

"Prepare your will," he said they told him.

'CRY TEARS OF BLOOD'

The Houthis began in the 1990s as a Shiite revivalist religious movement. The group turned into an armed militia in 2004, when the military under then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh killed their founder, the brother of the current leader, Abdel-Malek al-Houthi.

Saleh fought the Houthi insurgency for six years, with thousands killed on both sides before reaching a cease-fire just months ahead of the 2011 Arab Spring uprising that put an end to his rule.

Less than three years later, the Houthis joined ranks with Saleh in an alliance of convenience — the former autocrat saw a possible route back to power, while the rebels gained backing from the army units still loyal to him. Together, they occupied most of northern and western Yemen, driving out Saleh's successor, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

In response, the U.S.-backed coalition launched its campaign to restore Hadi's internationally recognized government and thwart what Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates claim is an attempt by Iran, the Houthis' ally, to take over.

The Houthis have sought to entrench their rule by cracking down on a wide range of perceived enemies — young activists, religious minorities, socialists and others who might oppose Houthi rule.

But there are divisions within the movement.

Internally, a moderate faction of Houthi leaders acknowledged abuses and sought to put an end to them. The leader's brother, Yahia al-Houthi, set up a committee in 2016 to investigate reports of torture and indefinite detentions, and helped free 13,500 prisoners in its first three months.

The committee sent a video report to the leader, Abdel-Malek, showing scenes of overcrowded prison wards and prisoners with bruises, along with testimony from senior Houthi figures.

Abdel-Malek never responded. Instead, hard-line security officials shut down the committee and briefly detained two of its members.

The video was not made public, but the AP obtained a copy, and it contains startling admissions from prominent Houthi figures about abuses.

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"What we saw would make you cry tears of blood," one committee member says.

'HELP ME'

The first few months in Houthi detention sites are usually the worst, ex-inmates say, as the militants improvise and inflict their torture.

Anas al-Sarrari recalls slowly regaining consciousness in a dark corridor in the Sanaa's Political Security prison. The 26-year-old critic of Houthi brutality held his head between his swollen hands and bruised wrists, as flashes of two months of torture raced through his mind.

He was eating grilled corn when masked militiamen snatched him from a main street in Sanaa one morning in September 2015.

He remembered hanging for 23 hours by his handcuffed wrists from the ceiling of a stuffy interrogation room as numbness claimed his fingers, arms and much of his body. The cuffs began to slit his wrists and he tried to rest on his toes.

"Death must be less painful than this nonstop torture," he recalled thinking at the time. "One more hour like this and I will die."

His jailers unchained him from the ceiling for a couple hours each day, when he was given hard bread and a plate of vegetables and dirty rice crawling with cockroaches. When they gave him yogurt, he was able to see the date written on the container and mark the passage of time.

"My mother doesn't even know if I am alive or dead," he thought.

He remembered seeing a torturer with a stun gun staring at his head before dealing a blow with all his might. Al-Sarrari collapsed.

He doesn't know how long it took for the Houthi militiamen to untie him from the ceiling and then dump him in the corridor. He tried to stand but couldn't pull his body together. "Maybe I am in heaven?" he remembers thinking. "Maybe it's a bad dream?"

At daylight, he tried again to move, but failed. "Help me," he screamed. Militiamen dragged him into a cell. Only then did he realize he was paralyzed. He had no one to talk to, no one to take him to the bathroom. He urinated and defecated like a newborn baby.

Guards sometimes took him out to wash and returned him to the filthy cell, where he banged his head on the wall in desperation. After four months, they cleaned him up and released him.

Al-Sarrari showed AP copies of his medical records. He now uses a wheelchair and believes that the purpose of his torture and release was to send a message to others who might want to criticize the Houthis.

"To see people with disabilities, coming out of prison after excessive torture will terrify everyone: Look, this will happen to you if you speak up," he said.

'PRESSURE ROOM'

The selfie of Baakar with an escaped prisoner was all the evidence seven Houthi militiamen needed of the medic's disloyalty when they came for him at al-Rashid hospital.

"How much money did they give you to treat the enemies?" one militiaman screamed in his face.

Baakar says they slapped and kicked him, beat him with batons on his face, teeth and body, and taunted him: "You will be killed because you are a traitor." The militiamen took him to a location he couldn't identify, stood him on a wooden box, chained his wrists to the ceiling and then kicked the box out from under his feet.

He says they stripped him and whipped his naked body, then pulled out his nails and tore out his hair. He fainted.

"It was so painful, especially when they come the next days and press on the bruises with their fingers," he said.

The Houthis became more and more creative, Baakar said. They once brought plastic bottles and with a lighter melted the plastic over his head, back, and between his thighs.

Eventually, Baakar was taken to Hodeida castle, the 500-year-old Ottoman-era fortress on the Red Sea

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coast. He says guards pushed him into a filthy basement known as the "Pressure Room" and hung him by his wrists. In a dark corner, he could see shapes of dead cats and even torn fingers.

When he grew thirsty, he said, torturers splashed water on his face and he licked off the drops. At times, they would let other prisoners enter his cell and give him water from a bottle.

On the day guards thought Baakar had died, then realized he was still alive, they untied him and allowed two prisoners to feed and clean him.

As Baakar began to recover from his wounds, other detainees who had been tortured began asking for his help. He tried to heal the injured. He carried out simple surgeries, without anesthesia, using electric wires, the only tool he had in prison.

Sometimes the guards allowed him to go about his medical work. Other times, he says, they turned on him and punished him for helping his fellow prisoners.

Baakar recalled helping a man who'd been hung by his penis and testes and was unable to urinate. Another man with a white beard and white hair had been badly burned when the Houthis poured acid on his back, melting his skin and nearly sealing his buttocks. Baakar used wires to make an opening and, with his fingers, removed the stool.

"When I asked Houthi guards for help, saying the man is dying, their only answer was: 'Let him die,'" Baakar said.

The Houthis released Baakar on Dec. 3, 2017 after his family paid 5.5 million rials, about \$8,000 at the time.

Soon after he fled to Marib, the anti-Houthi stronghold. He lives in a tent with other refugees, where he continues to treat the sick and wounded.

The AP's reporting on the war in Yemen is supported by a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. SOME OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

Robert Mueller is set to reveal more details about his Russia investigation on Friday as he faces court deadlines in the cases of two men who worked closely with Donald Trump.

2. HUAWEI CASE ADDS INTRIGUE TO TRADE RELATIONS

The dramatic arrest of a Chinese telecommunications executive shows why it will be so hard for the Trump administration to resolve its deepening conflict with China.

3. PARIS BRACES FOR PROTEST RALLIES

The Eiffel Tower will be closed on Saturday as French authorities tighten security to prevent another outbreak of violence following three weeks of anti-government protests.

4. HORRIFYING DEEDS IN MIDST OF CIVIL WAR

An Associated Press investigation has uncovered evidence of torture at detention sites run by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

5. FROM FORMER FOX ANCHOR TO AMBASSADOR

President Donald Trump is expected to announce he will nominate State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert to be the next U.S. envoy to the United Nations.

6. A HEARTFELT TEXAS GOODBYE

Thousands waved and cheered along the route as funeral train No. 4141 — for the 41st president — carried George H.W. Bush's remains to their final resting place.

7. TWITTER TROUBLE

Just two days after being named host of the Academy Awards, Kevin Hart stepped down following an outcry over past homophobic tweets.

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8. WHOSE NUCLEAR TALKS HAVE STALLED

Since remarkable claims made during the first-ever meeting of leaders from the U.S. and North Korea, there have been recriminations, simmering bad blood — and very little progress.

9. GRAND PRIZE FOR YOUNG SINGER

Ariana Grande caps off a successful year as a pop star — but a trying one as a maturing young woman — as she's named Woman of the Year at the 13th annual Billboard Women in Music event.

10. SAGE GROUSES HAVE REASON TO GROUSE

The Trump administration is moving forward with plans to ease restrictions on oil and natural gas drilling, mining and other activities put in place to protect an imperiled bird species across millions of acres in the American West.

Eiffel Tower to be closed as Paris braces for more protests

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN, Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The Eiffel Tower and the Louvre museum in Paris will be closed on Saturday as French authorities tighten security to prevent another outbreak of violence following three weeks of anti-government protests.

And at the height of the festive shopping season, many retailers have said they will remain shut for the day for fear they may be in the line of any unrest between protesters and police.

In addition to the 8,000 police forces that will be deployed in the French capital city, the Paris police prefect has identified 14 high-risk sectors that will be cleared out.

Fearing protesters could target street furniture and use material found at construction sites as makeshift weapons, Paris police will remove all the glass containers, railings and building machines set up in the identified sectors which include the world-renowned and glitzy Champs-Elysees avenue.

"According to the information we have, some radicalized and rebellious people will try to get mobilized tomorrow," Interior minister Christophe Castaner told a press conference on Friday. "Some ultra-violent people want to take part."

Many shop owners across the French capital are getting ready for the violence, setting up walls with carton boards to protect their windows. Meanwhile, the Nicolas wine chain, one of the biggest retailers in the country, canceled all its wine tasting sessions scheduled for Saturday.

Across the country some 89,000 police will be mobilized, up from 65,000 last weekend when more than 130 people were injured and over 400 were arrested in the worst street violence seen in Paris in decades. And authorities have also cancelled six French league soccer matches this weekend around the country.

Since the unrest began on Nov. 17 in reaction to a sharp increase in diesel taxes, four people have been killed in accidents.

The protesters are collectively referred to as the "yellow vest" movement, in reference to the fluorescent safety outfit French motorists keep in their cars.

Amid the unrest, some of the protesters, French union officials and prominent politicians across the political spectrum have urged calm especially as French President Emmanuel Macron agreed to abandon the fuel tax hike that triggered the movement. However, protesters' demands have now expanded to other issues hurting French workers, retirees and students.

Students opposing an education reform protested again Friday, a day after footage widely shared on social media showing the arrest of high school students protesting outside Paris prompted an outcry. Trade unions and far-left parties have lashed out at perceived police brutality.

The images, filmed Thursday at Mantes-la-Jolie, showed a group of students on their knees with their hands behind their head. They are being watched over by armed police officers whose faces are hidden by ski masks.

Interior minister Christophe Castaner said that 151 people were arrested in the small town, adding that some of them carried weapons. He said none of the students were injured.

The rioting has also had an economic impact at the height of the holiday shopping season. Rampaging

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groups last weekend threw cobblestones through Paris storefronts and looted valuables in some of the city's richest neighborhoods.

The national Federation of French markets said that Christmas markets have been "strongly impacted" and that its members registered "an average fall of their estimated figures between 30 and 40 percent since the beginning of the movement of the yellow vests."

In addition to the closure of the Eiffel Tower, many shops and museums across France, including the Louvre, Orsay Museum and the Grand Palais, will keep their doors shut on Saturday for safety reasons.

"We need to protect culture sites in Paris but also everywhere in France," Culture Minister Franck Riester told RTL radio.

In Paris, police officers will be equipped with a dozen armored vehicles that could be used for the first time in a French urban area since 2005.

"These vehicles can be very useful to protect buildings," said Stanislas Gaudon, the head of police union Alliance. "And in case they set up barricades, we can quickly clear out the space and let our units progress."

Why Huawei arrest deepens conflict between US and China

By PAUL WISEMAN and FRANK BAJAK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The arrest of a prominent Chinese telecommunications executive has driven home why it will be so hard for the Trump administration to resolve its deepening conflict with China.

The arrest of Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's chief financial officer, has heightened skepticism over the trade truce that Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping reached last weekend in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Stock markets tumbled Thursday on fears that the 90-day cease-fire won't last, but regained their equilibrium in Europe and Asia on Friday.

A bail hearing for Meng, who faces possible extradition to the United States after her arrest in Vancouver, Canada, last weekend, was set for later Friday.

Huawei has been a subject of U.S. national security concerns for years and Meng's case echoes well beyond tariffs or market access. Washington and Beijing are locked in a clash between the world's two largest economies for economic and political dominance for decades to come.

"It's a much broader issue than just a trade dispute," said Amanda DeBusk, chair of the international trade practice at Dechert LLP. "It pulls in: Who is going to be the world leader essentially?"

Meng was detained on the same day that Trump and Xi met at the Group of 20 summit in Argentina and agreed to a cease-fire in their trade war. The Globe and Mail newspaper, citing law enforcement sources, reported she is suspected of trying to evade U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Huawei is the world's biggest supplier of network gear used by phone and internet companies and long has been seen as a front for spying by the Chinese military or security services. A U.S. National Security Agency cybersecurity adviser, Rob Joyce, last month accused Beijing of violating a 2015 agreement with the U.S. to halt electronic theft of intellectual property.

Other nations are increasingly being forced to choose between Chinese and U.S. suppliers for next-generation "5G" wireless technology. U.S. critics are lobbying other countries not to buy the equipment from Huawei, arguing that the company may be working stealthily for Beijing's spymasters.

"There is ample evidence to suggest that no major Chinese company is independent of the Chinese government and Communist Party — and Huawei, which China's government and military tout as a 'national champion' is no exception," Sens. Mark Warner, D-Va., and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., wrote in October to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. They urged him to keep Huawei off Canada's next-generation network.

Still, a senior Japanese official cast doubt Friday over reports that his country was considering blocking Huawei and its biggest Chinese rival, ZTE Corp., from government procurement contracts. He said there had been no decision. Australia, New Zealand and Britain are among the countries that have moved to limit the Chinese companies' involvement in their next-generation telecoms networks.

In a sign Meng's case might not derail the Trump-Xi truce, Beijing protested Meng's arrest but said

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talks with the Trump administration would go ahead. Chinese Commerce Ministry spokesman Gao Feng said China is confident it can reach a deal during the 90 days that Trump agreed to suspend a scheduled increase in U.S. import taxes on \$200 billion worth of Chinese products.

Some analysts say China has deployed predatory tactics in its drive to overtake America's dominance in technology and global economic leadership, such as forcing American and other foreign companies to hand over trade secrets in exchange for access to the Chinese market and engaging in cyber-theft.

Washington also regards Beijing's ambitious long-term development plan, "Made in China 2025," as a scheme to dominate such fields as robotics and electric vehicles by unfairly subsidizing Chinese companies and discriminating against foreign competitors.

Priscilla Moriuchi, a former East Asia specialist at National Security Agency now with the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future, said both ZTE and Huawei are wedded to China's military and political leadership.

"The threat from these companies lies in their access to critical internet backbone infrastructure," she said.

The Trump administration has tightened regulations on high-tech exports to China and made it harder for Chinese firms to invest in U.S. companies or to buy American technology in cutting-edge areas like robotics, artificial intelligence and virtual reality.

Earlier this year, the United States nearly drove Huawei's biggest Chinese rival, ZTE Corp., out of business for selling equipment to North Korea and Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions. But Trump issued a reprieve, perhaps partly because U.S. tech companies, major suppliers to ZTE, would also have been scorched. ZTE agreed to pay a \$1 billion fine, change its board and management and to let American regulators monitor its operations.

The U.S. and Chinese tech industries depend on each other so much for components that "it is very hard to decouple the two without punishing U.S. companies, without shooting ourselves in the foot," said Adam Segal, cyberspace analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Dean Garfield, president of the U.S. Information Technology Industry Council trade group, said innovation by U.S. companies often depends utterly on product development and testing by Chinese partners and component suppliers.

Still, the pushback against Huawei and ZTE is limiting their reach into the world's richest markets. Nearly a year ago, AT&T pulled out of a deal to sell Huawei smartphones. Barred from use by U.S. government agencies and contractors, they're mostly locked out of the American market.

Derek Scissors, a China specialist at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, doubts that China will change its tech policies since it needs innovative technologies to keep its economy growing as its labor force ages and it confronts a huge stockpile of debt.

"We're not going to deal that away in 90 days," he said. "I don't see a way out of this."

Likewise, Rod Hunter, an international economic official in President George W. Bush's White House and a partner at law firm Baker McKenzie, said, "I'm skeptical that the Chinese are going to want to say 'uncle.'" U.S. and Chinese officials are "trying to tackle a problem that is going to take years, maybe a decade, to resolve."

Bajak reported from Boston. AP staff writers Rob Gillies in Toronto, Joe McDonald in Beijing and Yuri Kageyama in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Court deadlines set stage for more Russia probe details

By CHAD DAY and ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Robert Mueller is set to reveal more details about his Russia investigation on Friday as he faces court deadlines in the cases of two men who worked closely with President Donald Trump.

The special counsel and federal prosecutors in New York will have to file separate memos in court detailing the cooperation of longtime Trump legal fixer Michael Cohen, who has admitted lying to Congress and orchestrating hush-money payments to protect the president. And Mueller's team will also be disclosing what they say former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort lied about when his plea deal fell apart

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last month.

Cohen and Manafort are among five former Trump associates whom prosecutors have accused of lying either to federal investigators or to Congress.

The court filings will close out a week in which Mueller's team for the first time provided some details of the help they've received from former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn. Prosecutors, who said Flynn's assistance was "substantial" and merited no prison time, disclosed that he had cooperated not only with the Russia investigation but also with at least one other undisclosed criminal probe.

The new details about Mueller's investigation are set to become public as Trump continues to lash out at the Russia investigation and those who help prosecutors. Trump singled out Cohen, accusing him of lying to get a reduced prison sentence. The president also praised another associate, Roger Stone, for saying he wouldn't testify against him, and Trump said a pardon for Manafort isn't off the table.

In the latest filings Friday, prosecutors will weigh in on whether Cohen deserves prison time and, if so, how much. In doing so, they'll have to provide a federal judge with at least some description of the assistance he's provided to their investigations — the Russia probe and a separate investigation led by the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan.

In August, Cohen pleaded guilty to eight criminal counts, including tax evasion and campaign finance violations. He said Trump had directed him before the 2016 election to arrange payments to buy the silence of porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal, both of whom alleged they had affairs with Trump.

And then last week, Cohen made a surprise guilty plea to lying to Congress, a move that refocused attention on Trump's ties to Russia during the 2016 campaign. Cohen admitted he lied about the details of a proposed Trump Tower in Moscow, saying that talks about the project went on until June 2016 — longer than he previously said. Cohen also said he discussed the project with Trump during the presidential campaign, undercutting the then-Republican presidential candidate's statements that he didn't have any deals in Russia.

Trump has downplayed the project and stressed that he never put any money into the deal and ultimately decided not to do it.

In Manafort's case, prosecutors are expected to lay out what torpedoed the cooperation agreement he made when he pleaded guilty in September to two felony charges of conspiracy against the United States and conspiracy to obstruct justice. In late November, prosecutors revealed that Manafort had repeatedly lied to them but did not say about what. The allegations exposed him to the possibility of additional criminal charges and a lengthier prison sentence.

Manafort's attorneys have denied that he made false statements, and a judge is expected to hear from them before deciding whether he actually lied. Manafort, who was convicted in August in federal court in Virginia of eight financial crimes, also awaits sentencing in that case.

Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo contributed to this report.

All clear after bomb threat forces evacuation of CNN offices

NEW YORK (AP) — Police have given the all-clear after a phoned in bomb threat forced the evacuation of CNN's offices in New York.

Police said a man with a southern accent called CNN just after 10 p.m. Thursday and said five bombs had been placed throughout the facility inside the Time Warner building at Columbus Circle.

Police said the building was evacuated and building security did a preliminary search. Police units then swept the building with the NYPD bomb squad on standby.

Outside the building, CNN's Brian Stelter and Don Lemon continued to broadcast. Lemon said fire alarms rang and a loudspeaker told them they needed to evacuate during his live show.

In October, the building was partially evacuated after a suspicious package containing a crude pipe bomb was delivered to the company.

Comey set for closed-door interview with House Republicans

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are preparing to interview James Comey behind closed doors Friday, hauling the former FBI director to Capitol Hill one final time before they cede power to Democrats in January.

Comey will appear for the interview after fighting a subpoena in court. Under a deal struck with the House Judiciary Committee, he will be free to speak about the questioning afterward and a transcript will be released. He had argued that Republicans would selectively leak details from the interview.

The interview comes as GOP lawmakers are wrapping up a yearlong investigation into decisions made at the Justice Department during the 2016 presidential election. Republicans argue that department officials were biased against Donald Trump as they started an investigation into his campaign's ties with Russia and cleared Democrat Hillary Clinton in a separate investigation into her email use. Comey was in charge of both of those investigations

Democrats, who will also attend the interview, have said the GOP investigation is merely a way to distract from and undermine special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe. Mueller took over the department's investigation when he was appointed in May 2017.

Over the last year, Republicans on the Judiciary and House Oversight and Government Reform panels have brought in a series of officials and said after the closed-door meetings that there is ample evidence of bias. The investigation's most public moment was a 10-hour hearing in which former FBI special agent Peter Strzok defended anti-Trump texts he sent to a colleague as he helped lead both investigations. Strzok defiantly fought with angry Republican lawmakers in a riveting hearing that featured Strzok reading aloud from his sometimes-lewd texts and Democrats openly yelling at their GOP counterparts.

Comey, who has testified publicly on Capitol Hill about both the Clinton and Russia investigations, balked at the subpoena because he said committees were prone to selectively reveal information for political purposes.

"Don't do it in a dark corner and don't do it in a way where all you do is leak information," said Comey's attorney, David Kelley.

The Republican chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Virginia Rep. Bob Goodlatte, decried Comey's use of "baseless litigation" and called it an "attempt to run out the clock on this Congress," a reference to the few weeks left before Democrats take control. Both Goodlatte and South Carolina Rep. Trey Gowdy, the chairman of the Oversight panel, are also retiring at the end of the year.

A transcript of the interview will be released "as soon as possible after the interview, in the name of our combined desire for transparency," Goodlatte said.

A Justice Department watchdog report released in June said Comey was "insubordinate" in his handling of the Clinton email investigation in the explosive final months of the 2016 campaign. But it also found there was no evidence that Comey's or the department's final conclusions were motivated by political bias toward either candidate.

The report said the former FBI director, who announced in July 2016 that Clinton had been "extremely careless" with classified material but would not be charged with any crime, repeatedly departed from normal Justice Department protocol. Yet it did not second-guess his conclusion that Clinton should not have been prosecuted, despite assertions by Trump and his supporters that anyone less politically connected would have been charged.

Clashing views color future of stalled N.Korea nuclear talks

By FOSTER KLUG and MATTHEW LEE, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — To hear a beaming Donald Trump at his June summit with Kim Jong Un in Singapore, the solution to North Korea's headlong pursuit of nuclear weapons, a foreign policy nightmare

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that has flummoxed U.S. leaders since the early 1990s, was at hand.

Since the remarkable claims made during the first-ever meeting of leaders from the archrival nations, however, there have been recriminations, simmering bad blood — and very little progress. In other words, just what skeptics in Seoul and Washington have come to expect from North Korean nuclear diplomacy.

So even as Trump says he's keen on another summit, possibly early next year, continuing sanctions and pressure from Washington are met with anger and foot-dragging from Pyongyang, which has bluntly stated that an "improvement of relations and sanctions are incompatible."

One of the problems is a matter of wording. The statement hammered out in Singapore, which called for "the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," was so vague that it seemed tailor made for a stalemate: Each side can claim to be right when they say that they've done more than enough and it's the other side's responsibility to act.

So where do we go from here?

A second summit seems the most likely answer.

Trump's national security adviser said such a meeting would not be a reward and that the president merely wants to give North Korea "a chance to live up to the commitments they've made at the Singapore summit."

"He's held the door open for them, they need to walk through it," John Bolton said in an interview with NPR. "And this is one more chance for Kim Jong Un who is the only decision maker that matters in the North Korean system to deliver on what he said in Singapore, and that's possible I think some time after the first of the year."

Other diplomatic channels have stalled, including talks between Trump and Kim's main envoys, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his North Korean counterpart Kim Yong Chol.

Pompeo did meet on Thursday in Washington with South Korea's foreign minister in a new attempt to push the process forward. The State Department said only that the two officials "reaffirmed the ironclad alliance between the United States and (South) Korea and pledged to maintain close coordination to ensure the final, fully verified denuclearization of (North) Korea."

Pompeo has traveled to Pyongyang four times this year, but canceled a planned meeting with a top North Korean official in New York last month when the North balked. Tentative plans to reschedule those talks, perhaps as early as next week, remain uncertain.

Meanwhile, Pompeo's invitation for Kim to name a counterpart for his special North Korea envoy, former Ford Motor Co. executive Stephen Biegun, and send that person to Vienna for lower-level working discussions, has gone unanswered.

The views from both Seoul and Washington are complicated.

South Koreans are famous for ignoring North Korean threats, including repeated vows to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire," but there were widespread fears of war last year amid threats and insults between Trump and Kim Jong Un as the North tested a string of increasingly powerful weapons. Even the most jaded would likely say that things are better now.

There has also been curiosity at the warming ties between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Kim, who have had three summits and agreed on an unprecedented trip to Seoul by Kim, possibly in coming weeks. Among the more stunning sights this diplomacy has spawned has been Moon, who has worked doggedly behind the scenes to orchestrate the various summits, filling a water bottle at a "sacred" volcanic lake in the North, and Kim being spirited across the inter-Korean border, the world's most heavily armed, in an armored limousine, a phalanx of burly bodyguards jogging alongside.

But deep skepticism has always been the go-to mindset for many South Koreans, especially conservatives who have seen Moon's liberal presidential predecessors' engagement efforts with the North eventually fail to meet expectations. North Korea, it is true, has not conducted a nuclear or ICBM test since November 2017, but according to recent reports from private analysts it still is believed to be churning out nuclear bomb fuel and making headway on its missile program at more than a dozen facilities.

Like the others, the latest such report, released on Thursday, is drawn from commercial satellite imagery and shows activity at a previously undisclosed site where the North is believed to be expanding a missile

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base. "The base is a strong candidate to receive North Korea's newest long-range missiles, including those that can strike the United States," wrote the report's authors at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

Although Kim made no promises to halt such work, and U.S. and South Korean officials played down findings they said they were already aware of, analysts say they underscore the difficulty the Trump administration will face in getting the North to provide a full accounting of its programs so that they might be inspected and verifiably dismantled in the event a denuclearization deal is reached.

As Washington and Pyongyang have drifted further apart, Moon, his popularity numbers hovering around 50 percent, has scrambled to keep the diplomacy alive.

Moon's officials have pushed the narrative — and pushed aside skepticism from critics — that North Korea's suspension of nuclear and long-range missile tests and the dismantling of its nuclear testing site are meaningful steps toward an eventual total abandonment of nuclear weapons. They also briefly floated a proposal that Washington consider softer sanctions on the North.

Conservatives in Seoul, however, believe that Kim's outreach is meant to split Seoul from Washington, its military protector, so that it will be harder for the allies to boost sanctions and pressure should diplomacy fail. Any Trump-Kim summit redux, they say, needs to be prefaced with at least a declaration from the North of the extent of its secretive missile and nuclear programs; otherwise, it would just be another concession to a country that has spent years ramping up tension only to reap rewards by seeming to turn to diplomacy.

Still, in a place that has seen regular flare-ups of violence since the near-total destruction of the Korean War in the early 1950s, there's also interest in seeing if Trump and Kim can pursue in another summit a rare opportunity to test the sincerity of Kim's declaration that with his weapons program "complete," he intends to pivot to lifting his country up from poverty.

"With nuclear tensions on the Korean Peninsula dramatically reduced, it is time to find out if Kim's drive to improve the economy will eventually lead to denuclearization," Siegfried Hecker, a nuclear expert who has made regular trips to North Korea's nuclear facilities, wrote recently on 38 North, a website devoted to North Korea studies. "He may determine that his nuclear arsenal poses a significant hindrance to economic development that outweighs the putative benefits it confers. Washington and Seoul should work together to encourage rather than inhibit this potential shift."

Lee reported from Washington. Follow him at www.twitter.com/APDiploWriter and Foster Klug, AP's bureau chief for South Korea, at www.twitter.com/apklug.

Thousands salute Bush funeral train 4141 on final Texas ride

By **NOMAAN MERCHANT, JUAN A. LOZANO and WILL WEISSERT, Associated Press**

COLLEGE STATION, Texas (AP) — Thousands waved and cheered along the route as funeral train No. 4141 — for the 41st president — carried George H.W. Bush's remains to their final resting place on Thursday, his last journey as a week of national remembrance took on a decidedly personal feel in an emotional home state farewell.

Some people laid coins along the tracks that wound through small town Texas so a 420,000-pound locomotive pulling the nation's first funeral train in nearly half a century could crunch them into souvenirs. Others snapped pictures or crowded for views so close that police helicopters overhead had to warn them back. Elementary students hoisted a banner simply reading "THANK YOU."

The scenes reminiscent of a bygone era followed the more somber tone of a funeral service at a Houston church, where Bush's former secretary of state and confidant for decades, James Baker, addressed him as "jefe," Spanish for "boss." At times choking back tears, Baker praised Bush as "a beautiful human being" who had "the courage of a warrior. But when the time came for prudence, he maintained the greater courage of a peacemaker."

Baker also offered Bush as a contrast to today's divisive, sometimes vitriolic politics, saying that his "wish

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for a kinder, gentler nation was not a cynical political slogan. It came honest and unguarded from his soul.”
“The world became a better place because George Bush occupied the White House for four years,” said Baker.

As the post-funeral motorcade carrying Bush’s remains later sped down a closed highway from the church to the train station, construction workers on all levels of an unfinished building paused to watch. A man sitting on a Ferris wheel near the aquarium waved.

Bush’s body was later loaded onto a special train fitted with clear sides so people could catch a glimpse of the casket as it rumbled by. The train traveled about 70 miles — the first presidential funeral train journey since Dwight D. Eisenhower’s remains went from Washington to his native Kansas 49 years ago — to the family plot on the grounds of Bush’s presidential library at Texas A&M University. Bush’s final resting place is alongside his wife, Barbara, and Robin Bush, the daughter they lost to leukemia at age 3.

In the town of Pinehurst, 55-year-old Doug Allen left eight coins on the tracks before the train passed — three quarters, three dimes and two pennies. The train left the coins flattened and slightly discolored. “It’s something we’ll always keep,” Allen said.

Andy Gordon, 38, took his 6-year-old daughter, Addison, out of school so she and her 3-year-old sister, Ashtyn, could see the train pass.

“Hopefully, my children will remember the significance and the meaning of today,” Gordon said. Addison was carrying two small American flags in her hand.

The train arrived in College Station in the late afternoon with a military band playing “Hail to the Chief” and then Texas A&M’s “Aggie War Hymn.”

About 2,100 cadets in their tan dress uniforms with jackets and ties and knee-high boots waited for hours on a cold, gray day to line the road — known as Barbara Bush Drive — to the Bush library’s front doors. The U.S. Navy conducted a 21 strike fighter flyover, a salute to the World War II Navy pilot, followed by a 21-gun cannon salute on the ground.

At the earlier service at Houston’s St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, where Bush and his family regularly worshipped, the choir sang “This is My Country,” which was also sung at Bush’s presidential inauguration in 1989. Those gathered heard a prayer stressing the importance of service and selflessness that the president himself offered for the country at the start of his term.

There were rousing renditions of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “Onward Christian Soldiers,” and also performances from some of Bush’s country favorites. The Oak Ridge Boys recalled playing for him for decades — sometimes at the White House — and joked that Bush “fancied himself to be a good bass singer. He was not.” They then sang “Amazing Grace,” and Reba McEntire offered a musical version of “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Thursday’s flavor was distinctly Texan, unlike three days of Washington celebrations that had more of a national feel. In place of most federal dignitaries were top Houston athletes including the NFL Texans’ defensive end J.J. Watt — showing Bush’s love for sports — and Chuck Norris, who played TV’s “Walker, Texas Ranger.”

Grandson George P. Bush, the only member of the political dynasty still holding elected office, as Texas land commissioner, used his eulogy to praise the man the younger generations called “gampy.”

“He left a simple, yet profound legacy to his children, to his grandchildren and to his country: service,” George P. Bush said.

The church’s pastor, the Rev. Russell Levenson Jr., recalled the Bushes often attending services and offering to give up their seats to others on days when the church was particularly crowded.

“He was ready for heaven, and heaven was ready for him,” Levenson said of Bush who was in declining health in recent years. The minister suggested that when the former president died, he met his wife of 73 years in heaven and Barbara Bush playfully demanded, “What took you so long?”

Indeed, the funeral occurred at the same church where services were held in April for Barbara Bush. Those are remembered for an emotional scene when the former president gazed from his wheelchair up at her casket, then shook hands with well-wishers.

Wednesday night, more than 11,000 people paid their respects as Bush lay in repose at the church all

night.

Earlier Wednesday, at Washington National Cathedral in the nation's capital, there was high praise for the last of the presidents to have fought in World War II — and a hefty dose of humor about a man whose speaking delivery was once described as a cross between Mister Rogers and John Wayne. Three other former presidents and Donald Trump watched as George W. Bush eulogized his father as “the brightest of a thousand points of light.”

President Trump, who once mocked the late president's “points of light” call to volunteerism, had nothing but favorable words Thursday.

“He was a wonderful man. We will always remember this great statesman and beloved American patriot,” Trump said. “He really was very special.”

The cathedral service in Washington was a tribute to the patriarch of one of the nation's most powerful political families — they occupied the White House for a dozen years — and to a faded political era that prized military service and public responsibility. Like Baker's address Thursday, it included indirect comparisons to Trump but was not consumed by them, as speakers focused on Bush's public life and character — with plenty of cracks about his goofy side, too.

“He was a man of such great humility,” said Alan Simpson, former Republican senator from Wyoming. Those who travel “the high road of humility in Washington, D.C.,” he added pointedly, “are not bothered by heavy traffic.”

Trump sat Wednesday with his wife, the trio of ex-presidents and their wives, several of them sharp critics of his presidency and one of them, Hillary Clinton, his 2016 Democratic foe. Apart from courteous nods and some handshakes, there was little interaction between Trump and the others.

George W. Bush broke down briefly at the end of his eulogy while invoking the daughter his parents lost and his mother. He took comfort in knowing “Dad is hugging Robin and holding Mom's hand again.”

Associated Press writer David J. Phillip contributed to this report.

GOP tries to hamstring incoming Democratic attorneys general

By TODD RICHMOND and DAVID EGGERT, Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Republicans pushing to hang on to power in Wisconsin and Michigan aren't stopping at curbing the authority of incoming Democratic governors. They're also trying to hamstring Democrats who are about to take over as attorneys general.

The moves underscore how attorneys general have become powerful partisan weapons on both the state and national levels.

Republicans in both states say they need to reduce the powers of their Democratic attorneys general and strengthen their own authority to preserve GOP initiatives such as voter ID and to prevent more litigation challenging President Donald Trump's policies. Democrats see the effort as a wanton power grab that defies the will of voters who put their candidates in office.

“This clearly is an indication of how polarized politics have become,” University of Wisconsin-Madison political scientist David Canon said. “It's really not consistent with how we've had transfers of power in the past. We should be alarmed at this. I hope it's not the new normal.”

The GOP has controlled the legislatures and the governor's offices in Wisconsin and Michigan since 2011. The party has used that power to pass conservative policies, including creating voter ID requirements, adopting right-to-work laws and stripping public workers in Wisconsin of nearly all their collective bargaining rights.

But that power structure changed last month, and Democrats rejoiced after their candidates seized the governor and attorney general offices in both states.

Wisconsin's attorney general-elect, Josh Kaul, campaigned on promises to pull the state out of a lawsuit challenging the Affordable Care Act and to get tougher on polluters. His counterpart in Michigan, Dana Nessel, vowed not to defend state laws she considers unconstitutional and pledged to sue the Trump

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administration "all day, every day."

Groups of Democratic attorneys general have filed dozens of multistate lawsuits against the Trump administration. This week Democratic attorneys general planned to file subpoenas seeking records from the Trump Organization and the Treasury Department as part of a lawsuit accusing Trump of profiting off the presidency.

The midterm election results put the GOP on the defensive. Within weeks, anxious Republican lawmakers started meeting to seek ways to weaken all four offices in lame-duck legislative sessions.

The bills they proposed followed the lead of North Carolina, where Republicans adopted similar legislation over the last two years. In 2016, state GOP lawmakers passed lame-duck measures reducing incoming Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's powers. Last year, they included language in the state budget that gives final decision-making in lawsuits challenging state laws to legislative leaders rather than Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein.

In an all-night floor session, Wisconsin Republicans this week approved sweeping legislation to eliminate the state Justice Department's solicitor general's office, a tool the defeated Republican attorney general, Brad Schimel, used to join highly partisan lawsuits such as the ACA challenge. The move ensures Kaul cannot use the office to attack Republican laws.

Lawmakers could intervene in any lawsuit, setting themselves up to defend their policies if Kaul does not. Kaul also would need legislative approval before settling cases. The bills await outgoing Republican Gov. Scott Walker's signature.

Kaul said this week that he would defend any state law that's constitutional regardless of his personal beliefs, "but the Legislature has just ignored all that."

Lawmakers are trying to put their "judgment in place of the judgment of the voters of Wisconsin," he said. "And this is fundamentally not how the process should be working in any functional democracy."

He predicted the Wisconsin legislation would spark lawsuits across multiple jurisdictions.

Wisconsin Republicans have not offered any defense of the attorney general provisions, except to say they need to curtail Evers' power to eliminate GOP laws.

In Michigan, Republicans are advancing their own measure that would also allow GOP lawmakers to intervene in lawsuits, ensuring they could step in if Nessel will not defend laws. The bill could win Senate approval as early as next week.

The bill "is an attack on the doctrine of separation of powers," Democratic state Rep. Brian Elder said. "Had last month's results been different, specifically in this particular race, I am confident that this legislation would not have been introduced."

Republicans denied that the bill undercuts Nessel or any future attorney general, calling it a response to increasing "legislation through litigation."

Eggert reported from Lansing, Michigan.

Follow Todd Richmond on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/trichmond1> . Follow Dave Eggert on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/DavidEggert00> .

Democratic 2020 campaign revving up quickly

By STEVE PEOPLES, BILL BARROW and WILL WEISSERT, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Democrats are hitting fast forward.

The first major presidential campaign announcements could come before year's end. The Democratic National Committee plans to announce a debate framework by then featuring 15 to 20 candidates. The first primary debate could happen as early as May, a full three months before the premiere debate of the 2016 cycle.

And long-rumored White House hopefuls are already bowing out.

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Like it or not, the 2020 presidential season has arrived. For some potential contenders, there's an increasing sense of urgency to be in the first wave of declared candidates in what will likely be a large, unwieldy field. And for the party as a whole, there's a desire to move forward with what's expected to be a nasty fight — and wrap it up in time to give the eventual nominee strong footing to take on President Donald Trump.

"It starts now, but there will be a lot of ups and downs," said Democratic consultant Jesse Ferguson, who previously worked for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. "Anyone who thinks the early front-runner will also go the distance hasn't seen how these campaigns play out."

This week has offered a preview of the drama that could lie ahead. Former Vice President Joe Biden declared himself "the most qualified person in the country to be president," billionaires Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer courted activists in key states, and at least two prospects — former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick and firebrand attorney Michael Avenatti — publicly bowed out of the 2020 contest.

For those preparing candidacies, activity is picking up. While she has yet to make a final decision, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren is laying the groundwork for an early launch — potentially by year's end but more likely in January. New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper and New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand are also lining up for early launches.

Aides to the Democrats addressed their plans on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly disclose internal discussions.

Another well-funded set, including Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Texas Rep. Beto O'Rourke, Bloomberg and Steyer, believe they can afford to wait slightly longer to announce their intentions given their fundraising prowess.

Others may need to soon form presidential exploratory committees to access millions of dollars locked in their Senate campaign accounts to pay for travel, consulting and polling related to a possible White House bid. That's especially true for Warren, Gillibrand, O'Rourke, Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley and Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown.

O'Rourke, who smashed fundraising records this year in his failed Texas Senate bid, is discussing a possible 2020 run with his family, according to people with direct knowledge of his thinking. He feels the only drawback to running would be another prolonged period away from his wife and three children.

O'Rourke won't declare his intentions until after his House term ends on Jan. 3, according to the people, who spoke on condition of anonymity because a campaign hasn't been launched.

His camp says he's been assured that many prospective staffers and donors would wait for him to decide before committing to another candidate, believing he has effectively frozen the field.

O'Rourke has fielded numerous calls from supporters, donors and strategists who have urged him to run, including alumni of former President Barack Obama's administration. Many have suggested one key question to guide his 2020 decision: Is he excited about any of the other possible candidates? At the moment, O'Rourke doesn't appear sufficiently enthused about anyone else to not run, according to those familiar with his thinking.

O'Rourke has been invited to visit Iowa and New Hampshire in recent weeks. He hasn't accepted any such invitation but has not declined them either.

Meanwhile, Hickenlooper isn't expected to make a formal decision on running until after his term as governor ends Jan. 8. But he's already started assembling his team and his operation has hired a pollster and national fundraiser.

Senior aides to Sanders, who mounted an aggressive challenge to Clinton in 2016, are laying the groundwork for a bigger campaign organization, according to chief adviser Jeff Weaver.

Sanders' wife, Jane O'Meara Sanders, told The Associated Press that the grueling pace of a presidential contest would not be a deterrent for a second run. She also highlighted Sanders' philosophy of not attacking other Democrats.

"We've never been negative toward an opponent," she said in an interview last weekend. "And that's going to be the case this time."

Biden, who has been less active than other 2020 prospects in preparing to run, is scheduled to appear in

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Sanders' home base of Burlington, Vermont, over the weekend as part of a nationwide book tour. Weaver said there were no plans for Sanders and Biden to meet.

Obama is in regular touch with Biden, underscoring the close relationship they forged in the White House.

But there are few Democratic competitors concerned about Biden's 2020 plans. Would-be challengers note he fared badly in the only two presidential campaigns he ran on his own and generally struggles to raise money.

Booker, who says he will consider his decision over the holidays, has been among the most aggressive prospects.

In addition to aggressively courting activists and prospective staff, the New Jersey Democrat is scheduled to make a series of appearances this weekend in New Hampshire, which traditionally hosts the nation's first presidential primary election.

Other ambitious Democrats are actively discussing potential White House bids with their friends.

Former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti are among those reaching out to experienced political operatives across the country for feedback. Former Obama administration Cabinet member Julian Castro has already indicated he's likely to run.

Montana Gov. Steve Bullock is weighing a possible presidential bid. Some Democrats have sought to recruit him to run for the Senate in 2020, but his chief of staff, Tom Lopach, said, "Bullock is not interested" in that campaign.

Among the Democrats not ruling out a run is John Kerry, the former secretary of state and Massachusetts senator who lost the 2004 presidential race. Democrats close to Kerry say he's done little to start building a campaign infrastructure, but he's happy to keep his name in the discussion, particularly in the event other elder statesman-like figures — namely Biden — decide not to run.

As the field takes shape, DNC Chairman Tom Perez is working to craft what he says must be a fair process that doesn't leave the eventual nominee facing internal criticisms of favoritism like those that dogged Clinton in 2016.

A group of DNC officials and advisers, led by Mary Beth Cahill, who managed Kerry's presidential campaign, is months into private discussions with television networks, previous presidential campaign officials and state party leaders as they craft a plan for Perez.

Several people involved say the party wants the earliest debates to have generous qualifications thresholds, so that longshot-but-legitimate candidates aren't shut out. Later in the campaign, the thresholds — everything from polling and fundraising to the breadth of a candidate's campaign operation in early primary states — could be much higher.

Barrow reported from Atlanta and Weissert reported from Austin, Texas. Associated Press writers Julie Pace and Elana Schor in Washington, Nicholas Riccardi in Denver and Thomas Beaumont in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

Disputed House race puts spotlight on 'ballot harvesting'

By MATT VOLZ, Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — An investigation into whether political operatives in North Carolina illegally collected and possibly stole absentee ballots in a still-undecided congressional race has drawn attention to a widespread but little-known political tool called ballot harvesting.

It's a practice long used by special-interest groups and both major political parties that is viewed either as a voter service that boosts turnout or a nefarious activity that subjects voters to intimidation and makes elections vulnerable to fraud.

The groups rely on data showing which voters requested absentee ballots but have not turned them in. They then go door-to-door and offer to collect and turn in those ballots for the voters — often dozens or hundreds at a time. Some place ballot-collection boxes in high-concentration voter areas, such as college campuses, and take the ballots to election offices when the boxes are full.

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In North Carolina, election officials are investigating whether Republican political operatives in parts of the 9th Congressional District harvested ballots from minority voters and didn't deliver them to the election offices. In some cases they are accused of harvesting ballots that were not sealed and only partially filled out. Ballot harvesting is illegal under state law, which allows only a family member or legal guardian to drop off absentee ballots for a voter.

Investigators are focusing on areas in the district where an unusually high number of absentee ballots were not returned. They want to know whether some ballots were not turned in as promised to the local elections office, were unsealed or only partially filled out.

Republican Mark Harris leads Democrat Dan McCready by 905 votes, but the state elections board has refused to certify the results. The head of the state Republican Party said Thursday that he would be open to holding a new election if there is evidence of fraud.

Supporters of ballot harvesting say they worry the North Carolina election may give an important campaign tool an unnecessary black eye. These groups see their mission as helping voters who are busy with work or caring for children, and empowering those who are sick, elderly and poor. Collecting ballots to turn in at a centralized voting hub also has been an important tool for decades on expansive and remote Native American reservations.

"Sometimes we think of voting as this really straightforward process and we often forget that all voters, but for new voters in particular, there's a lot of confusion when voting about when they actually have to vote by, where they have to take their ballot to," said Rachel Huff-Doria, executive director of the voter advocacy group Forward Montana.

Several states have tried to limit ballot harvesting by restricting who can turn in another person's ballot. In Arizona, a video that showed a volunteer dropping off hundreds of ballots at a polling place prompted a debate that led to an anti-ballot harvesting law in 2016.

"I think at any level, Republican, Democrat or anything, it's wrong. It's a terrible practice," said former Arizona Republican Party chairman Robert Graham, who backed the law. "People should be responsible for their own votes."

The Arizona law making it a felony in most cases to collect an early ballot was challenged in federal court before the 2016 election, and blocked by an appeals court. The U.S. Supreme Court stepped in and allowed the law to be enforced.

Further challenges have so far been unsuccessful, most recently just before the midterm election.

Montana was the latest state to pass an anti-ballot harvesting law when voters approved a referendum last month. Al Olszewski, a Republican state senator, said he proposed the ban after two of his constituents in northwestern Montana complained of pushy ballot collectors coming to their homes.

"For a woman in her 70s that's maybe frail and lives alone and feels intimidated, at least now they can say please leave" and have confidence that the law is behind them, he said.

Voting-rights advocates are dismayed that such laws are being passed without evidence of actual ballot fraud happening, at least before questions were raised about the activities in the North Carolina congressional race. They say restricting who can collect ballots punishes certain voters without doing anything to actually detect, deter or punish fraud.

"If you have an honest person who is trying to help voters, then who they are doesn't matter as long as they return (the ballot)," said Myrna Perez, the deputy director of the Brennan Center for Justice's democracy program.

California went in the opposite direction when it passed a law in 2016 to allow ballot harvesting.

Republicans felt the new law's effects during this year's midterm elections after congressional districts that GOP candidates were leading on Election Day flipped to the Democrats when a flood of last-minute mail-in ballots were counted along with provisional ballots.

The rout included several seats that had been held by Republicans in the former GOP stronghold of Orange County, where more than 250,000 mail-in ballots were turned in on Election Day. And in the agriculture-dominant Central Valley, Republican incumbents Jeff Denham and David Valadao saw their

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leads disappear after a tally of late-arriving ballots.

Valadao, for example, had an initial lead of more than 7 percentage points, but Democrat T.J. Cox pulled ahead after winning 56 percent of the votes counted after Election Day.

Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan described California's election system as "bizarre" in an interview with The Washington Post.

California's situation underscored that ballot harvesting is an important tool for political parties. Orange County Republican Party Chairman Fred Whitaker wrote in a newsletter last month that Republicans must "develop a response to this new law that allows us to remain competitive."

Even Olszewski, the sponsor of Montana's anti-ballot harvesting measure, acknowledges that laws such as his are unlikely to eliminate ballot harvesting completely. Such "micro-targeting" of voters when used with technology to identify individuals' political leanings has become too important and effective in get-out-the-vote efforts, he said.

"I think the Democrats, they're the ones that figured it out and were far more successful in '18, in this election, than the Republicans ever were," he said. "The Republicans, what I'm hearing right now early on is, holy cow, we need to learn how to do this as good or better than the Democrats at harvesting ballots. We have the data."

Associated Press writers Michael R. Blood in Los Angeles and Bob Christie in Phoenix contributed to this report.

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Appeals to Scott Walker: Don't stain legacy, veto bills

By SCOTT BAUER, Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A bipartisan group of political figures appealed to Gov. Scott Walker to avoid staining his legacy and behaving like a sore loser by signing legislation that would weaken the powers of the Democrat who defeated him.

Rather than notching another partisan victory in his final weeks in office, they said, Walker should think bigger. Think of your recently deceased father, they pleaded. Think of former President George H.W. Bush. Think of Christ.

"You can have a long, successful career ahead," longtime Republican and major GOP donor Sheldon Lubar wrote to Walker in a deeply personal email. "Don't stain it by this personal, poor-loser action. Ask yourself, what would my father say, what would the greatest man who ever lived, Jesus Christ, say."

Walker, never one to shy away from a fight, gave no signs Thursday of tipping his hand. A spokesman said only that he was reviewing the bills. He's been generally supportive of the measures in the past, without promising to sign or veto them.

The choice is whether to satisfy fellow Republicans, who passed the bills over objections from Democrats, or strike them down to let his successor, Tony Evers, take office under the same rules in place when Walker was in charge.

"It just gets back to what does he want to be remembered for," said Democratic state Sen. Jon Erpenbach. "It's time to set aside your political beliefs and do what's best for your state."

Another Democrat, state Sen. Tim Carpenter, asked Walker to consider the letter Bush left for his Democratic successor, Bill Clinton, wishing him well.

"Governor Walker, PLEASE do the right thing and leave Governor-elect Evers your best wishes for him, his family and the state of Wisconsin," Carpenter said in a statement. "Governor Walker, what do you want your legacy to be?"

Charlie Sykes, a former conservative talk radio host in Milwaukee, made a similar appeal mentioning Bush, who died last week.

"Look at the way George H.W. Bush is being remembered and the way that he handled his transition

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after his very, very bitter defeat by Bill Clinton, the grace by which he handed over power," Sykes told MSNBC. "I do think Governor Walker needs to reflect on the kind of legacy he's going to leave."

Evers said he planned to make a personal request to Walker for a veto. If that failed, Evers said, he would consider legal action.

Lubar, who first shared his email with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, urged Walker to consider his future.

At 51, Walker is leaving office at a young age. Although he's not said what he plans to do next, he may want to stay active in Wisconsin politics, perhaps to run for the U.S. Senate in 2022.

It's not clear how his political prospects would be affected by signing the legislation. Walker won three elections pursuing a strongly conservative agenda, and he nearly won re-election last month despite heavy Democratic turnout.

Lubar said he voted for Walker in the past but cast his ballot for Evers in November because he feared Walker had put his political ambitions ahead of what's best for the state. There is still time for Walker to end on a high note, Lubar wrote.

"I ask you not to destroy your reputation," Lubar wrote on Tuesday.

Walker has six days after the bills are delivered to him to either sign them into law, allow them to become law without his signature or veto them. He may also be able to line-item veto portions of them, depending on how they are drafted and whether they spend money.

The GOP power grab in Wisconsin comes as Michigan Republicans vote on taking action before a Democratic governor takes over in that state. North Carolina lawmakers took similar steps two years ago.

It was Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, not Walker, who was the driving force behind the bills. Drafting notes show they originated with Vos' office. Vos first hinted at the need to take action just hours after Walker conceded defeat.

Vos and Walker have clashed in the past, and with Walker's pending departure, the speaker is trying to position himself as the state's most powerful Republican. A Walker veto would remind Vos that, at least until Jan. 7, Walker is still in charge.

The measures make it more difficult for Evers to undo the legacy of Walker and Republicans, who have had full control of Wisconsin's government for eight years. That includes protecting a work requirement for some people receiving state health care and blocking Evers from withdrawing Wisconsin from a multistate lawsuit seeking repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

The bills could also make it harder for Evers to renegotiate a \$3 billion subsidy for a Foxconn Technology Group manufacturing facility, a deal spearheaded by Walker.

The governor's long history of clashing with Democrats doesn't give his opponents much hope he will change course and issue substantial vetoes.

Walker's decision "will be driven not by what is best for the office or the state but what is best for him," said Mike Browne, deputy director of the liberal group One Wisconsin Now.

State Sen. Mark Miller joined the chorus of those asking Walker to take a different approach as he prepares to leave office on Jan 7.

"Wisdom is knowing the right path to take. Integrity is taking it," Miller said in the Democrats' weekly radio address. "Scott Walker would be wise not to sign these bills. I'm not holding my breath."

Follow Scott Bauer on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sbauerAP>

This version corrects that Walker has six days to act on the bills after they are delivered to him instead of 10 days.

Asian shares rise on Wall Street gains amid trade friction

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares were mostly higher Friday after gains on Wall Street but investors continued to watch for news about U.S.-China trade friction.

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KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 added 0.1 percent to 21,524.02, and Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.5 percent to 5,685.50 in early trading. South Korea's Kospi rose 0.1 percent to 2,070.83. Hong Kong's Hang Seng inched up less than 0.1 percent to 26,164.46, while the Shanghai Composite was also up less than 0.1 percent at 2,606.52. Shares were also higher in Indonesia and Taiwan.

ANALYST'S TAKE: "Clouded with much uncertainty, markets will likely remain jittery and may struggle to hold on to the gains," says Jayden Loh, a Trader at IG in Singapore.

WALL STREET: The S&P 500 index fell 4.11 points, or 0.2 percent, to 2,695.95. The benchmark index had been down as much as 2.9 percent. The Dow dropped 79.40 points, or 0.3 percent, to 24,947.67. The average briefly slumped as much as 784 points. The technology-heavy Nasdaq composite reversed an early loss to finish with a gain, adding 29.83 points, or 0.4 percent, to 7,188.26. The Russell 2000 index of small-company stocks gave up 3.34 points, or 0.2 percent, to 1,477.41. U.S. stock and bond trading were closed Wednesday because of a national day of mourning for President George H.W. Bush.

FED WATCH: Last week, stocks jumped after Fed Chairman Jerome Powell indicated the central bank might consider a pause in rate hikes next year while it gauges the impact of its credit tightening program. The Fed has raised rates three times this year and is expected to boost rates for a fourth time at its Dec. 18-19 meeting of policymakers. At the same time, there has been growing evidence that global economic growth is slowing.

TRADE WATCH: The gap between what the U.S. sells and what it buys from foreign countries hit \$55.5 billion in October, according to the U.S. Commerce Department. The politically sensitive deficit with China rose 7.1 percent to a record \$43.1 billion. The dramatic arrest of Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's chief financial officer, has driven home why it will be so hard for the Trump administration to resolve its deepening conflict with China. Skepticism is growing about the trade truce Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping reached last weekend in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

ENERGY: U.S. benchmark crude fell 24 cents to \$51.25 a barrel. It dropped 2.6 percent to \$51.49 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price international oils, dipped 39 cents to \$59.67.

CURRENCIES: The dollar weakened to 112.75 yen from 112.80 yen late Thursday. The euro rose to \$1.1376 from \$1.1345.

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Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, Dec. 7, the 341st day of 2018. There are 24 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii as part of its plan to conquer Southeast Asian territories; the raid, which claimed some 2,400 American lives, prompted the United States to declare war against Japan the next day.

On this date:

In 43 B.C., Roman statesman and scholar Marcus Tullius Cicero was slain at the order of the Second Triumvirate.

In 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1842, the New York Philharmonic performed its first concert.

In 1911, China abolished the requirement that men wear their hair in a queue, or ponytail.

In 1917, during World War I, the United States declared war on Austria-Hungary.

In 1946, fire broke out at the Winecoff (WYN'-kahf) Hotel in Atlanta; the blaze killed 119 people, including hotel founder W. Frank Winecoff.

In 1972, America's last moon mission to date was launched as Apollo 17 blasted off from Cape Canaveral.

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Imelda Marcos, wife of Philippine President Ferdinand E. Marcos, was stabbed and seriously wounded by an assailant who was shot dead by her bodyguards.

In 1987, 43 people were killed after a gunman aboard a Pacific Southwest Airlines jetliner in California apparently opened fire on a fellow passenger, the pilots and himself, causing the plane to crash. Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev set foot on American soil for the first time, arriving for a Washington summit with President Ronald Reagan.

In 1988, a major earthquake in the Soviet Union devastated northern Armenia; official estimates put the death toll at 25-thousand.

In 1993, a gunman opened fire on a Long Island Rail Road commuter train, killing six people and wounding 19. (The shooter was later sentenced to a minimum of 200 years in prison.)

In 2001, Taliban forces abandoned their last bastion in Afghanistan, fleeing the southern city of Kandahar.

In 2004, Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAH'R'-ze) was sworn in as Afghanistan's first popularly elected president.

Ten years ago: President-elect Barack Obama introduced retired Gen. Eric Shinseki (shin-SEHK'-ee) as his choice to head the Veterans Affairs Department. Actress-singer Barbra Streisand, actor Morgan Freeman, country singer George Jones, dancer and choreographer Twyla Tharp and musicians Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey of The Who received Kennedy Center Honors.

Five years ago: North Korea freed an 85-year-old U.S. veteran of the Korean War after a weeklong detention, ending the saga of Merrill Newman's attempt to visit the North as a tourist six decades after he oversaw a group of South Korean wartime guerrillas still loathed by Pyongyang.

One year ago: Democratic Sen. Al Franken said he would resign after a series of sexual harassment allegations; he took a parting shot at President Donald Trump, describing him as "a man who has bragged on tape about his history of sexual assault." Republican Rep. Trent Franks of Arizona said he would resign, after revealing that he discussed surrogacy with two female staffers. A brush fire driven by gusty winds exploded north of San Diego, destroying mobile homes in a retirement community and killing race horses at a training facility. A white former South Carolina police officer, Michael Slager, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the fatal shooting of an unarmed black motorist, Walter Scott, in North Charleston in 2015. Demonstrators in the Gaza Strip burned U.S. flags and pictures of President Trump, and Palestinian protesters clashed with Israeli forces in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, after Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Today's Birthdays: Linguist and political philosopher Noam Chomsky is 90. Bluegrass singer Bobby Osborne is 87. Actress Ellen Burstyn is 86. Former Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss., is 81. Broadcast journalist Carole Simpson is 78. Baseball Hall of Famer Johnny Bench is 71. Actor-director-producer James Keach is 71. Country singer Gary Morris is 70. Singer-songwriter Tom Waits is 69. Sen. Susan M. Collins, R-Maine, is 66. Basketball Hall of Famer Larry Bird is 62. Actress Priscilla Barnes is 61. Former "Tonight Show" announcer Edd (cq) Hall is 60. Rock musician Tim Butler (The Psychedelic Furs) is 60. Actor Patrick Fabian is 54. Actor Jeffrey Wright is 53. Actor C. Thomas Howell is 52. Actress Kimberly Hebert Gregory (TV: "Kevin (Probably) Saves the World") is 46. Producer-director Jason Winer is 46. Former NFL player Terrell Owens is 45. Rapper-producer Kon Artis is 44. Pop singer Nicole Appleton (All Saints) is 43. Latin singer Frankie J is 42. Country singer Sunny Sweeney is 42. Actor Chris Chalk is 41. Actress Shiri Appleby is 40. Pop-rock singer/celebrity judge Sara Bareilles (bah-REHL'-es) is 39. Actress Jennifer Carpenter is 39. Actor Jack Huston is 36. Singer Aaron Carter is 31.

Thought for Today: "Any frontal attack on ignorance is bound to fail because the masses are always ready to defend their most precious possession — their ignorance." — Hendrik Willem van Loon, Dutch-American journalist and lecturer (1882-1944).