

Groton Daily Independent

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**Card Shower
for
Dee Baily's
90th Birthday**
**Send to:
715 W. Willow
Groton, SD 57445
Her birthday is Dec. 21**

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



Check out our portfolio on Facebook at
Schultz-Construction-LLC
~ New Construction and Remodeling-
renovations, additions, and carpentry work
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605-380-1717
www.shawnshultzconstruction.com

Groton Area Schedule of Events

Saturday, December 15, 2018

Debate at Brookings High School (Brookings Bell)
8:00am: Basketball: Boys C Tournament vs. Ab-
erdeen Roncalli, Hamlin, Ipswich, Leola-Frederick,
Redfield-Doland, Sioux Valley, Sisseton @ Groton Area
High School Arena

9:00am: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Tournament TBA
vs. Madison @ Madison High School

3:00pm: Basketball: Girls 7th/8th Game vs. Redfield-
Doland @ Groton Area High School (7th Grade 3pm
8th Grade 4pm)

6:30pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Game vs. Redfield-
Doland @ Groton Area High School

Rohlfs' 3-pointers propel Pheasants to win over Tigers

The Groton Area Boys Basketball team had everything going for them. Groton Area built up a 12 point lead midway in the second quarter. Then Leyton Rohlfs came into the picture for the Redfield-Doland Pheasants. Rohlfs made three straight three-pointers at the end of the first half and Groton's lead had evaporated to two at half time, 36-34.

The Pheasants had it first lead right away in the third quarter. The game was tied twice and the lead changed hands four more times before Redfield-Doland had a 54-50 lead at the end of the third quarter. Rohlfs contributed two more three pointers in the third quarter and two more in the fourth quarter. He only missed one shot and finished the game with 21 points as the Pheasants went on to win, 78-67.

Brodyn DeHoet led the Tigers with 25 points that included two three-pointers. Treyton Diegel added 15 points with two three-pointers. Jonathan Doeden had 10 points followed by Tristan Traphagen and Austin Jones with three each, Kaden Kurtz had two and Cade Guthmiller added a free throw.

Redfield-Doland made 57 percent of its three-pointers while Groton Area made 19 percent. After shooting only 45 percent in the first quarter, the Pheasants made 63 percent of all its field goals for the game. The Tigers shot 64 percent in the first quarter, but cooled down to 40 percent for the game. The Tigers made 68 percent of its free throws, making 15 of 22 off of Redfield-Doland's 21 team fouls. Redfield-Doland made 47 percent of its free throws, making eight of 17 off of Groton Area's 19 team fouls.

Groton Area had 12 turnovers, six of which were steals. The Pheasants had 13 turnovers, nine of which were steals with Diegel and Doeden each having two. The Pheasants had more rebounds, 28-24, with Max Baloun having 13 for the Pheasants and DeHoet having nine for the Tigers.

Others adding to the Redfield-Doland tally were Baloun and Micaiah Utecht with 16 each, Zach Jordan had 10, Kolton Haider six, Jaxson Frankenstein four, Isaac Suchor had three and Thomas Shantz added two points.

Redfield-Doland won the C game, 33-32. Scoring for Groton Area: Jordan Bjerke 10, Tate Larson 8, Jackson Cogley 5, Lane Tietz 3, Kannon Coats 2, Lucas Simon 2, Jayden Zak 2. Peyton Osborn led the Pheasants with 19 points.

Redfield-Doland won the junior varsity game, 39-25. Scoring for Groton Area: Chandler Larson 8, Cyruss DeHoet 6, Jayden Zak 5, Jordan Bjerke 2, Jace Kroll 2 and Tate Larson 2. Paul Juarez led the Pheasants with 10 points.

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Varsity Stat Sheet - Redfield-Doland Boys Game

Player	No.	2Pt	2PtA	2Pt%	3Pt	3PtA	3Pt%	FG	FGA	FG%	EFG%	FT	FTA	FT %	Pts
Baloun	11	6	9	66.7%	0	0	0.0%	6	9	66.7%	66.7%	4	5	80.0%	16
Frankenstein	32	2	5	40.0%	0	1	0.0%	2	6	33.3%	33.3%	0	1	0.0%	4
Haider	4	3	4	75.0%	0	0	0.0%	3	4	75.0%	75.0%	0	1	0.0%	6
Jordan	2	5	9	55.6%	0	2	0.0%	5	11	45.5%	45.5%	0	1	0.0%	10
Rohlfs	23	0	0	0.0%	7	9	77.8%	7	9	77.8%	116.7%	0	0	0.0%	21
Shantz	12	1	1	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	1	1	100.0%	100.0%	0	1	0.0%	2
Suchor	10	0	0	0.0%	1	2	50.0%	1	2	50.0%	75.0%	0	1	0.0%	3
Utecht	20	6	7	85.7%	0	0	0.0%	6	7	85.7%	85.7%	4	7	57.1%	16
Unassigned		0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Redfield/Doland Varsity Totals		23	35	65.7%	8	14	57.1%	31	49	63.3%	71.4%	8	17	47.1%	78
Groton Varsity Totals		20	38	52.6%	4	21	19.0%	24	59	40.7%	44.1%	15	22	68.2%	67
DeHoet	42	7	13	53.8%	2	12	16.7%	9	25	36.0%	40.0%	5	7	71.4%	25
Diegel	55	2	6	33.3%	2	9	22.2%	4	15	26.7%	33.3%	5	7	71.4%	15
Doeden	3	4	10	40.0%	0	0	0.0%	4	10	40.0%	40.0%	5	8	62.5%	13
Guthmiller	11	0	1	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Jones	34	3	3	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	3	3	100.0%	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	6
Kroll	4	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Kurtz	20	1	2	50.0%	0	0	0.0%	1	2	50.0%	50.0%	0	0	0.0%	2
Traphagen	50	3	3	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	3	3	100.0%	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	6

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Junior Varsity Stat Sheet - Redfield-Doland Boys Game

Player	No.	2Pt	2PtA	2Pt%	3Pt	3PtA	3Pt%	FG	FGA	FG%	EFG%	FT	FTA	FT %	Pts
Blume	33	2	3	66.7%	1	6	16.7%	3	9	33.3%	38.9%	0	0	0.0%	7
Haider	33	0	0	0.0%	1	1	100.0%	1	1	100.0%	150.0%	0	0	0.0%	3
Jordan	2	0	1	0.0%	0	2	0.0%	0	3	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Juarez	25	4	11	36.4%	0	3	0.0%	4	14	28.6%	28.6%	2	4	50.0%	10
Osborn	15	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Schnabel	32	0	1	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Shantz	12	2	6	33.3%	0	0	0.0%	2	6	33.3%	33.3%	0	1	0.0%	4
Stephens	1	2	3	66.7%	1	2	50.0%	3	5	60.0%	70.0%	0	0	0.0%	7
Suchor	10	1	4	25.0%	0	2	0.0%	1	6	16.7%	16.7%	4	4	100.0%	6
Wright	12	1	1	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	1	1	100.0%	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	2
Redfield/Doland JV Totals		12	30	40.0%	3	16	18.8%	15	46	32.6%	35.9%	6	9	66.7%	39
Groton JV Totals		5	13	38.5%	4	16	25.0%	9	29	31.0%	37.9%	3	6	50.0%	25
Jayden Zak	12	1	2	50.0%	1	4	25.0%	2	6	33.3%	41.7%	0	2	0.0%	5
Bjerke	30	0	2	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	2	0.0%	0.0%	2	2	100.0%	2
DeHoet	32	0	1	0.0%	2	7	28.6%	2	8	25.0%	37.5%	0	0	0.0%	6
Kettering	3	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Kroll	4	1	3	33.3%	0	0	0.0%	1	3	33.3%	33.3%	0	0	0.0%	2
Larson	24	2	3	66.7%	1	3	33.3%	3	6	50.0%	58.3%	1	2	50.0%	8
Larson	25	1	1	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	1	1	100.0%	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	2
Simon	14	0	1	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0	2	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Smith	22	0	0	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Unassigned		0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0

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C Team Stat Sheet - Redfield-Doland Boys Game

Player	No.	2Pt	2PtA	2Pt%	3Pt	3PtA	3Pt%	FG	FGA	FG%	EFG%	FT	FTA	FT %	Pts
Blume	33	1	5	20.0%	0	0	0.0%	1	5	20.0%	20.0%	0	0	0.0%	2
Delgado	1	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Jordan	2	3	8	37.5%	0	1	0.0%	3	9	33.3%	33.3%	0	0	0.0%	6
Millar	20	1	3	33.3%	0	1	0.0%	1	4	25.0%	25.0%	0	2	0.0%	2
Osborn	4	2	4	50.0%	0	0	0.0%	2	4	50.0%	50.0%	0	1	0.0%	4
Osborn	25	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Osborn	15	3	7	42.9%	3	8	37.5%	6	15	40.0%	50.0%	4	5	80.0%	19
Rothacker	44	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Redfield/Doland C Totals		10	27	37.0%	3	10	30.0%	13	37	35.1%	39.2%	4	8	50.0%	33
Groton C Totals		13	21	61.9%	2	15	13.3%	15	36	41.7%	44.4%	0	4	0.0%	32
Bjerke	30	5	5	100.0%	0	1	0.0%	5	6	83.3%	83.3%	0	0	0.0%	10
Coats	34	1	1	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	1	1	100.0%	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	2
Cogley	20	1	4	25.0%	1	4	25.0%	2	8	25.0%	31.2%	0	0	0.0%	5
Kettering	3	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	2	0.0%	0
Larson	25	4	6	66.7%	0	1	0.0%	4	7	57.1%	57.1%	0	2	0.0%	8
Simon	5	1	3	33.3%	0	4	0.0%	1	7	14.3%	14.3%	0	0	0.0%	2
Tietz	10	0	1	0.0%	1	4	25.0%	1	5	20.0%	30.0%	0	0	0.0%	3
Zak	23	1	1	100.0%	0	1	0.0%	1	2	50.0%	50.0%	0	0	0.0%	2

It's Girls' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Redfield/Doland
Pheasants**
VS



Groton Area Tigers

**Saturday, Dec. 15, 2018
Varsity Game at 8 p.m.
at the Groton Area Arena**

Tonight's Livestream is sponsored by:

Allied Climate Professionals
Bahr Spray Foam
Blocker Construction
Doug Abeln Seed Company
James Valley Seed - Doug Jorgensen
John Sieh Agency
Locke Electric
Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.
Northeast Chiropractic Clinic
Sanford Health
Weber Landscaping

Make sure you tell these sponsors "Thank You" and patronize them as well!

Wolves bench the difference maker in victory over Minot State

Aberdeen, S.D. – A 14-point first half lead propelled the Northern State University men's basketball team to their fourth straight NSIC victory. The Wolves defeated the Beavers of Minot State 85-72 from Wachs Arena. With the win, NSU improves to 8-2 overall and 4-0 in the league.

The Beavers out-scored the Wolves in the second half, however were unable to overcome the first half deficit. Northern knocked down nine from beyond the arc in the first 20 minutes, shooting 50.0 percent from the field and 56.3 percent from the foul line.

Northern tallied a game high 34 points off the bench, as well as 26 points in the paint, 11 points off eight turnovers, and ten second chance points off ten offensive boards. They combined for 16 assists, and added 32 rebounds, 11 made 3-pointers, two blocks, and one steal. The Wolves shot 45.2 percent from the floor, 44.0 percent from the 3-point line, and 85.7 percent from the foul line in the game.

Bo Fries and Ian Smith led four Wolves in double figures with 14 points apiece. Smith tallied a team high seven rebounds and seven assists as well, while Fries was second on the team with five rebounds. The pair were followed by Andrew Kallman and Jordan Belka with 13 points, each going a perfect 3-for-3 from the 3-point line. Belka's 13 was a career high for the freshman, as he also went a perfect 4-for-4 from the free throw line.

Cole Dahl dropped eight points, two rebounds, one assist, and one block off the bench, followed by Mason Stark with seven points and three rebounds. Justin Decker and Gabe King rounded out the starting five for NSU with six and four points respectively. King recorded four rebounds and one assist, while Decker notched two assists and one rebound. Parker Fox grabbed the final six points and five rebounds for NSU in the win.

Northern returns to Don Meyer Court this evening for a 6 p.m. tip versus the Marauders of the University of Mary.

The Farm Bill: Protecting America's Food Supply **By Governor-elect Kristi Noem**

Between a drought, poor prices, hail, and diminished net farm incomes, South Dakota's agriculture economy has taken a significant hit in recent years. Without the proper safety nets in place for unexpected circumstances like these, farmers aren't able to do what they do best: feed the world.

While you can't change the weather, you can change policy. And that's exactly what I did. Earlier this month, I was proud to help lead the U.S. House of Representatives in passing the 2018 Farm Bill. This is a significant step toward securing a safety net, not only for South Dakota producers, but for America's food supply.

This critical legislation maintains strong crop insurance and livestock disaster programs and makes improvements to the commodity title. Additionally, we expand support for rural broadband and increase investments in farm country.

It was a true privilege to represent South Dakota during Farm Bill discussions, and now I'm bringing that experience home. There's a lot of work to do here, too.

With increasing trade, both foreign and domestic, risk of foot-and-mouth, avian influenza, and many other diseases has greatly increased in recent years. But South Dakota – backed by SDSU's world-class animal disease research program, including the new laboratory that is currently under construction – is uniquely positioned to improve livestock disease management practices. Working with the university, the Animal Industry Board, the State Veterinarian, and our growing biotech industry, we can mitigate economic and environmental impacts while improving overall herd and flock health.

Furthermore, I'll seek to enhance infrastructure to support farmers and grow the economy. As governor, I will work to improve the state's infrastructure to lower the basis for grain products, putting more money in the hands of hardworking farmers and growing our economy.

And while we bolster the existing industry, we must also equip young farmers with the skills they need to succeed in agriculture. I'll work to expand education and increase investments in production-boosting research, such as biotechnology and precision ag. I'll also encourage the life-changing, inspirational work of programs like 4-H and FFA, complete SDSU's precision ag building, which the state legislature recently approved, and enhance the Governor's Ag Summit to increase access and educational offerings.

I'm proud of the Farm Bill and the way it ensures people all across our country have access to the safest, most plentiful food supply in the world grown right here in our South Dakota fields. Our ag industry is special – it's our legacy, our way of life. I'm committed to protecting that legacy and advancing it so it's sustainable for generations to come.

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Today in Weather History

December 15, 1983: A storm system impacted the region on the 14-15th with five inches of snow and high winds to produce blocked roads and numerous school closings on the 15th throughout most of the eastern third of South Dakota. No travel was advised from late afternoon on the 14th due to low visibility and blocked roads in Roberts and Brookings Counties. The conditions contributed some to several traffic accidents. Meanwhile, snow also spread across Minnesota on December 13th and diminished late on the 15th. Snow accumulations ranged from 1 to 2 inches in west central Minnesota to higher amounts over 10 inches to the east. Winds increased and temperatures began to fall on December 14th as an arctic cold front pushed through the state. The strongest winds occurred during the night of December 14th and into the morning of December 15th. Near-blizzard conditions developed in the southwest and west-central sections of Minnesota where the visibility was reported to be near zero with winds of 20 to 30 mph. The wind chill index dropped to 30 below to 60 below zero. Blowing and drifting snow conditions occurred to some degree throughout all of Minnesota. Snow drifts caused many roads to close. Drifting snow continued during the evening of December 15th as the winds and snowfall gradually diminished. This event, associated with an arctic cold front, was the beginning of what would become, and remains, the coldest stretch of December days on record across most of the area. For the next nine days, beginning on December 16th, Aberdeen did not warm above -6 degrees, enduring temperatures as low as -34 F and high temperatures as low as -15 F. Other stations around the region had very similar cold temperatures during the December 16th through December 24th period, with temperatures warming into single digits above zero on Christmas Day.

December 15, 1992: Cyclone John hit the sparsely populated northwest coast of Australia with winds gusting to 185 mph. John was the strongest cyclone to hit Australia in over 100 years.

1839 - The first of triple storms hit Massachusetts Bay. The storm produced whole gales, and more than 20 inches of snow in interior New England. There was great loss of life at Gloucester MA. (David Ludlum)

1901 - An intense cold front swept across the eastern U.S. The cold front produced heavy rain in Louisiana, and heavy snow in the northeastern U.S. (David Ludlum)

1945 - A record December snowstorm buried Buffalo, NY, under 36.6 inches of snow, with unofficial totals south of the city ranging up to 70 inches. Travel was brought to a halt by the storm. (14th-17th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A major winter storm hit the Great Lakes Region, intensifying explosively as it crossed northern Illinois. High winds and heavy snow created blizzard conditions in southeastern Wisconsin. Winds gusted to 73 mph, and snowfall totals ranged up to 17 inches at LaFarge. The barometric pressure at Chicago IL dropped three quarters of an inch in six hours to 28.96 inches, a record low reading for December. Up to a foot of snow blanketed northern Illinois, and winds in the Chicago area gusted to 75 mph. O'Hare Airport in Chicago was closed for several hours, for only the fourth time in twenty years. High winds derailed train cars at Avon IN. Light winds and partly sunny skies were reported near the center of the storm, a feature typical of tropical storms. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High pressure in the Pacific Northwest and low pressure in the southwestern U.S. combined to produced high winds from Utah to California. Winds gusting to 70 mph in the San Francisco area left nearly 300,000 residents without electricity. Winds in Utah gusted to 105 mph at Centerville. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A couple of low pressure systems spread heavy snow across the northeastern U.S. Up to two feet of snow was reported along Lake Erie in northeastern Ohio, and up to ten inches was reported in Connecticut. Heavy snow squalls developed over Michigan for the third day in a row. Three Oaks MI reported 25 inches of snow in two days. Twenty-six cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. The low of 10 degrees below zero at Wichita KS was a December record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Freezing rain and ice pellets fell throughout portions of the southeast U.S. The accumulation of ice caused about 683,000 utilities customers to lose power from northern Georgia northward through the western Carolinas. The power outages were the result of ice accretions of up to three-quarter inch in thickness. The ice storm was blamed for at least four deaths (Associated Press).

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Today

Tonight

Sunday

Sunday
Night

Monday



Sunny

Mostly Clear

Sunny

Mostly Clear

Sunny

High: 49 °F

Low: 22 °F

High: 44 °F

Low: 18 °F

High: 38 °F



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
Updated: 12/15/2018 4:49 AM Central

WEEKEND FORECAST

Today 44 to 55°
 breezy across and just east of the Sisseton Hills

Tonight 20s

Sunday 40s
warmest temperatures west of the Missouri River

Published on: 12/15/2018 at 5:00AM

Warm & Dry Weekend! Highs will be in the 40s to mid 50s. Breezy winds out of the south will gust 25 to around 35 mph across and just east of the Sisseton Hills through this evening.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 45 °F at 3:08 PM

Low Outside Temp: 21 °F at 4:46 AM

High Gust: 15 mph at 8:47 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 60° in 1939

Record Low: -24° in 1917

Average High: 25°F

Average Low: 6°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.24

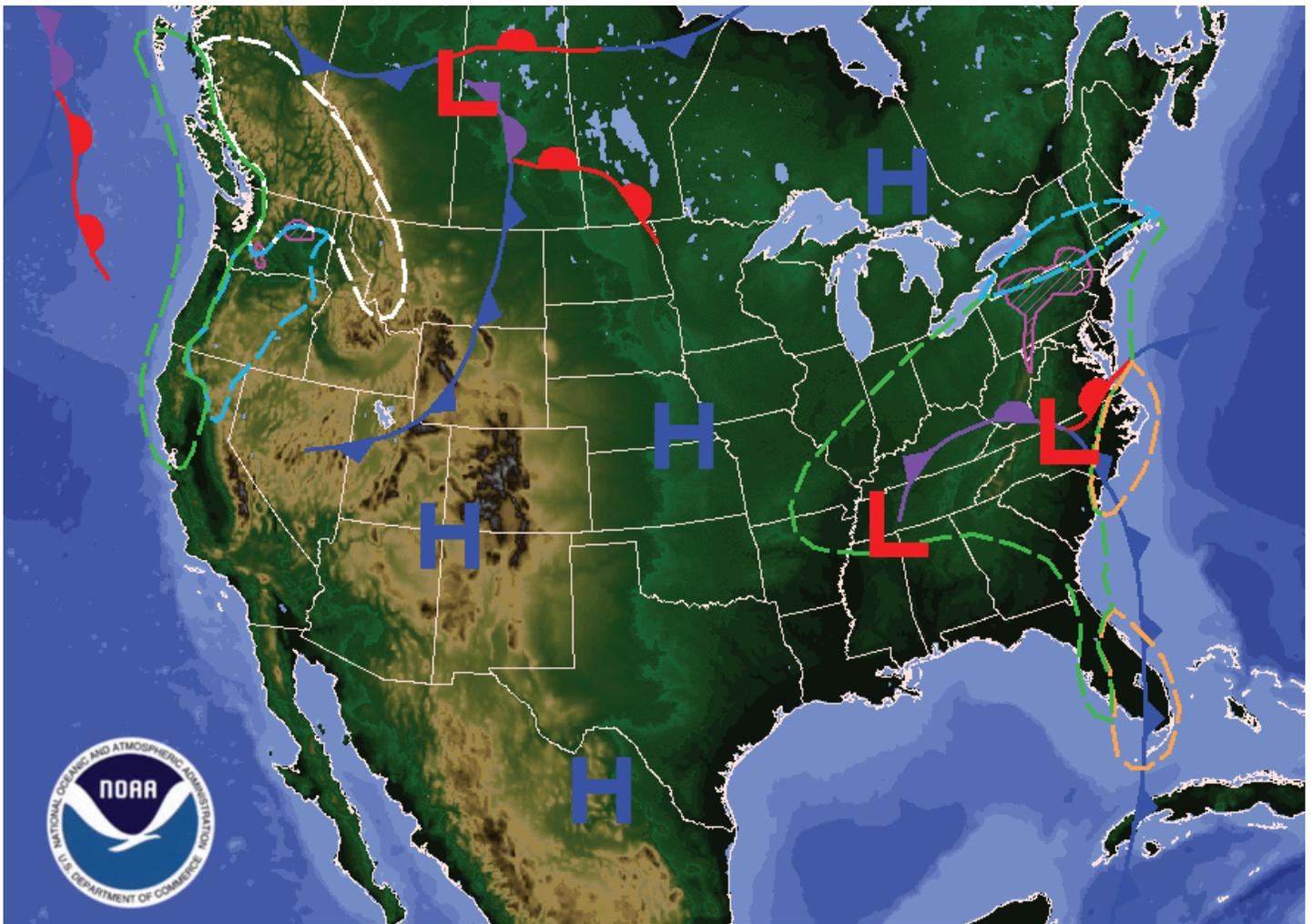
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.44

Precip Year to Date: 15.81

Sunset Tonight: 4:51 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:07 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Sat, Dec 15, 2018, issued 3:37 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Hamrick 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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PLANNING AHEAD

It was the Sunday before Christmas and the teacher of the fifth grade class was reviewing the details of the birth of Jesus. With carefully chosen words she talked about the difficult journey to Bethlehem. Then she said with sadness, And when they arrived, there was no room for them in the inn. Wasnt that terrible?

George, after thinking for a moment about the vacations his family had taken and the plans they made said without thinking, Why didnt Joseph make a reservation?

There will be many around us during this holiday season who will make no room no reservation for Jesus to be with them once again this year. We often remind each other that Hes the reason for the Season but do not take time to explain to others what that reason is. We are quick to condemn those who want to take Christ out of Christmas but do not take time to plant the message of Christ in their minds and hearts at Christmas. We place the manger scene under the tree, cover it with presents and then wrap it back up and forget about His birth and its significance for another year.

Hanging next to Jesus on a cross was a thief who was dying for crimes he committed. In his final moments he turned to Him and said, Jesus, remember me. And Jesus said, I will. Today you will be with me in paradise. Today is the best day to make your reservation to be with Him if you have not done so.

Prayer: Your Word, Lord, declares that Today is the day of salvation. May we take advantage of this day! In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Luke 2:1-7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

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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

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News from the Associated Press

Friday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 69, Spearfish 45
Aberdeen Roncalli 61, Milbank 44
Arlington 66, Elkton-Lake Benton 44
Bennett County 60, Gordon/Rushville, Neb. 58
Bon Homme 59, Scotland 8
Chamberlain 53, Parkston 48
Clark/Willow Lake 55, Britton-Hecla 32
Colman-Egan 67, Castlewood 61
Corsica/Stickney 70, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 47
Dakota Valley 92, Canton 22
Dell Rapids St. Mary 66, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 40
Deubrook 43, Estelline/Hendricks 41
Gayville-Volin 66, Alcester-Hudson 58
Highmore-Harrold 71, Wolsey-Wessington 53
Huron 75, Rapid City Stevens 71, OT
Irene-Wakonda 59, Viborg-Hurley 56
James Valley Christian 72, Sunshine Bible Academy 51
Jones County 65, Wall 45
Kadoka Area 72, Dupree 61
Lemmon 62, Beach, N.D. 53
McCook Central/Montrose 58, Howard 48
Miller 59, Winner 57
Morrill, Neb. 49, Edgemont 43
Newell 54, Tiospaye Topa 43
Pierre 66, Douglas 56
Potter County 67, Northwestern 51
Rapid City Central 62, Mitchell 44
Rapid City Christian 67, Lyman 60
Redfield/Doland 78, Groton Area 67
Sioux Falls Lincoln 52, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 48
St. Thomas More 56, Alliance, Neb. 50
Tea Area 80, Dell Rapids 60
Tri-State, N.D. 73, Florence/Henry 63
Tri-Valley 57, Chester 51
Watertown 52, Harrisburg 45
West Central 74, Wagner 55
Lakota Nation Invitational
Makosica(equals)
Consolation Semifinal
Little Wound 70, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 69
Tiospa Zina Tribal 71, Lower Brule 52
Semifinal
Pine Ridge 77, Red Cloud 54

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White River 71, Omaha Nation, Neb. 40

Paha Sapa

Consolation Semifinal

Marty Indian 62, Oelrichs 60

St. Francis Indian 68, Crazy Horse 53

Semifinal

Custer 56, Crow Creek 46

Todd County 56, McLaughlin 55

Stateline Shootout at Belle Fourche, S.D.

Belle Fourche 68, Sundance, Wyo. 55

Newcastle, Wyo. 66, Lead-Deadwood 61

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 54, Spearfish 36

Aberdeen Roncalli 57, Milbank 39

Alcester-Hudson 38, Gayville-Volin 30

Beach, N.D. 58, Lemmon 40

Bridgewater-Emery 64, Canistota 37

Chester 47, Tri-Valley 38

Clark/Willow Lake 55, Britton-Hecla 20

Corsica/Stickney 58, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 35

Dakota Valley 71, Canton 53

Dell Rapids 67, Tea Area 60

Gordon/Rushville, Neb. 54, Bennett County 37

Great Plains Lutheran 46, Wilmot 30

Harrisburg 61, Watertown 24

James Valley Christian 48, Sunshine Bible Academy 38

Kadoka Area 79, Dupree 57

Langford 52, Ipswich 40

McCook Central/Montrose 61, Howard 45

Mitchell 64, Rapid City Central 56

Morrill, Neb. 32, Edgemont 25

Newell 58, Tiospaye Topa 41

Parkston 37, Chamberlain 26

Platte-Geddes 53, Gregory 44

Rapid City Stevens 49, Huron 34

Sioux Falls Christian 41, Elk Point-Jefferson 25

Sioux Falls Washington 51, Moorhead, Minn. 47

Wall 54, Jones County 32

Waverly-South Shore 62, Waubay/Summit 36

West Central 65, Wagner 25

Lakota Nation Invitational

Makosica

Consolation Semifinal

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 49, Lower Brule 45

White River 65, Little Wound 41

Semifinal

Crow Creek 71, Red Cloud 55

Todd County 67, Pine Ridge 60

Paha Sapa

Consolation Semifinal

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McLaughlin 56, Crazy Horse 43
Oelrichs 67, Omaha Nation, Neb. 61
Semifinal
Custer 35, Marty Indian 26
St. Francis Indian 72, Tiospa Zina Tribal 58
Stateline Shootout at Belle Fourche, S.D.
Belle Fourche 67, Sundance, Wyo. 23

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

'Homes for Heroes' program helps Aberdeen couple find a home

By VICTORIA LUSK, Aberdeen News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Louie and Rebecca Genzler never meant to look at the house they now call home. It wasn't even for sale, technically.

But now the couple will be hosting Christmas for all of their children and grandchildren this month, with a few extra presents under the tree thanks to the Homes for Heroes program.

Louie Genzler qualified for the program because he served in the U.S. Army Reserve for 24 years, the Aberdeen News reported .

He's called many places home — from Texas to California to nearby Gettysburg and Blunt.

He and his wife had a deal.

"We always had an agreement. We spent 10 years mobilized in the military," Rebecca Genzler said.

After that, it was time to be in Blunt in order take care of her mother, who died three years ago in March. Now they do the same for his parents, including his 80-year-old mother, who still lives independently in Aberdeen, and his father, who has Alzheimer's and is in a local nursing facility.

"It took us a while to get here," she said.

Louie Genzler retired from the military in May 2014. He now works at Menards.

He moved to Aberdeen May 20, choosing to initially live in his camper in The Meadows, a trailer park and campground on the south edge of town.

Six months later, on Oct. 27, Rebecca Genzler joined her husband, and the couple moved into their home. It was a timeline that makes them feel blessed.

Unlike the house they live in now, the house on the other side of South Jackson Street was actually for sale this fall.

But it wasn't the right one, and somebody, somehow, knew better.

In August or September, after having taken a tour of the house that was then on the market, the couple was approached by a stranger, Louie Genzler said.

"You guys looking to buy a home?" the man said.

"Yes."

And there it was, right across the street, a home owned by the man who approached them, Clarence Habeck, and his wife, Lori. The fenced-in yard was perfect for the Genzlers' two dogs. It was the right size. And it had character.

"We love its character. It's a story," Rebecca Genzler said. "You know there was plenty of family events here (when the previous owners had it), and we just liked that."

As luck would have it, the Habecks listed the house with Danelle McMaster of First Premier Realty. McMaster is a new affiliate for Homes for Heroes in Aberdeen, she said.

The program was formed after 9/11 as a form of thanks to heroes, including firefighters, law enforcement, military, health care and emergency medical system workers, and teachers.

While Louie Genzler was McMaster's first hero, she hopes others follow.

So does he, as he knows many who are deserving not only locally, but across the U.S.

The paperwork was simple and minimal.

"I didn't feel like I had to jump through hoops," he said.

Genzler feels like the program opened more doors for him because a bank reached out to offer him lending for the program. But, he said, he already had financing in place.

When a "hero" uses an affiliate real estate agent, lending specialist or business like a title company, he or she receives what are called Hero Rewards.

For instance, a seller gets 25 percent of the commission refunded at closing. And the buyer gets 0.7 percent of the purchase price back after closing.

Homes for Heroes estimates it has helped more than 25,000 heroes save more than \$40.41 million nationwide.

"They are real rewards," McMaster said. "They are truly going to feel it in their pocketbooks."

It seems like a good time of year for the kickback, Genzler said. The couple used the money to stack presents under their Christmas tree.

The program is close to McMaster's heart. She said her husband, who was a paramedic/firefighter, died in February.

He was really passionate with his service, she said.

When McMaster first learned of the program, there was already an affiliate in Aberdeen.

The number of Homes for Heroes affiliates in each area is determined by population, she said. That meant she had to leave her contact information in case a local position in the program opened.

When it did, Homes for Heroes contacted her.

Now McMaster hopes to expand her business with the program, as well as get others on board.

"If we businesses get creative, there's so much more potential," she said.

Because rewards can be layered, buyers can get money back from each affiliate. So if the title company is an affiliate, a buyer can get a percentage back on the closing. And if the bank is an affiliate, the buyer can also get a percentage back on the loan, McMaster explained.

Plus, the definition of "heroes" with the program is vague, McMaster said, which allows her to cast a wide net.

"Dispatcher is just as important to my end result as the law person responding to the call," she said.

The stress of some of the hero professions affects entire families, she said.

"The program is also a way that we can give back to them — the whole family," McMaster said.

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

New prescription drug is giving hope to opioid addicts

By SAMUEL BLACKSTONE, Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — For 16 years, prescription opioids ruled Jo Pagel's life. From 2001 to 2017, she battled cancerous tumors in her breasts, lymph nodes and uterus while fighting an addiction to OxyContin.

"I didn't know a thing about it," Pagel, 63, told the Rapid City Journal of the drug, which was prescribed to her in 2001 to quell pain from her cancer treatments, surgeries and neuropathy in her hands and feet. "I just knew I wanted to beat my cancer. Whatever my doctors told me I needed to do to beat my cancer, that's what I was going to do."

Pagel has since beat cancer three times and retired from a 35-year career teaching physical education for the Rapid City School District. But her struggles with OxyContin continued until another drug, now being offered in Rapid City, helped her kick her addiction.

In late September, the Addiction Recovery Centers of the Black Hills held Rapid City's first complete medication-assisted treatment (MAT) clinic.

Alongside traditional addiction treatment like counseling, doctors in the clinic with a special certification also have the option to prescribe patients Suboxone, a drug crafted to lessen the effects of opioid withdrawal, give users a very slight high meant to kill cravings, and block certain brain receptors, preventing patients from getting a real high should they relapse. It's the first center in Rapid City to offer the full

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range of MAT, with counseling and the administering of Suboxone under one roof.

Doug Austin, CEO of the Addiction Recovery Centers, said MAT is for people who have “tried pretty much everything” to beat addiction and still come up short. Austin understands the difficulty, too. A Vietnam War veteran, Austin struggled with alcoholism for decades and even relapsed after a nine-year stint of sobriety before finally putting down the bottle for good.

In-patient rehab and counseling helped Austin get to where he is today. Medication-assisted treatment and counseling — the recovery center offers Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for Substance Abuse and Moral Recognition Therapy, two different behavioral treatments for addicts — Austin believes, are even more effective.

“It’s our job to change the way they think,” he said. “You change your thoughts, you change your world. I’m a firm believer in that.”

He’s also a firm believer in the man running the center’s MAT program, Dr. Stephen Tamang.

“He really has a real drive for helping people with opioid and heroin addictions,” he said of Tamang. “I lucked out when I got him.”

Tamang is a family physician for Regional Health and one of just two doctors in Rapid City who can prescribe Suboxone and currently use it in a MAT program. The other, Troy Thompson, is a physician’s assistant who works alongside Tamang at the center.

“It’s a real elegant drug,” said Tamang of Suboxone, explaining that it attaches to the same brain receptors stimulated by opioids, killing cravings. “When you give people a tool where they don’t have cravings anymore, it’s like not being hungry anymore. You’re probably not going to binge eat if you’re not hungry.”

Pagel’s take on Suboxone is a bit simpler.

“It was a gift,” she said.

Pagel began using Suboxone in mid-2017 when Tamang was just beginning MAT in a Regional Health program that didn’t offer counseling and other behavioral health treatment now being offered at the recovery center. Tamang characterized Pagel as a perfect patient and one of Rapid City’s first and best success stories for MAT and Suboxone. There’s the potential for thousands of similar success stories in Rapid City, Tamang said.

“There are so many people that are addicted to prescription narcotics, it’s ridiculous,” he said. “Highly functioning people. Those are the people that I feel like we could get to and help. They don’t have the stigma of being a drug addict, but they know they have a problem and this would be a wonderful tool for them. I think you could hit thousands of people in Rapid City and it would help immensely.”

That’s not to say Suboxone and Naltrexone — used to treat alcoholism in the recovery center’s MAT program — make overcoming addiction easy.

“I had withdrawals. I had the whole shebang,” Pagel said. “It plays tricks with your mind. I was really depressed. I didn’t understand why.”

Pagel had moments of paranoia where she thought everyone was talking about her, or that people didn’t like her. She had trouble concentrating, felt nervous, shaky and had trouble dealing with things logically and rationally. Those issues, she said, still crop up “once in a while.”

But Pagel stayed the course with an eye to the future.

“I just knew I wanted to be around to see my grandchildren grow up so I needed to get off of it,” she said. “I was afraid what it was going to do with my brain.”

Pagel stopped using her prescribed OxyContin pills on June 29, 2017, and began taking Suboxone twice daily. Slowly, she was weaned off Suboxone until Sept. 25, 2017, when she took her last dose.

“I never abused it, but I knew when I had to take it,” she said. “If I didn’t, I was trouble. This is a recovery. It’s a long process. I’m still dealing with it. I’m finding things out about my body that I didn’t have for 16 years.”

But not everyone is sold on Suboxone, which is actually two drugs: Buprenorphine and Naloxone. Buprenorphine is a powerful opiate that, in its small dosage in Suboxone, produces a mild high meant to kill cravings. Naloxone blocks the brain receptors triggered by opioids, effectively preventing a person from

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getting a real high should they relapse or a stronger high should they abuse Suboxone. Naloxone also induces symptoms of withdrawal when Suboxone is abused and its opioid-blocking effect means it's also used to resuscitate people from opiate overdoses.

Critics characterize the administering of Suboxone as effectively giving addicts opioids to fight an addiction to opioids. The abuse of Suboxone, often intravenously, and illicit sale can also be a problem for some, as can the detox from Suboxone, which can last months compared to the weeks it takes to detoxify from OxyContin or methadone.

Further, Buprenorphine is known to cause withdrawal symptoms similar to opioid withdrawal when users are taken off the drug. The paranoia, confusion, anxiety and mood swings Pagel described are some of the most common withdrawal symptoms from Buprenorphine.

"Depression really set in," Pagel said. "Depression was probably the biggest side effect."

But it's tough to argue with some of the numbers. In one study — the first randomized large-scale clinical trial testing the effectiveness of Suboxone — approximately 49 percent of participants reduced their abuse of prescription opioids when using it for at least 12 weeks. When people ceased using Suboxone, that rate dropped to 8.6 percent. Tamang said he has read other studies where the success rate was close to 80 percent.

"I would probably still be on OxyContin because I know I couldn't have done it by myself, and I don't know where I would have turned," Pagel said.

Though the Addiction Recovery Center's MAT clinic is still in its infancy, Tamang already has expansion on his mind.

"I think it will grow quite a lot," he said. "We are going to take as many people as we can and expand as appropriately as we can to try to meet the need of this community because nobody else is doing it."

If he ever needs to point toward an example of success, Tamang said he knows where to turn. Pagel is ready and willing should the moment ever arrive.

"I hope I can give someone some hope that they can kick it, too," she said. "I'm not embarrassed about it. It was something that happened to me. I took ownership of it. I really felt that I was making the decision and he (Tamang) was going to help me. I could not have done it without his help."

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

05-22-26-43-49, Mega Ball: 23, Megaplier: 4

(five, twenty-two, twenty-six, forty-three, forty-nine; Mega Ball: twenty-three; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$262 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$246 million

Stick leads NDSU over Jackrabbits, into FCS title game

By DAVE KOLPACK, Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Quarterback Easton Stick and the North Dakota State football team gave a rousing going-away present to their beloved coach during his last game in the Fargodome.

Stick ran for 169 yards and three touchdowns and threw for another score to help North Dakota State defeat rival South Dakota State 44-21 Friday night in an FCS semifinal game the players dedicated to Bison coach Chris Klieman, who is headed for Kansas State.

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Bruce Anderson added two rushing touchdowns for the undefeated and top-seeded Bison (14-0), who will be seeking their seventh FCS title in the last eight years. North Dakota State led 14-7 at intermission and then won a shootout in the second half.

Klieman has received overwhelming support from the team the community for his move to Kansas State. One of the loudest ovations came with about five minutes left when the big screens at the stadium flashed a picture of a fan holding a sign that said, "Thank you coach." As the final seconds ticked away, players came up to Klieman and told him that the victory was for him.

"I am happy for him. He is a player's coach," NDSU running back Seth Wilson said.

"Never underestimate the power of people who live for each other and support each other," Klieman said. "All the things that happened this week galvanized that locker room."

Stick, a first-team AP All-American selection, finished with 316 total yards. He was 12-of-15 passing for 169 yards and no interceptions, but it was his bulldog running that put the game away, especially when three Bison backs went out with minor injuries as the game wore on. Klieman said coaches put in more running plays for Stick this week and the quarterback "was not going to be denied" against the Jackrabbits.

"Easton Stick is the best player in college football. Period," Klieman said. "We're lucky to have him."

South Dakota State coach John Stiegelmeier said Stick was the difference in the game, helped by an offensive line that wore down the Jacks.

"It was a great performance," Stiegelmeier said of Stick. "We know him pretty well obviously."

Stick, who has accepted an invitation to play in the East-West Shrine game, said he was happy that Klieman called his number so often.

"That was the most fun I ever had playing football," Stick said.

The Bison amassed 608 total yards, including 439 rushing. Anderson and fellow running backs Wilson and Adam Cofield combined for another 242 yards on the ground. Wilson set the tone for the Bison on the first play from scrimmage in the second half when he ran 78 yards to the South Dakota State 3, leading to a touchdown and a 21-7 lead.

"That really changed the momentum," Stiegelmeier said. "It was a basic play."

South Dakota State scored a touchdown on its next possession but the Bison got the breathing room they need with Anderson's two scoring runs of 14 and 41 yards.

Taryn Christian threw for a pair of touchdowns for South Dakota State (10-3) and Pierre Strong Jr. ran for 135 yards and one score.

The victory capped a whirlwind week for the Bison football program, which lost Klieman to Kansas State and then promoted defensive coordinator Matt Entz to the top job. Klieman will coach the Bison in the Jan. 5 title game in Frisco, Texas.

"I can't thank (Bison athletic director) Matt Larsen enough for letting me finish this journey with these guys," Klieman added.

The Jackrabbits are 0-4 against the Bison in the playoffs. They lost for the second straight year in the semifinals.

South Dakota school report cards show inaccurate safety data

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's recently released report cards on schools are filled with inaccuracies in safety data, according to state education officials.

For the first time, the report cards required under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act include information on school safety from a federal Civil Rights Data Collection survey. But the findings show 65 percent of statewide school-related arrests occurred in the Rapid City district during the 2015-16 school year, the most recent period such data was collected.

A breakdown within the Rapid City district's data shows over half of students arrested were Asian Americans, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Rapid City district spokeswoman Katy Urban said the district is unsure why the report card doesn't reflect information submitted to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

According to the report card, 79 Asian students were arrested in 2015-16. But the district's data shows zero Asian students arrested.

The state report card said zero Native American students were arrested in the 2015-16 school year. Meanwhile, the Rapid City district reported 93 Native American students were arrested during that time.

Sioux Falls, the state's largest district, reported zero arrests despite making 194 referrals to law enforcement during the 2015-16 school year.

"We're not trying to make ourselves look better than any other school district. We just didn't collect the data, so we don't have outputs on arrests, for 2015," said DeeAnn Konrad, the Sioux Falls district's spokeswoman.

The report cards have a handful of other inconsistencies, such as "incidences of violence" seemingly fluctuating arbitrarily between schools.

"There is likely inconsistency in how districts are reporting some of that civil rights data," said Mary Stadick-Smith, the state's interim secretary of education.

Stadick-Smith said another issue is that the state education department's small staff must handle a massive amount of new data.

"I don't know that we're short-handed," said Stadick-Smith. "But we have a pretty lean staff, and we have to follow all the federal requirements. Larger states have huge staffs and entire divisions devoted to data management. We don't have that luxury."

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

After close governor race, Sutton hints at political future

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — In the weeks since Billie Sutton came closer to the governor's office than any Democrat in decades, his campaign has been unusually active for an unsuccessful candidate, sending out fundraising pleas hinting that there's more to come.

Sutton wrote in one post-election pitch that he wasn't just building a campaign but a movement — one that will "keep going and keep fighting for our shared priorities." Sutton told The Associated Press this week that he doesn't have plans right now to run for anything else, but said to expect to hear more from him in coming months as he gets input from supporters.

"Even when you lose a race like this, it just doesn't, that fire doesn't die out," Sutton said. "Whatever we do, it's going to take resources to do that, and so we're asking ... my supporters to join me in whatever that might be, even, even though we don't have it completely fleshed out yet."

Sutton's strong campaign gave Democrats rare hope in a statewide election for an office that hadn't gone blue since 1974.

Sutton cast himself as a moderate, with pro-gun and anti-abortion stances that made him palatable to many Republican voters, to push Kristi Noem hard to the finish. His unusual life story — a former rodeo cowboy who turned to politics after a paralyzing injury — brought him added attention, and he lost to Gov.-elect Noem by 3.4 percentage points in November.

After months of campaigning, Sutton returned to work full-time at a bank in Burke. He said he's enjoying spending time with his family and watching the National Finals Rodeo.

Sutton said his gubernatorial campaign doesn't have any debt and his fundraising efforts come as he's heard encouragement to stay engaged and think of ways to "have an impact moving forward." Sutton said his goal is to bring people together in an age of hyper-partisanship.

Sutton didn't share how much he's raised since the election, and the next campaign finance reporting isn't due until January. Sutton, 34, said it's too early to tell whether he'd run against incoming U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson or U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds in 2020 and he hasn't thought seriously about opting for a rematch against Noem in 2022.

Steve Jarding, a longtime Democratic strategist, said Sutton is a young man with a "tremendous profile"

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who is smarter, stronger and more experienced after his race against Noem. Jarding said Sutton could be a strong House or Senate candidate.

Republican strategist Jason Glodt in a statement called Sutton's fundraising emails "unusual," saying he should be more open with voters about his intentions since he's seeking money. Glodt said based on the close governor's race, it makes sense national Democratic Party leaders would attempt to recruit Sutton for federal office.

"However, such races would be much more difficult for him because the national Democratic liberal agenda ... does not sell in South Dakota," said Glodt, who worked on Rounds' 2014 campaign.

US land management bureau names new Nevada state director

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The agency that manages vast stretches of federal land in the U.S. West has named a new state director in Nevada.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management said Thursday that Jon Raby will take over the new job in January. Raby has been acting director of the bureau's Montana and Dakotas area.

Bureau Deputy Director Brian Steed cited Raby's more than 25-year career in federal service including 20 years with the BLM.

He previously worked at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Forest services.

In Nevada, he will oversee management of 75,000-square-miles (194,250 square kilometers) of public land and more than 92,000-square-miles (238,280-square-kilometers) of federal mineral resources.

Raby replaces John Ruhs, who left the Nevada position in February to head the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

Farmers buoyed but cautious as China resumes buying soybeans

By **BLAKE NICHOLSON**, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The resumption of soybean sales to China this week is encouraging to American farmers who have seen the value of their crop plummet amid a trade war with the world's second-largest economy, but producers see it only as a small step and say they need more federal aid.

Private exporters reported sales of 1.13 million metric tons of soybeans to China on Thursday and another 300,000 metric tons on Friday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said. The Thursday report was the ninth-largest daily sale since 1977, according to the agency's Foreign Agriculture Service, and it comes less than two weeks after the Trump administration reached a three-month truce in its trade war with China during which the two sides will try to work out their differences.

Davie Stephens, a Kentucky farmer who serves as president of the American Soybean Association, said the resumption of sales is "positive news" but that "it is vital that this 90-day process result in lifting the current 25 percent tariff that China continues to impose on U.S. soybean imports."

"Without removal of this tariff, it is improbable that sales of U.S. soybeans to China can be sustained," he said.

China had suspended U.S. soybean purchases earlier this year but under the truce agreed to buy more U.S. farm products. The country typically buys between 30 million and 35 million metric tons of U.S. beans in a normal year.

News of the U.S. sale might prompt some farmers to sell some of the soybeans they have stored on their farms, in part because South American crops will be hitting the world market within a couple of months, said Huron, South Dakota, farmer Brandon Wipf, who serves on the American Soybean Association board.

"We have a narrow window out of which to operate," he said. "I think you'll see some farmers selling, some holding on for a little better prices."

No beans are moving yet out of North Dakota, which typically sends most of its annual crop to Pacific Northwest ports from which the beans go overseas to southeast Asia.

"It may take some time to get the shuttle trains in place and get ocean-going vessels stationed at the

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PNW," said North Dakota Soybean Growers Association Executive Director Nancy Johnson. The sale announced this week is for delivery after the new year, she said, and it did not significantly boost prices.

January soybean futures in early Friday trading on the Chicago Board of Trade gained 40 cents to about \$9.06 a bushel. That's down from almost \$15 a bushel four years ago and nearly \$10 a bushel 18 months ago.

Soybean farmers are getting the largest share of a federal program created to compensate producers up to \$12 billion for trade-related losses, though this year's payment of 82 cents a bushel doesn't match a market price drop of about \$2 per bushel since May.

The Trump administration has said another 82 cents might be approved next year if a trade deal isn't reached. Both the American Soybean Association and the National Farmers Union this week pushed for a second payment while the administration works on a long-term trade solution.

"The farm sector has already lost far more value to this trade war than the (compensation) payments will provide, and damages due to lost markets will persist long into the future," Farmers Union President Roger Johnson said. "The administration should be doing everything it can to protect the men and women who feed, fuel and clothe this nation."

North Dakota U.S. Sen. John Hoeven, chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee, said Friday that he stressed the importance of the second payment to Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney.

Not getting a second payment could be a "deal-breaker" for some farmers in terms of their support for the Trump administration, according to Wipf.

"They would see that as a broken promise by the administration," he said. "We're of course encouraging the administration not to make the miscalculation that this little bit of detente we have with China has suddenly fixed all the problems we have."

Follow Blake Nicholson on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/NicholsonBlake>

Augustana University to pursue move to Division I athletics

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Augustana University in South Dakota will pursue a move to NCAA Division I athletics.

It's one of a number of initiatives in a strategic vision for the next dozen years that was approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees for the Sioux Falls school. Other goals deal with academics and research.

The school currently competes in Division II athletics, as part of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. The commission issued a statement saying Augustana hopes to secure an invitation to a Division I conference by the 2021-22 academic year.

Augustana last explored a possible reclassification about 12 years ago, after South Dakota State and North Dakota State moved to D-I athletics. The University of South Dakota and the University of North Dakota have since followed.

Walz draws GOP criticism for skipping Trump meeting

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota Gov.-elect Tim Walz did not attend a meeting between a bipartisan group of new governors and President Donald Trump in Washington Thursday, drawing some criticism from Republicans.

The six-term Democratic congressman stayed in Minnesota this week to meet with transition staff and advisers, even as newly-elected Democratic counterparts from Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan visited the White House.

Walz has criticized Trump's handling of veterans issues, but spokeswoman Kayla Castaneda said political disagreements had nothing to do with Walz not making the trip.

"He's not going because he's in Minnesota conducting interviews and doing transition business," she said. "He's busy building the executive branch."

The work includes vetting at least 1,500 applicants for appointed positions in state government, including 500 applicants for 23 state commissioner posts.

Trump invited governors-elect to meet with him and members of his Cabinet to discuss workforce development, infrastructure, the opioid crisis and other topics. Thirteen newly elected governors attended Thursday's meeting, including Tony Evers, a Wisconsin Democrat, and Kristi Noem, a South Dakota Republican.

Republican leaders in the Minnesota House criticized Walz for skipping the meeting.

"Minnesota needs a strong relationship with our partners at the federal level — including President Donald Trump," said Rep. Anne Neu, a Republican from North Branch and the incoming deputy House Republican leader. She said she hoped Walz would make it a priority to meet with Trump in the near future "and work to build a productive working relationship with the White House."

Kansas' incoming Democratic governor, Laura Kelly, also opted out of the White House meeting. Her staff said she stayed in Topeka to work on the state budget and her transition into office. The Kansas City Star reported .

Powered by surging turnout in Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs, Minnesota Democrats held on to the governor's office and unexpectedly swept back into power in the state House during the November election. Republicans retain a one-seat majority in the state Senate.

Landowners lose appeal over Dakota Access pipeline easements

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota landowners who unsuccessfully sued the developer of the Dakota Access oil pipeline over land easements have lost their appeal.

The 21 landowners sued for more than \$4 million in 2017, saying a company formed by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners and a hired land acquisition consultant used deception to acquire unfair private land easements.

A federal judge last year ruled that they didn't prove their case, in part because the fraud-based claims required a higher standard of proof.

They took their case to the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which on Thursday upheld the judge's ruling.

The pipeline has been moving North Dakota oil to a shipping point in Illinois since June 2017.

Marshall County sheriff revoked for inappropriate comments

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Marshall County Sheriff Dale Elsen has had his law enforcement certification revoked after admitting to making sexually explicit comments in front of deputies and an inmate.

The American News reports that the South Dakota Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission met in Pierre on Thursday and determined Elsen's conduct was "unbecoming of a law enforcement officer." He has the right to appeal.

County employees made seven complaints against Elsen. The state Division of Criminal Investigation looked into the matter.

Elsen was first elected sheriff in 1983. He was most recently re-elected last month. Several county employees and officials including four county commissioners have expressed support for him.

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

Accused sheriff-elect to take office with restricted duties

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — The sheriff-elect of Roberts County will be sworn into office next month but will have his duties restricted as a criminal case against him proceeds.

Twenty-eight-year-old Korey Ware, of Sisseton, is accused of assaulting a 30-year-old man at or near an Aberdeen bar on Oct. 6. He has pleaded not guilty to assault charges and is scheduled for trial in February.

Ware had a hearing Thursday before the South Dakota Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission in Pierre.

The American News reports that the county plans to swear in Ware in January but also will appoint an interim sheriff. Ware will be restricted to handling administrative and civil duties and overseeing detention centers pending the resolution of his case and any potential action by the standards commission.

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

Trump pushes Congress for new health law after court ruling

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After a federal judge ruled that the Obama-era health overhaul was “invalid,” President Donald Trump is looking to congressional leaders to come up with a replacement even as the White House says the current law will remain in place for now.

“Get it done!” the president instructed Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., the likely House speaker in January.

Legal appeals are expected to reach the Supreme Court on an issue that helped propel Democrats to their new majority in the House in the recent midterm elections.

In a 55-page opinion Friday, U.S. District Judge Reed O’Connor in Texas ruled that last year’s tax cut bill knocked the constitutional foundation from under the Affordable Care Act by eliminating a penalty for not having coverage. He wrote that the rest of the law cannot be separated from that provision and therefore was invalid.

Supporters of the law said they would appeal. “Today’s misguided ruling will not deter us: Our coalition will continue to fight in court for the health and wellbeing of all Americans,” said California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, who is leading a coalition of states defending the overhaul.

The White House applauded the ruling by O’Connor, who was appointed by President George W. Bush, and said that “pending the appeal process, the law remains in place.”

Trump tweeted that “Obamacare has been struck down as an UNCONSTITUTIONAL disaster!” and said it was not up to Congress to “pass a STRONG law that provides GREAT healthcare and protects pre-existing conditions.”

While congressional Republicans held their silence in reaction to the ruling, Democrats said they would test the GOP’s commitment to such popular provisions.

“The GOP spent all last year pretending to support people with pre-existing conditions while quietly trying to remove that support in the courts,” Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said in a tweet Saturday. “Next year, we will force votes to expose their lies.”

Pelosi said the House “will move swiftly to formally intervene in the appeals process to uphold the life-saving protections for people with pre-existing conditions and reject Republicans’ effort to destroy” the law.

But Congress is unlikely to pass a new law while the case remains in the courts. Numerous high-ranking Republican lawmakers have said they did not intend to also strike down provisions such as protection for people with medical conditions when they repealed the law’s fines for people who can afford coverage but remain uninsured.

Legal expert Timothy Jost, a supporter of the health law, said O’Connor’s ruling would have repercussions for nearly all Americans if it stands. If the entire health law is invalidated, popular provisions that benefit Medicare beneficiaries and people with employer coverage would also be scrapped. That could include the section that allows parents to keep young adult children on their coverage until age 26.

About 20 million people have gained health insurance coverage since the law passed in 2010 without a single Republican vote. Currently, about 10 million have subsidized private insurance through the health law’s insurance markets, while an estimated 12 million low-income people are covered through its Medicaid expansion.

Saturday was the sign-up deadline for 2019 private plans through HealthCare.gov. Meanwhile, a number of states are expected to move forward with Medicaid expansion after Democratic victories in the midterm elections.

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If the case were to reach the Supreme Court it would mark the third time the justices consider a challenge to fundamental provisions of the law. The law's opponents lost both the first two cases.

The five justices who upheld the health law in 2012 in the first major case — Chief Justice John Roberts and the court's four liberals — are all still serving.

Since then, public opinion on the overhaul has shifted from mostly negative to generally favorable.

Preserving the law's protections for people with medical conditions proved to be a strong argument for Democrats in the November elections. Republicans who tried to undermine those safeguards during their failed effort to repeal the health law last year were forced on the defensive and went on record saying they, too, want to make sure people with health problems can get coverage.

House Democrats are talking about passing legislation that enshrines protections for medical conditions. It's unclear what form that would take, or if the Republican-majority Senate would go along and Trump would sign it.

The GOP-led states that had sued asked O'Connor to toss out the entire law after Congress repealed the "individual mandate" penalty for going without coverage. The judge had previously ruled against other Obama-era policies.

The Trump administration weighed in, saying the government would no longer defend some core components of the law, but that others could remain, including Medicaid expansion, subsidies for private insurance and health insurance markets.

Along with the requirement to have health insurance, the administration said the parts of the law that should go included:

- the requirement that insurers must take all applicants for comprehensive coverage regardless of prior health history, including existing conditions. That includes a prohibition on insurers writing policies that exclude a particular condition — for example, a recurrence of breast cancer.

- the prohibition on insurers charging higher premiums to people with health problems.

The health insurance industry says doing away with consumer protections will destabilize a market that seems to be finding its footing, with modest premium increases and more plan choices next year.

The American Medical Association called O'Connor's ruling an "unfortunate step backward for our health system that is contrary to overwhelming public sentiment to preserve pre-existing condition protections."

Ballot security was a worry long before disputed House race

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and EMERY P. DALESIO, Associated Press

BLADENBORO, N.C. (AP) — Six months ago, election officials in rural North Carolina's Bladen County resolved to tighten security at their headquarters and protect the ballots stored there by installing an alarm and video cameras and securing an unlocked door that leads to another government office.

The fixes never got done before Election Day. The then-chairman of the county commissioners, who control the purse strings, did not see the need.

Now Bladen County is at the center of a disputed congressional election rife with suspicions of fraud, including the possibility that absentee ballots were altered or discarded.

While no evidence has surfaced to suggest ballots were stolen or tampered with inside the building, warnings about the potential for political chicanery in Bladen County were raised years before the burgeoning scandal dragged this patch of eastern North Carolina's pine barrens into the spotlight.

Marshall Tutor, who was lead investigator for the state Board of Elections for 15 years, said he frequently traveled to Bladen County over the years to probe accusations of wrongdoing. He said residents were often hesitant to talk to outsiders about possible voting fraud, much less testify.

"Looking back during my time at the Board of Elections, this mess in Bladen County, just from what I've seen and what I know, is the worst that I've encountered in the entire state," said Tutor, who retired in March.

With the congressional race now under investigation by state authorities, the state has refused to certify the results of the Nov. 6 vote in the 9th District, where Republican Mark Harris leads Democrat Dan Mc-

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Cready by 905 votes. Both parties concede a do-over election might be needed.

Foremost among the cast of characters in the case is Leslie McCrae Dowless Jr., a 62-year-old local campaign operative and convicted felon who has been named a "person of interest" by the state Board of Elections. Authorities want to know whether he and others working on Harris' behalf ran an illegal operation in which they collected large numbers of absentee ballots from voters.

Because of the potential for mischief, it is against the law in North Carolina for anyone other than a voter or immediate family member to handle someone's absentee ballot before it is sealed and mailed.

In an interview with Charlotte station WBTV on Friday, Harris admitted making the decision to hire Dowless, who he said had come recommended by people in Bladen County. But the GOP candidate denied knowing about any illegal "ballot harvesting" tactics.

The investigation highlights the vulnerabilities of the electoral process in the U.S., where many of the responsibilities for administering federal elections fall on state governments and myriad local jurisdictions big and small.

Located about an hour's drive from the coast, Bladen is among North Carolina's least densely populated counties, with about 35,000 people. Good jobs can be hard to come by. The biggest employer is a massive hog processing plant in the town of Tar Heel.

Politics here is more personal than partisan, with local races for sheriff and the county commission often generating more interest than state and federal contests. Untangling how the county became the scene of 2018's last undecided congressional race requires a look at a network of decades-long friendships, political alliances and blood relations.

Records reviewed by The Associated Press show Dowless and his relatives have received payments over the years from the campaigns of several of Bladen County's top elected officials, including the current sheriff and some county commissioners. He has worked for Democrats and Republicans alike.

Dowless, an affable, bearded chain-smoker known locally by his middle name, McCrae, has a criminal record that includes prison time for fraud and perjury. He has also held local elected office as a Soil and Water district supervisor. He declined to comment last week when an AP reporter visited his home, as well as in later phone calls.

In recent years, one source of worry about Bladen County elections has been the unsecured door between the local elections office — where registration rolls, absentee ballots and other sensitive documents are stored — and the county veterans' services office.

Just before the 2014 election, Jens Lutz, a local Democrat, raised questions about ballot security in Bladen County in an email to state Democratic officials, who forwarded it the state election board. His concern: Republican Larry Hammond, who was formerly the county's elections director and was still the local veterans services coordinator, continued to have free access to sensitive areas of the election offices. This was at a time, Lutz claimed, that Hammond was managing a GOP candidate's race for sheriff.

North Carolina's Democratic Party chief asked the state election board to investigate the suspicions about Hammond, but the board's then-attorney, Don Wright, replied via email that he knew Hammond and had "never noticed or been informed of any unethical or illegal behavior by him."

In an interview Monday, Hammond denied he managed the campaign of the candidate for sheriff, who ultimately won in a close vote. Hammond also denied he had ever improperly accessed the elections office.

"No, absolutely not," he said. "I value honest and fair elections."

But Lutz continued to harbor suspicions that something fishy might be going on inside the Bladen elections building. And after he became chairman of the county of Board of Elections last spring, he persuaded the panel to vote 4-0 to block off or secure the door and adopt other measures, including changing the locks and repairing or replacing security cameras that hadn't worked for at least a decade.

Lutz's concerns about what he termed the "lackadaisical openness" of the elections office were buttressed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which assessed the site shortly before this year's election. In a report obtained by AP, the department said that because of the unlocked door, "sensitive voting materials are vulnerable." It said the door should be eliminated and other security measures taken.

Ray Britt, a Bladen County commissioner who served as the board chairman until earlier this month,

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said in an interview that security improvements were unnecessary.

"We've never had any problems," said Britt, a Republican.

On Thursday, Bladen County Manager Greg Martin said he is working to adopt some of the changes recommended in the federal report but is unsure whether a lock will be added to the inside door.

On Dec. 7, a day after he was interviewed by the AP, Lutz unexpectedly resigned from the county Board of Elections. In a measure of how closely intertwined political figures are in Bladen County, documents soon emerged showing Lutz had previously started a political consulting business with Dowless. He has not responded to messages since quitting the board.

Britt, too, has had connections to Dowless. His 2016 campaign issued a \$500 check to Dowless with the notation: "To get out the vote."

The commissioner said he has known Dowless for years and the two remain in touch. He said he would need to see proof before he believed Dowless violated the law.

"But I don't care if you're a member of my family, if you do wrong, you've done wrong," Britt said.

Associated Press investigative reporter Michael Biesecker reported from Washington. AP reporter Gary D. Robertson contributed from Raleigh, North Carolina.

Follow Biesecker at <http://twitter.com/mbieseck> and Emery P. Dalesio at <http://twitter.com/emerydalesio>

Contact the AP's investigative team with tips about this or other matters: <https://www.ap.org/tips>

This story corrects the population figure for the county to 35,000.

Australia recognizes west Jerusalem as Israel's capital

SYDNEY (AP) — Australia has decided to formally recognize west Jerusalem as Israel's capital, but won't move its embassy until there's a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced Saturday.

Morrison said in a speech that Australia would recognize east Jerusalem as Palestine's capital only after a settlement has been reached on a two-state solution. The Australian Embassy won't be moved from Tel Aviv until such a time, he said.

While the embassy move is delayed, Morrison said his government would establish a defense and trade office in Jerusalem and would also start looking for an appropriate site for the embassy.

"The Australian government has decided that Australia now recognizes west Jerusalem, as the seat of the Knesset and many of the institutions of government, is the capital of Israel," Morrison said.

He said the decision respects both a commitment to a two-state solution and long-standing respect for relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Australia becomes the third country to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, following the U.S. and Guatemala.

Unlike its predecessors, however, Australia recognized only the western part of the city. The move, therefore, is unlikely to please either side entirely.

For the Palestinians, it offers a partial resolution to an issue that they believe should be resolved through negotiations. That decision is softened, though, by recognizing their claim to east Jerusalem.

The Israelis welcome recognition of Jerusalem as their capital, but the Australian decision falls far short of their claim to all of the city. Refusing to include east Jerusalem, home to the city's most important religious sites, is likely to upset Israeli nationalists who dominate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition.

Israel's foreign ministry commended Australia's move as "a step in the right direction." In a statement, it also praised the Australian government's stance against anti-Semitism and its pro-Israel position at the U.N.

Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat slammed Australia's "irresponsible policies" that led to the recognition.

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"The policies of this Australian administration have done nothing to advance the two-state solution," Erekat said in a statement, stressing the Palestinian view that the holy city remains a final-status issue in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, which have run aground.

Morrison had earlier floated the idea that Australia may follow the contentious U.S. move of relocating its embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, but it was seen by many Australians as a political stunt. Critics called it a cynical attempt to win votes in a by-election in October for a Sydney seat with a high Jewish population.

The consideration had sparked backlash from Muslim-majority Indonesia and Malaysia, threatening a free trade deal that has now been delayed.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten said the decision to recognize west Jerusalem as Israel's capital but not move the embassy there was a "humiliating backdown" from the October by-election campaign.

"What I'm worried is that Mr. Morrison put his political interest ahead of our national interest," Shorten told reporters.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed it in a move that is not internationally recognized. Israel considers east Jerusalem an indivisible part of its capital, while the Palestinians seek the area, home to the city's most sensitive holy sites, as the capital of a future state.

Associated Press writers Josef Federman in Jerusalem and Fares Akram in Gaza City, Gaza Strip, contributed to this report.

Tear gas on Champs-Elysees but fewer Paris protesters seen

By **RAPHAEL SATTER** and **ELENA BECATOROS**, Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Tear gas billowed Saturday across the French capital's protest-scarred Champs-Elysees after a day of largely peaceful demonstrations and water cannons shot into the crowds on the fifth straight weekend of protests by the country's "yellow vest" movement.

The demonstrations against France's high cost of living — sapped by cold weather, rain and recent concessions by French President Emmanuel Macron — were significantly smaller Saturday than at previous rallies, some of which scarred parts of Paris with vandalism and looting.

A few thousand people marched up and down the famed shopping street in Paris, a spirited yet peaceful gathering that edged into violence as the afternoon wore on. Riot police clashed with demonstrators as the occasional tourist darted from their hotel or a brave Christmas shopper took a peek at the neighborhood's mostly boarded-up storefronts.

In the late afternoon, a water cannon in a line of police vans confronting protesters sprayed water into a crowd in frigid weather to disperse them. Firefighters put out a fire on a side street leading to the Champs-Elysees and limited scuffles broke out between protesters and police.

Protesters made clear they wanted to keep up the pressure, even if their numbers were far smaller than previous weeks, which saw rioters smashing and looting stores and setting up burning barricades in the streets.

Pierre Lamy, a 27-year-old industrial worker wearing both a yellow vest and a French flag over his shoulders, said the movement had long stopped being about the fuel tax hike that sparked the protests in November but was now focused on economic justice.

"We're here to represent all our friends and members of our family who can't come to protest, or because they're scared," he said, walking to the demonstration with three friends. "Everything's coming up now. We're being bled dry."

French law enforcement was out in force. About 8,000 police and 14 armored vehicles were deployed in Paris for the demonstration, and streets of central Paris were honeycombed with checkpoints where officers in riot gear checked bags and coats for weapons and helmets.

Police said 86 people were taken into custody in Paris. No details were given as to why they were taken in. Police in riot gear were seen tackling one protester and dragging him off the Champs-Elysees, while

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his friends said he was doing nothing but exercising his protest rights.

The yellow vest movement, which takes its name from the fluorescent safety vests French motorists must have in their vehicles, has been fueled by a sense that Macron's government is hurting ordinary workers and retirees with too many taxes. Without any clear form or leadership, it has attracted a wide range of disgruntled people across France's political spectrum, including some violent militants.

"Respect my existence or expect my resistance," read one banner held aloft by protesters.

Max Werle, a 56-year-old father of nine, said the protests were his first-ever demonstrations.

"I'm here for my children," he said, adding that his daughter had given birth in a firetruck Monday because the local hospital in Loiret outside Paris had closed years ago. "(We are) here to defend our cause ... it's not a left and right thing."

Yellow vest protests were also being held Saturday in other parts of France, where roads and highways were being blocked. The number of deaths linked to the protest rose to seven after Belgian police said a man accidentally crashed his car Friday night into a truck that had stalled at a yellow vest roadblock on the Franco-Belgian border.

Macron had called for calm before the demonstrations, a call echoed by his government.

"Protesting is a right. So let's know how to exercise it," the French government tweeted, showing a 34-second video that began with images of historic French protests and recent footage of "yellow vest" protesters rallying peacefully before turning to violence.

"Protesting is not smashing. Protesting is not smashing our heritage. Protesting is not smashing our businesses. ... Protesting is not smashing our republic," the video says.

Macron acknowledged in a speech earlier this week that he was partially responsible for the anger displayed during the protests, and announced measures aimed at improving workers' spending power. He refused, however, to reinstate a wealth tax that was tossed out in an effort to spur investment in France.

But on the streets of Paris, some protesters still said the president didn't understand them.

"I think that Macron isn't in touch with what the yellow vests want. I think the yellow vests need to continue speaking out," said Julie Verrier, a protester from Picardie in Normandy in northern France who went to Paris for Saturday's demonstration.

"Local city halls are closed, so we can't go there to express and write our complaints," she said. "So coming here is the only way we have to say that French people need to be heard."

Chris Den Hond and Elaine Ganley in Paris contributed to this report.

Trump says Interior Secretary Zinke leaving administration

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and JONATHAN LEMIRE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who is facing federal investigations into his travel, political activity and potential conflicts of interest, will leave the administration at year's end, President Donald Trump said Saturday.

Trump, in tweeting Zinke's departure, said the former Montana congressman "accomplished much during his tenure" and that a replacement would be announced next week. The Cabinet post requires Senate confirmation.

Zinke is leaving weeks before Democrats take control of the House, a shift in power that promised to intensify probes into his conduct. His departure comes amid a staff shake-up as Trump heads into his third year in office. The president on Friday named White House budget director Mick Mulvaney as his next chief of staff.

Zinke, 57, played a leading part in Trump's efforts to roll back environmental regulations and promote domestic energy development. When he recently traveling to survey damage from California's wildfires, Zinke echoed Trump claims that lax forest management was to blame in the devastation.

He pushed to develop oil, natural gas and coal beneath public lands in line with the administration's business-friendly aims. But Zinke has been dogged by ethics probes, including one centered on a Montana

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land deal involving a foundation he created and the chairman of an energy services company that does business with the Interior Department.

Investigators also are reviewing Zinke's decision to block two tribes from opening a casino in Connecticut and his redrawing of boundaries to shrink a Utah national monument.

Zinke has denied wrongdoing.

The Associated Press reported last month that the department's internal watchdog had referred an investigation of Zinke to the Justice Department.

Trump told reporters this fall he was evaluating Zinke's future in the administration in light of the allegations.

Asked by reporters last month whether he might fire Zinke, Trump said, "No, I'm going to look into any complaints."

Zinke in November denied he already was hunting for his next job.

"I enjoy working for the president," he told a Montana radio station. "Now, If you do your job, he supports you."

"I think I'm probably going to be the commander of space command," Zinke said. "How's that one?"

Zinke had a memorable administration debut when he rode a bay roan gelding to his first day of work in March 2017.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump floats fictions about the border

By CALVIN WOODWARD and HOPE YEN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's relationship with the truth tends to be borderline, at best, when it comes to the border.

So it was this past week when he made a flurry of false or unsupported statements about immigration. He said, with no evidence, that migrants are plagued with disease. He asserted that Mexico has in effect agreed to pay for his border wall, even as he threatens a partial government shutdown if Congress doesn't approve billions of dollars to build it. He twisted federal statistics to claim the recent arrest of 10 terrorists who don't exist.

On another front, Trump tried to cast doubt on whether his former national security adviser had lied to the FBI even after the aide pleaded guilty to doing just that.

A look at recent rhetoric and the reality:

BORDER SECURITY

TRUMP: "People with tremendous medical difficulty and medical problems are pouring in, and in many — in many cases it's contagious. They're pouring into our country. We have to have border security." — statement in Oval Office meeting Tuesday with Democratic leaders, Rep. Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Chuck Schumer.

THE FACTS: Trump provided no evidence that people coming into the country, including the caravan at the U.S.-Mexico border, are carrying contagious diseases at a higher rate than the U.S. population. Medical screening is part of the process for vetting people who seek asylum.

A study published this month by the UCL-Lancet Commission on Migration and Health called scares about contagion one of the most pervasive myths about migrants. The study found no evidence that migrants pose a significant public health risk to countries such as the U.S. that have good health systems. In fact, migrants themselves face health threats from arduous journeys, violence along the way, or overcrowding in shelters or camps, the Lancet commission said. While some may come from regions where certain diseases are common, the report noted that international tourism and movement of animals spread illness, too.

As for the caravan and other migrants from the south, World Bank statistics show Mexico and Central America vaccinate most children against measles, sometimes at a bit higher rate than the U.S. Along the border between Mexico and California, public health departments have long had a system in place to watch for signs of outbreaks of a variety of illnesses, whether they're immigration-related or not.

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TRUMP: "Our Southern Border is now Secure and will remain that way." — tweet Tuesday.

TRUMP: "We need border security. People are pouring into our country, including terrorists. We have terrorists. But we caught 10 terrorists. These are over the last very short period of time — 10. These are very serious people." — statement in Oval Office meeting.

THE FACTS: Trump contradicted himself, declaring the border secure and insecure on the same day. And Trump is wrong about the government recently catching 10 terrorists.

His statement is a mangling of federal statistics showing that U.S. Customs and Border Protection stopped an average of seven to 10 people a day in the 2017 budget year who were denied entry to the U.S. because they were on a watch list. That average applied to all points of entry, and overwhelmingly from airports, and was not specific to the southern border. The standard for placing someone on the list is reasonable suspicion, a lower bar than the probable cause needed to arrest someone for an alleged crime. The statistics do not show how many might have been arrested or charged with anything.

In any event, Trump rendered a daily average as 10 recently captured terrorists in the flesh.

As for border security, U.S. arrests on the Mexican border jumped 78 percent in November from a year earlier to the highest level in Trump's presidency. Increased arrests indicate that more people are trying to cross the border illegally.

JOBS

PELOSI: "We came at a place to say, 'How do we meet the needs of American people who have needs?' The economy has — people are losing their jobs." — Oval Office meeting.

TRUMP: "Well, we have the lowest unemployment that we've had in 50 years." — Oval Office meeting.

THE FACTS: Trump is correct about jobs.

There may always be some layoffs even if the economy is strong. General Motors, for instance, said last month it would cut as many as 14,000 workers in North America in a restructuring aimed at generating cash to spend on innovation, even though U.S. auto sales are near historic highs.

But the U.S. economy has now added jobs for a record 98 straight months, dating to October 2010, during the Obama administration.

The Labor Department reported the unemployment rate in November stayed at 3.7 percent, a five-decade low, for the third straight month.

The job gains are pushing down unemployment rates to historically low levels for a variety of groups. The unemployment rate for men aged 20 and above fell last month to 3.3 percent, the lowest in 18 years. The rate for Americans with just high school diplomas dropped to 3.5 percent, the lowest since December 2000. The African-American jobless rate declined to 5.9 percent, matching May's figure as the lowest on record.

That's making it more challenging for businesses to find the workers they need. Employers have posted 7 million open jobs, outnumbering the ranks of the unemployed, which fell last month to just under 6 million.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

SCHUMER: "The one thing I think we can agree on is we shouldn't shut down the government over a dispute. And you want to shut it down. You keep talking about it." — Oval Office meeting.

TRUMP: "No, no, no, no, no. The last time, Chuck, you shut it down."

SCHUMER: "No, no, no."

THE FACTS: There's no settling any argument over who is responsible for a shutdown. But the last one, in January, was generally attributed to Senate Democrats seeking to force protections for hundreds of thousands of young immigrants.

Parts of the government closed for three days as Democrats united against a Republican-backed temporary spending bill unless Republicans and Trump agreed to extend the expiring Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which protected the children of parents who came to the U.S. illegally. The White House was resisting bipartisan efforts to help the young immigrants.

Schumer ultimately gave in to GOP demands in exchange for a promise from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., to address the issue at a later date, infuriating liberal activists who were pushing

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Democrats hard for an immigration deal.

Schumer had grounds, though, for accusing Trump of wanting a partial shutdown now. The president said he'd be "proud to shut down the government" and eager to take responsibility for it if he didn't get enough money from Congress for border security.

TRUMP: "If we don't get what we want one way or another ... I will shut down the government." — in meeting with Pelosi and Schumer.

SCHUMER, asked after the meeting what happens if Trump doesn't compromise: "He will get no wall and he will get a shutdown."

PELOSI: A "Trump shutdown" could be his "holiday president to the American people."

THE FACTS: Everyone's exaggerating. The government is not at risk of closing if a deal is not reached by the end of this coming Friday.

About three-quarters of the government would continue to have enough money to operate. But even a partial shutdown could be disruptive. Among the affected departments absent a deal: Homeland Security, Transportation, Agriculture, State, Justice.

Congress has approved continued financing of the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments, among other federal operations, and workers deemed essential would not be idled.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

TRUMP: "Well the FBI said Michael Flynn, a general and a great person, they said he didn't lie. And Mueller said: 'Well, maybe he did.' And now they're all having a big dispute, so I think it's a great thing that the judge is looking into that situation. It's an honor for a lot of terrific people." — remarks Thursday.

THE FACTS: That's not what the FBI said. And Flynn, Trump's former national security adviser, has agreed that he lied to the FBI. He pleaded guilty to it and is to be sentenced next week — the first White House official punished as part of special counsel Robert Mueller's ongoing Russia investigation.

The idea that Flynn didn't lie to the FBI picked up steam after Republicans on the House intelligence committee issued a report this year that said ex-FBI director James Comey, in a private briefing, told lawmakers that agents who interviewed Flynn "discerned no physical indications of deception" and saw "nothing that indicated to them that he knew he was lying to them." But Comey called that description "garble" in a private interview with House lawmakers this month.

Comey, in essence, said Flynn was a good liar, having a "natural conversation" with agents, "answered fully their questions, didn't avoid. That notwithstanding, they concluded he was lying."

As for Trump's comment that the judge is looking into the matter, it's true U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan has asked for documents related to the agents who interviewed Flynn. It's not clear from Sullivan's order whether he considers there to be a dispute to resolve or if he just wants to see the underlying documents as he decides Flynn's sentence.

THE WALL

TRUMP: "I often stated, 'One way or the other, Mexico is going to pay for the Wall.' This has never changed. Our new deal with Mexico (and Canada), the USMCA, is so much better than the old, very costly & anti-USA NAFTA deal, that just by the money we save, MEXICO IS PAYING FOR THE WALL!" — tweet Thursday.

THE FACTS: This is a face-saving statement to mask the fact that Mexico refused to pay for a U.S. border wall, Trump gave up trying to make it do so and U.S. taxpayers are on the hook for it.

In essence, Trump is arguing that new terms of trade with Mexico will increase economic growth in the U.S. and produce more tax revenue. That's what everyone hopes trade agreements will do. As part of that, he hopes for a lower trade deficit with Mexico. Neither outcome is assured.

The deal negotiated with Mexico and Canada is an update of the North American Free Trade Agreement he railed against, not a transformative pact. The three countries will continue trading in an environment

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of mainly low or no tariffs, with improvements here and there for all three partners. There is no credible way for Trump to forecast additional growth covering costs that are being charged to U.S. taxpayers if the wall is built. Trade balances depend on too many factors — consumer tastes, exchange rates, overall economic performance, and the choices of thousands of companies among them — and some are well outside any government's control.

Trump specifically promised in the campaign that Mexico would pay for the wall. That is not the same as trying to reduce the U.S. trade deficit, which is about the exchange of goods and services among private entities rather than payments between governments. Nor is a trade deficit necessarily a penalty on consumers. It is the result of consumers buying things made in another country.

He wants some \$25 billion from Congress for wall construction over five years and promises a partial government shutdown if he does not get a \$5 billion or so portion in the next week. Congress may or may not give him that. If it does, it will not be because lawmakers expect a refund to the treasury in future years from extra growth produced by a trade deal.

TRUMP: "Tremendous amounts of wall have already been built." — statement in meeting Tuesday with Pelosi and Schumer.

TRUMP: "People do not yet realize how much of the Wall, including really effective renovation, has already been built." "We have already built large new sections & fully renovated others, making them like new." — tweets.

THE FACTS: Tremendous portions of the wall have not been built. Yes, some barrier renovation has happened, but little wall construction has been completed under Trump.

Congress allocated roughly \$1.4 billion in the spring — a bit more than 5 percent of what Trump wanted — for border security and specified that the money was not to be used for construction of the prototype wall sections that stand near San Diego. Instead, the money is to strengthen or replace existing fencing with more secure fencing.

Altogether, Trump promised in the campaign that he'd build a 1,000-mile (1,600 kilometer-) wall, as high as 40 feet or 12 meters (and have Mexico pay for it, which isn't happening). If some 650 miles (1,050 km) of existing fencing are considered in the equation, that leaves him with about 350 miles (560 km) of wall to build.

KELLYANNE CONWAY, Trump adviser: "You just want to keep saying 'wall, wall, wall.' ... There are many ways to secure a border." — to reporters asking Tuesday about Trump's wall.

THE FACTS: Trump, of course, has been saying wall, wall, wall, since the 2015 Republican primaries, in a torrent of tweets and in countless rallies. Or, as he put it in Tuesday's tweet, "the Wall." He's described the material, the dimensions and the beauty of it, and had prototype sections built, and they are of a wall, not a fence.

Federal officials, and Trump himself, at times, have tried to scale back expectations by noting, for example, that "there are places where you can't have a physical wall," as Conway put it Tuesday. "There are rivers. There's brush." But Trump already accounted for that when he promised 1,000 miles of wall to supplement an additional 1,000 miles of rivers and other natural barriers.

"The Wall is the Wall, it has never changed or evolved from the first day I conceived of it," he tweeted in January, as if inviting voters to hold him to his literal promise.

Associated Press writers Lauran Neergaard, Josh Boak, Chad Day, Eric Tucker, Matthew Daly and Colleen Long in Washington, and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

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Light at the end of the tunnel for UN climate talks

By **FRANK JORDANS, Associated Press**

KATOWICE, Poland (AP) — A deal on the rules that govern the Paris climate accord appeared within grasp Saturday, as officials from almost 200 countries worked to bridge remaining differences after two weeks of U.N. talks in Poland.

The 2015 Paris Agreement was a landmark moment in international diplomacy, bringing together governments with vastly different views to tackle the common threat of global warming. But while the accord set a headline target of keeping average global temperatures from rising by more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) — or 1.5 C (2.7 F) if possible — much of the fine print was left unfinished.

The meeting in Poland's southern city of Katowice was meant to finalize how countries report their emissions of greenhouse gases — a key factor in man-made climate change — and the efforts they're taking to reduce them. Poor countries also wanted assurances on financial support to help them cut emissions, adapt to inevitable changes such as sea level rise and pay for damage that's already happened.

"We've come a long way," Canada's environment minister, Catherine McKenna, told The Associated Press ahead of a planned plenary meeting Saturday afternoon. "There's been really late negotiations, there's been big group negotiations, there's been shuttle diplomacy all through the night, and now we are coming to the wire."

One major sticking point during the talks was how to create a functioning market in carbon credits. Economists believe an international trading system could be an effective way to drive down emissions and raise large amounts of money for measures to curb global warming.

"We want billions to flow into trillions. And I'm someone who believes that it's not just about national governments," McKenna said. "Ultimately the market is going to play a huge role in the cleaner solutions that we need, supporting countries and being efficient and how we do this."

Emerging economies such as Brazil have pushed back against rich countries' demands to cancel piles of carbon credits still lingering from a system set up under the 1997 Kyoto accord.

"There are still a range of possible outcomes and Brazil continues to work constructively with other parties to find a workable pathway forward," said the country's chief negotiator, Antonio Marcondes.

The talks in Poland took place against a backdrop of increasing concern among scientists that global warming is proceeding faster than governments are responding to it.

A recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that while it's possible to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F) by the end of the century compared to pre-industrial times, this will require a dramatic overhaul of the global economy including a shift away from fossil fuels.

Alarmed by efforts to include this in the final text of the meeting, the U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait blocked endorsement of the report mid-way through the talks, prompting uproar from vulnerable countries and environmental groups.

While some officials questioned the format of the meeting, which has grown to a huge event with tens of thousands of participants, the head of Greenpeace International, Jennifer Morgan, stressed how important it was to bring all countries of the world together on the issue.

"We need a multilateral process especially for the poorest and smallest countries that don't go to G-20," she said, referring to the Group of 20 major and emerging economies that met recently in Argentina. "But the lack of ambition by some rich countries, like the European Union, is worrying, especially as we are staring the 1.5 report in the face."

Sri Lanka's disputed prime minister resigns to end impasse

By **KRISHAN FRANCIS, Associated Press**

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka's disputed prime minister announced Saturday that he would step aside, paving the way for his sacked predecessor to regain the position and apparently ending a political impasse that has paralyzed the government for nearly two months.

Mahinda Rajapaksa's resignation signals the end of a crisis that began in October when President Mai-

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thripala Sirisena sacked Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and appointed Rajapaksa as his replacement.

"Since I have no intention of remaining as prime minister without a general election being held, and in order to not hamper the president in any way, I will resign from the position of prime minister and make way for the president to form a new government," Rajapaksa said in a televised statement.

After his appointment as prime minister, Rajapaksa sought to secure a majority in the 225-member Parliament but failed. Sirisena then dissolved Parliament and called new elections, but the Supreme Court struck down the move as unconstitutional.

On Wednesday, Wickremesinghe secured the support of 117 lawmakers in a confidence vote in Parliament, forcing Sirisena to relent from his promise not to reappoint the man he had sacked.

Wickremesinghe and his Cabinet will be sworn in on Sunday.

Rajapaksa said, however, that he would continue to fight along with Sirisena's support to have an early election.

"The change of government that the people expected has now had to be put off," he said. "But the people will definitely get the change they desire. No one can prevent that."

Rajapaksa's resignation came a day after the Supreme Court extended a lower court's suspension of Rajapaksa and his Cabinet. The top court put off the next hearing until mid-January, when it planned to rule on whether they should hold office after losing two no-confidence votes in Parliament. It is uncertain if this case will continue now.

Sri Lanka has had no functioning government for nearly two weeks since the Court of Appeal suspended Rajapaksa and his Cabinet and was facing the prospect of being unable to pass a budget for next year if a new government is not appointed quickly.

The country faced the risk of being unable to use state funds from Jan. 1 if there was no government to approve the budget. It also has a foreign debt repayment of \$1 billion due in early January, and it was unclear if it can be serviced without a lawful finance minister.

Rajapaksa is a former strongman president who is considered by many a war hero for defeating the Tamil Tiger rebels in 2009 after a long civil war. But he lost a 2015 re-election bid amid allegations of wartime atrocities, corruption and nepotism.

Sirisena was health minister in Rajapaksa's Cabinet when he joined Wickremesinghe and ran against Rajapaksa in the 2015 presidential election. After winning the election, Sirisena formed a unity government with Wickremesinghe as prime minister, but had disagreements with his economic policies and his efforts to investigate alleged wartime atrocities.

Wisconsin, Michigan Republicans enact lame-duck limits

By **SCOTT BAUER, DAVID EGGERT and TODD RICHMOND, Associated Press**

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Republicans in Wisconsin and Michigan enacted last-minute limits on Democratic power Friday, with outgoing GOP governors in both Upper Midwest states signing measures protecting their priorities before leaving office in less than a month.

Democrats derided the moves as desperate power grabs, while Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder downplayed the scope of their actions while defending their rights to do it.

"There's a lot of hype and hysteria, particularly in the national media, implying this is a power shift. It's not," Walker said before signing bills that weaken powers of the incoming Democratic governor and attorney general and limit early voting to two weeks before an election.

The push in both states mirrors tactics employed by North Carolina Republicans in 2016.

Snyder signed measures to significantly scale back citizen-initiated measures to raise Michigan's minimum wage and require paid sick leave for workers, finalizing an unprecedented Republican-backed legislative maneuver that opponents blasted as shameful.

To prevent minimum wage and earned sick time initiatives from going to voters last month, GOP lawmakers approved them in September. That allowed them to more easily alter the measures with simple majority votes rather than the three-fourths support that would have been needed if voters had passed

the proposals.

The tactic — never done before — was pushed by the business community as necessary to avoid jeopardizing the economy. But it was criticized as an unconstitutional attack on voters' will at a time Republicans in Michigan are trying to dilute the powers of incoming elected Democrats.

Snyder signed the bills in private and issued a statement calling them a "good balance" between what the ballot drives proposed and what legislators drafted initially.

"They address a number of difficulties for job providers while still ensuring paid medical leave benefits and increased minimum-wage incomes for many Michiganders," he said.

Walker traveled 130 miles from his Capitol office to sign the bills in Green Bay, a more conservative city far from the liberal capital of Madison where protesters converged on the Capitol to voice opposition to the lame-duck legislative session two weeks ago.

Just two hours later, a group run by former Democratic U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced it planned legal action to block the limitation on early voting.

Members of both parties, including Democratic Gov.-elect Tony Evers and former Republican Gov. Scott McCallum, urged Walker to reject the legislation. Evers accused Walker of ignoring and overriding the will of the people by signing the bills into law.

"People will remember he took a stand that was not reflective of this last election," Evers said. "I will be reviewing our options and do everything we can to make sure the people of this state are not ignored or overlooked."

Walker, speaking after he signed the bills, brushed aside what he called "high-pitched hysteria" from critics of the legislation. He said his legacy will be the record he left behind that includes all-but eliminating collective bargaining for public workers, not the lame-duck measures.

Walker's signing of the bills came a day after he announced a \$28 million incentive package to keep open a Kimberly-Clark Corp. plant in northeast Wisconsin. One of the lame-duck bills would prevent Evers from making such a deal, instead requiring the Legislature's budget committee to sign off.

In Michigan, Democratic state Rep. Christine Greig blasted Snyder.

"With a flick of his lame-duck pen, Gov. Snyder chose to rob the people of Michigan of the strong paycheck and good benefits they deserve," she said in a statement. "It is shameful that this governor, who is just counting down the days to the end of his tenure, would use this opportunity to hurt the people of Michigan one last time."

Eggert reported from Lansing, Michigan.

Michael Cohen claims Trump knew hush money payments wrong

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Shaken and facing a prison term, President Donald Trump's longtime personal lawyer said Friday that Trump directed him to buy the silence of two women during the 2016 campaign because he was concerned their stories of alleged affairs with him "would affect the election." He says Trump knew the payments were wrong.

Michael Cohen — who for more than a decade was a key power player in the Trump Organization and a fixture in Trump's political life — said he "gave loyalty to someone who, truthfully, does not deserve loyalty." Cohen spoke in an interview with ABC that aired Friday on "Good Morning America."

Cohen said that "of course" Trump knew it was wrong to make the hush-money payments, but he did not provide any specific evidence or detail in the interview. Federal law requires that any payments made "for the purposes of influencing" an election must be reported in campaign finance disclosures.

Speaking to ABC's George Stephanopoulos, Cohen appeared shaken over the series of events that swiftly took him from Trump's "fixer" to a man facing three years in prison.

"I am done with the lying," Cohen said. "I am done being loyal to President Trump."

He added: "I will not be the villain of this story."

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Cohen was sentenced on Wednesday to three years in federal prison after pleading guilty to several charges, including campaign finance violations and lying to Congress. Prosecutors have said Trump directed Cohen to arrange the payments to buy the silence of porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal in the run-up to the 2016 campaign.

The decisions to pay off Daniels, who alleged she had sex with a married Trump in 2006, during the run-up to the 2016 election was made soon after an old "Access Hollywood" tape surfaced, in which Trump was heard talking about groping and trying to have sex with women, Cohen said.

"He was very concerned about how this would affect the election," Cohen said.

The hush money wasn't initially reported on campaign finance documents and, in any case, far exceeded the legally acceptable amount for in-kind contributions. The federal limit on individual contributions is \$2,700.

As to whether Trump knew it was wrong to make the payments, Cohen said, "First of all, nothing at the Trump organization was ever done unless it was run through Mr. Trump. He directed me to make the payments, he directed me to become involved in these matters."

Trump has denied directing Cohen to break the law and has asserted in a barrage of tweets over the last several weeks that Cohen is a "liar" who cut a deal in order to get a reduced prison sentence and to help himself and his family.

Loyalty has long been a core value for Trump, who has been stung by the behavior of Cohen and other former associates who have dissociated themselves from the president, intent on saving themselves. That list also includes former White House staffer Omarosa Manigault Newman and former National Security adviser Michael Flynn.

"He knows the truth. I know the truth. Others know the truth," Cohen said. "And here is the truth: People of the United States of America, people of the world, don't believe what he is saying. The man doesn't tell the truth. And it is sad that I should take responsibility for his dirty deeds."

"Instead of him taking responsibility for his actions, what does he do? He attacks my family," Cohen said.

White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said Friday that reporters were "giving credence to a convicted criminal."

When asked specifically about Cohen's claims that Trump had directed Cohen to make the payments, Gidley said: "I understand that. He's a self-admitted liar. You guys all know that and for him to say, 'I'm going to start — I'm going to stop lying starting now,' is somewhat silly."

Cohen insists that Trump is a different person now than when he was running his real estate empire in New York and said he believes the pressure of being the president of the United States is "much more than he thought it was going to be."

Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, was paid \$130,000 as part of a nondisclosure agreement that was signed days before the 2016 election and she's currently suing to dissolve that contract.

In August 2016, the parent company of the tabloid National Enquirer reached a \$150,000 deal to pay McDougal for her story of a 2006 affair, which it never published, a tabloid practice known as catch and kill.

Cohen insisted he just reviewed the McDougal deal and said the payment was negotiated directly between Trump and David Pecker, the chief executive officer of the tabloid's parent company.

Both Cohen and American Media Inc. now say they made hush-money payments were to help Trump's 2016 White House bid. The U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan reached a non-prosecution agreement with the company.

In a separate case, Cohen pleaded guilty to lying to Congress about his work on a possible Trump real estate project in Moscow and said he did so to be consistent with Trump's "political messaging."

The charges in that case were brought by special counsel Robert Mueller's office and Mueller's prosecutors have said Cohen has provided key information in their investigation. Cohen has said he is continuing to cooperate with investigators in the Russia probe, which the president has repeatedly called a "witch hunt."

Associated Press writer Catherine Lucey contributed to this report.

Death of 7-year-old on border raises questions

By COLLEEN LONG and ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just 7 years old, Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin was picked up by U.S. authorities with her father and other migrants this month in a remote stretch of New Mexico desert. Some seven hours later, she was put on a bus to the nearest Border Patrol station but soon began vomiting. By the end of the two-hour drive, she had stopped breathing.

Jakelin hadn't had anything to eat or drink for days, her father later told U.S. officials.

The death of the Guatemalan girl is the latest demonstration of the desperation of a growing number of Central American families and children showing up at the U.S.-Mexico border, often hoping to claim asylum, and it raises new questions about how well authorities are prepared.

Customs and Border Protection said Friday that the girl initially appeared healthy and that an interview raised no signs of trouble. Authorities said her father spoke in Spanish to Border agents and signed a form indicating she was in good health, though a Guatemalan official said late Friday that the family's native language was a Mayan dialect.

CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan said agents "did everything in their power" to save her.

The episode drew immediate questions from members of Congress and others about whether more could have been done. There were only four agents working with a group of 163 migrants, including 50 unaccompanied children, and only one bus to take them to the nearest station 94 miles away. The protocols the agents followed failed to alert them to any signs of distress until it was too late.

"A 7-year-old girl should not be dying of dehydration and shock in Customs and Border Protection custody," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer tweeted.

The Rev. John L. McCullough, president of Church World Service, said her death was a result of "the administration's immoral war on immigrants." He declared, "People don't walk thousands of miles unless they are desperate for freedom at the end of their journey."

The Homeland Security Department's inspector general opened an investigation, and congressional leaders promised one as well.

The girl and her father, 29-year-old Nery Gilberto Caal Cuz, were arrested with the large group near the Antelope Wells border crossing at about 9:15 p.m. Dec. 6. The rugged, mountainous area is home to ghost towns and abandoned buildings from Old West homesteader days. It's an unforgiving terrain where Geronimo made his last stand and remains largely isolated with no cell service and few unpaved roads. The sparsely used official port of entry is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The group was held at one of 17 "forward operating bases" in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas — spartan facilities built in recent years to increase official U.S. presence in extremely remote areas. Agents live there on weeklong assignments because driving back and forth every day from their stations would consume enormous amounts of time.

Jakelin and her father were held in the facility with food and water but no medical aid.

CBP officials say the drive from Antelope Wells to the nearest Border Patrol station in Lordsburg can take hours.

With the migrants, the agents went over an intake form that reads: "Receiving screening will be performed by professional or paraprofessional personnel trained to recognize the state of conscious, quality of gross motor function, fever or other signs of illness upon arrival at the facility."

According to the form, the girl showed no sign of illness. She was not sweating, had no tremors, jaundice or visible trauma and was mentally alert.

"Claims good health," the form reads. Jakelin's father appeared to have signed the form, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

The final question is whether she should be in a general population, referred for non-emergency medical care or referred for emergency medical care. The "general population" box is checked.

Arresting such large groups poses logistical problems for agents, who have to wait on transport vans that are equipped with baby seats to take the migrants to processing facilities, some which are far from

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the border.

There is a single bus that transports migrants to and from this area to the base in Lordsburg, and, following protocol, the other minors filled the first bus while the daughter and her father waited.

It's not clear whether Jakelin ate or drank anything while in custody.

The father and daughter did not board the bus until 4:30 a.m. She began vomiting at 5. The bus continued — there was no way to receive medical care where they were, officials said — and radioed ahead to have emergency medical technicians available when they arrived in Lordsburg. By the time they arrived, at 6:30, she had stopped breathing.

Emergency crews revived her, and she was airlifted to an El Paso, Texas, hospital, while the father was driven there. The girl died at about 12:30 a.m. Dec. 8. Officials said she had swelling on her brain and liver failure. An autopsy was scheduled to determine the cause of death. The results could take weeks.

CBP said Friday it didn't immediately publicize the death out of respect for the family but is reviewing its disclosure practices. Commissioner McAleenan didn't mention the girl's death when he was questioned by senators this week on border issues.

"The agents involved are deeply affected and empathize with the father over the loss of his daughter," McAleenan said Friday. "We cannot stress enough the dangers posed by traveling long distances, in crowded transportation, or in the natural elements through remote desert areas without food, water and other supplies."

White House spokesman Hogan Gidley described Jakelin's death as "a horrific, tragic situation" and called for "commonsense laws to disincentivize people from coming up from the border," crossing illegally.

Guatemalan consular officials said they had spoken with the father who was deeply upset. Tekandi Paniagua, the Guatemalan consul in Del Rio, Texas, told Univision said the family's native language was K'iche', a Mayan dialect spoken in the country's highlands.

The girl's father is at Annunciation House, an immigrant shelter in El Paso, said director Ruben Garcia. Garcia said the dad isn't speaking with reporters but now has an attorney. The group planned a press briefing for Saturday but Garcia said the father would not be present.

Arrests in the U.S. have surged since summer, with many prospective migrants coming from the highlands, where Mayan dialects flourish.

In many ways, the group of 163 migrants that included the girl offers a snapshot of how dramatically the border has changed in recent years. In November, there were 51,001 arrests of people entering the country illegally from Mexico — the highest of Donald Trump's presidency — and more than half were traveling as families or unaccompanied children.

It was unclear if any in the group expressed fear of returning home, but families and children increasingly seek out agents to pursue asylum or other humanitarian protection, avoiding an often life-threatening effort to elude capture in remote areas.

The Trump administration has made curbing illegal immigration a signature issue — and some advocates say its policies are prompting more people to cross in perilous ways. Immigration officials say their system is strained and not equipped to handle such a high volume of families who can't be easily returned, but there is resistance to suggestions to change facilities to better accommodate families. The government notes there are many other border missions, including trade, commerce and counterterrorism efforts.

Spagat reported from San Diego. Associated Press Writers Astrid Galvan in Phoenix, and Sonia Perez D. in Guatemala City, and Russell Contreras in Albuquerque, New Mexico contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to change the spelling of the girl's name per government officials.

Mueller says FBI not to blame for Flynn's false statements

By ERIC TUCKER and CHAD DAY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The special counsel's office is pushing back at the suggestion that the FBI acted improperly in its interview of former national security adviser Michael Flynn, saying he "chose to make false statements" and did not need a warning that it was against the law to do so.

The filing from special counsel Robert Mueller Friday comes four days before Flynn gets sentenced on a charge of lying to the FBI about his conversations with the then-Russian ambassador to the United States. It responds to a sentencing memorandum filed earlier this week by Flynn's lawyers that suggested there were irregularities in how he was interviewed.

The back-and-forth between prosecutors and defense lawyers has created an unusual rupture in an otherwise harmonious relationship as prosecutors had praised Flynn as a model cooperator and recommended that he receive no prison time at his sentencing.

The disagreement is unlikely to affect Flynn's chances for probation, but it's attracted the attention of President Donald Trump, who said this week that Flynn did not lie despite having fired him nearly two years ago for just that reason. The matter may also become a point of debate at next Tuesday's hearing, especially since the judge, Emmet Sullivan, has asked prosecutors to produce documents related to Flynn's interview.

They did so Friday as they said "nothing about the way the interview the way was arranged or conducted caused the defendant to make false statements to the FBI."

Prosecutors said Flynn had committed to a false story weeks before the Jan. 24, 2017, interview with the FBI, having lied several times already to White House officials about his dialogue with ambassador Sergey Kislyak and then repeating those falsehoods to federal agents.

Trump ousted him weeks after the FBI interview. White House officials said he had misled Vice President Mike Pence and others about his discussions on sanctions with Kislyak.

Prosecutors said Friday that Flynn voluntarily agreed to meet with the FBI without a lawyer present and had enough experience in government to understand the consequences of lying and "the importance of accurate information to decision making in areas of national security."

"A sitting National Security Advisor, former head of an intelligence agency, retired Lieutenant General, and 33-year veteran of the armed forces knows he should not lie to federal agents," Mueller's prosecutors wrote. "He does not need to be warned it is a crime to lie to federal agents to know the importance of telling them the truth."

Flynn's lawyers had earlier cast doubt on the process by saying the agents who questioned Flynn never told him it was against the law to lie. They also suggested that then-Deputy Director Andrew McCabe appeared to discourage Flynn from having a lawyer present by saying the Justice Department would have to be involved if the national security adviser wanted an attorney.

Though Flynn's supporters have seized on the fact that the FBI agents who questioned him did not detect signs of deception during the interview, prosecutors say that doesn't change the fact "that he was indeed lying, and knowingly made false statements to FBI agents in a national security investigation."

Mueller's office also released redacted memos and interviews of two FBI officials involved in the interview process - McCabe and former counterintelligence agent Peter Strzok. The notes paint a portrait of a strikingly relaxed and informal conversation, with Strzok in his interview noting how he had walked past Trump and some movers discussing where to place artwork in the White House.

"Flynn was so talkative, and had so much time for them, that Strzok wondered if the National Security Adviser did not have more important things to do than have such a relaxed, non-pertinent discussion with them," according to notes from the interview.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Read the filing: <http://apne.ws/wSdTI8n>

Budget head Mulvaney picked as Trump's next chief of staff

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, JILL COLVIN and CATHERINE LUCEY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has picked budget director Mick Mulvaney to be his acting chief of staff, ending a chaotic search in which several top contenders took themselves out of the running for the job.

"Mick has done an outstanding job while in the Administration," Trump tweeted Friday. "I look forward to working with him in this new capacity as we continue to MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!"

Trump added that his current chief of staff, John Kelly, will be staying until the end of the year. "He is a GREAT PATRIOT and I want to personally thank him for his service!" Trump wrote.

Trump's first pick for the job, Vice President Mike Pence's chief of staff Nick Ayers, took himself out of the running last weekend and decided to leave the White House instead. The decision caught the president and many senior staffers by surprise, and Trump soon found that others he considered front-runners were not interested in the job.

It was not immediately clear why the president decided to make Mulvaney's appointment temporary. One senior White House official said there was no time limit on the appointment and Mulvaney would fill the role of chief of staff indefinitely, regardless of the "acting" title.

Key to his selection: Mulvaney and the president get along and the president likes him personally. Additionally, Trump prized the former congressman's knowledge of Capitol Hill and political instincts as the White House prepares for a Democratic-controlled House and the president's upcoming re-election campaign.

The decision came suddenly. Trump had grown frustrated with the length of the search and the growing perception that no one of stature wanted the job, according to one person familiar with his thinking.

Mulvaney received the news before the president tweeted his announcement. They spoke face to face Friday afternoon at a meeting that was supposed to be about the budget and spoke by phone later in the evening, according to a second White House official. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the personnel matter on the record.

"This is a tremendous honor," Mulvaney tweeted. "I look forward to working with the President and the entire team. It's going to be a great 2019!"

Mulvaney, who will be Trump's third chief of staff, will now take on his third job in the administration. He is head of the Office of Management and Budget, and for a time simultaneously led the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The White House originally said Russell Vought, Mulvaney's deputy, would be taking over at OMB. But press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Friday night that Mulvaney will not resign that job even though he "will spend all of his time devoted to his role as the acting Chief Of Staff for the President."

Sanders said Vought "will handle day to day operations and run OMB."

Mulvaney had signaled in recent weeks that he wasn't interested in being chief of staff, with a person close to him telling reporters that he'd made clear that he would be more interested in taking over as secretary of the Treasury or Commerce. But the White House officials disputed reports that captured that sentiment, and said the president didn't need to change Mulvaney's mind.

A former tea party congressman, Mulvaney was among a faction on the hard right that pushed GOP leaders into a 2013 government shutdown confrontation by insisting on lacing a must-pass spending bill with provisions designed to cripple President Barack Obama's signature health care law.

Trump's pick generated little immediate reaction on Capitol Hill, where most of Mulvaney's allies are part of the conservative House Freedom Caucus. But his knowledge of Congress and how government works is likely to be an asset in the coming months.

The appointment of the affable, fast-talking South Carolinian came just hours after another candidate for the post, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, took himself out of contention. Christie cited family reasons in a statement saying he was asking Trump to remove him from consideration. He had met with Trump on Thursday to discuss the job, according to a person familiar with the meeting who was not authorized to discuss it publicly.

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Ayers, who had cited family concerns as a reason he didn't accept the post, tweeted Friday: "The right father of triplets got the job...Congratulations @MickMulvaneyOMB!" Both men are, coincidentally, fathers of triplets.

Trump's first chief of staff, Reince Priebus, served for six months before leaving in July 2017. Trump tweeted his choice of Kelly to replace him before he formally offered the retired four-star Marine general the job.

For some months, Kelly had success streamlining the decision-making process in the West Wing and curtailing access to the undisciplined president. But Trump grew weary of the restrictions and Kelly's influence waned as the two men frequently clashed.

As the search dragged on after Ayers bowed out, with no backup at the ready, the void had been filled with Trump's specialty: drama.

British journalist Piers Morgan suggested he would be a good fit in an op-ed for The Daily Mail, while former major league slugger Jose Canseco tweeted his interest to Trump. Speculation swirled around an array of Trump associates, prompting some to distance themselves from the job.

When former House Speaker Newt Gingrich visited the White House this week, he insisted it was merely to see the Christmas decorations.

The wild process was hardly a novelty for the Trump administration, which has struggled with high staff turnover and attracting top talent, but it underscored the tumult of Trump's Washington. In past administrations, chief of staff was a sought-after job, typically awarded after a careful process. Now, many view the job as a risky proposition, given Trump's propensity for disorder and his resistance to being managed.

Author Chris Whipple, an expert on chiefs of staff, had called the search process "sad to watch."

"In his first two years, Trump devalued the position by failing to empower anyone to perform the job, and now he's turned the search for a replacement into a reality show," said Whipple, author of "The Gatekeepers," a book on the subject. "The only thing more broken and dysfunctional than the White House itself seems to be the search for the new White House chief of staff."

Trump on Friday disputed that notion.

"For the record, there were MANY people who wanted to be the White House Chief of Staff. Mick M will do a GREAT job!" he tweeted.

Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Salt Lake City gets go-ahead to bid for Winter Olympics

By **EDDIE PELLIS** and **BRADY McCOMBS**, Associated Press

Salt Lake City got the green light to bid for the Winter Olympics — most likely for 2030 — in an attempt to bring the Games back to the city that hosted in 2002 and provided the backdrop for the U.S. winter team's ascendance into an international powerhouse.

The U.S. Olympic Committee said Friday it was selecting Utah's capital, which stood out as a predictable, slam-dunk pick in a process that also included Denver and Reno, Nevada.

With venues still in place — some of them upgraded — from the 2002 Games, Salt Lake claims it can host again at a lower cost than other candidates, which aligns with the International Olympic Committee's new blueprint for the Games.

It's almost a certain bet the bid will be for 2030, though the USOC left open the possibility of other dates. There are only two bidders for 2026: from Sweden and Italy, after voters in Calgary, Alberta, rejected a proposed bid.

USOC CEO Sarah Hirshland said Denver and Salt Lake City both presented strong cases, but that the board determined Utah was the better choice due in part to the existing venues, their proximity to each other, the city's experience hosting the games and widespread community and political support. She said it minimizes the risk.

"It is critical to ensure that we have the ability to create an incredible experience for athletes while at the

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same time managing sustainability and fiscal responsibility," Hirshland said. "It was clear to us when we were there and in what they presented that Salt Lake City very much understands the practical realities of hosting a Games, but also wants and supports what they represent."

The city's selection set off celebration at the mayor's office where local leaders who worked on the plan gathered. Since 2012, Utah has said it's ready and willing to host another Olympics.

One key hurdle for Salt Lake City will be erasing memories of the bidding scandal that marred the buildup to 2002 and resulted in several IOC members losing their positions for taking bribes.

Mitt Romney was brought in to steer the games through the scandal. The newly elected U.S. Senator for Utah told The Associated Press after the announcement that a series of processes put in place by the IOC will ensure no bribery scandal happens again.

Romney said Salt Lake City should have a great chance at winning the bid from the IOC because it has shown it can host the games without losing money. Salt Lake City ended up with a surplus after the 2002 Games, money he used to help maintain venues it will use again if it's awarded the Olympics.

"We learned how to produce the Games for the same cost as the revenue that came in," Romney said. "We will not put a glitzy show like Sochi or Beijing, that are reported to have cost as much \$50 billion. We will show the world that you can produce an Olympics without having the government writing the checks."

In many parts of the United States, however, the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City are remembered not for the bribery scandal but for a different reason.

After never surpassing 13 medals at a Winter Games, the U.S. used home-turf advantage, an influx of new sports and the emotion of the recent Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks to capture 34 over three weeks in Utah.

In the aftermath, Park City and other mountain towns near Salt Lake City preserved and improved upon many of the venues, and continued hosting key international events. The freestyle world championships will be held in Park City in February.

Utah organizers say they could host the games for \$1.35 billion, some \$50 billion less than it cost in Russia for the 2014 Sochi Games, which are the most expensive games ever and stood out as a blaring warning signal that the IOC needed to streamline its bloated Olympic structure.

The exorbitant costs have changed the dynamic of Olympic bidding. In 2002, cities were trying to bribe IOC officials to award them the Olympics. These days, the IOC finds itself wanting for bidders.

The IOC normally awards Olympics seven years before they're scheduled, though that calendar has been in flux because so many cities have dropped out.

Last year, the IOC handed out the 2024 and 2028 Summer Games at the same time because there were only two cities left in what began as a much bigger contest for 2024. Paris will host 2024, Los Angeles will host 2028, and if Salt Lake wins 2030, it would mark the first time since the IOC began staggering the Games two years apart, in 1994, that the same country has hosted back-to-back.

At this time, Salt Lake could be considered a favorite in a 2030 contest that hasn't really taken shape yet. Hirshland said the USOC has the luxury of time to refine Salt Lake City's bid.

In fact, Salt Lake could still be a favorite for 2026 had it been allowed to go that route. Recently, voters in Calgary rejected that city's attempt to host, leaving Stockholm and a joint bid from Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy as the only two remaining candidates. A bid from Utah was considered, but putting it in front of the Los Angeles Olympics provided too many hurdles on the marketing side.

Rob Cohen, chair of Denver's Olympic bid committee, called it disappointing that Colorado lost out on the chance to bid but said the process prepared the city as it looks for other chances to showcase the city on the world stage.

Scandal-plagued CBS grants \$20M to 18 women's rights groups

By ALEXANDRA OLSON, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — CBS on Friday pledged to give \$20 million to 18 organizations dedicated to eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace as the network tries to recover from a scandal that led to the ouster of its top executive, Les Moonves.

The announcement comes as the network's crisis deepens, with details emerging from an ongoing investigation into Moonves' conduct and news surfacing of other instances of sexual misconduct at CBS.

In the latest revelation, CBS acknowledged that it reached a \$9.5 million confidential settlement last year with actress Eliza Dushku, who said she was written off the show "Bull" in March 2017 after complaining about on-set sexual comments from its star, Michael Weatherly. Some women's rights activists called on CBS to fire Weatherly.

The funds for the grants to the 18 organizations are being deducted from severance owed to Moonves under his contract, and the company had previously said the former CEO would have a say in which groups would receive the money.

But whether Moonves, who was one of the television industry's most powerful executives, receives the remaining \$120 million of his severance hinges on the investigation, which is being conducted by two outside law firms. The company has said Moonves would not be entitled to the severance if its board of directors determines he was fired for cause.

CBS said its donation to the 18 groups will go toward helping expand their work and "ties into the company's ongoing commitment to strengthening its own workplace culture."

Among the recipients are Catalyst, a 56-year-old organization dedicated to empowering women in the workplace, and several groups that have emerged as prominent voices since the downfall last year of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, which triggered an avalanche of sexual misconduct allegations against powerful men across several industries.

The 18 organizations issued a joint statement praising the donations as a first step while calling on CBS to disclose the results of the Moonves investigation and the company's efforts to rectify practices that may have enabled misconduct.

"We thank CBS for these donations. We also recognize these funds are not a panacea, nor do they erase or absolve decades of bad behavior," the groups said.

Moonves was ousted in September after the New Yorker published allegations from 12 women who said he subjected them to mistreatment that included forced oral sex, groping and retaliation if they resisted. Moonves has denied having any non-consensual sexual relationships.

Two other major figures at CBS have lost their jobs in the past year over misconduct allegations: "60 Minutes" top executive Jeff Fager, and news anchor Charlie Rose.

The New York Women's Foundation said it is receiving \$2.25 million from CBS to support its "Fund for the Me Too Movement and Allies," which is co-led by #MeToo founder Tarana Burke. The fund invests in community organizations nationwide dedicated to fighting sexual violence and harassment.

Ana Oliveira, the foundation's president and CEO, said the donation will help give survivors of sexual misconduct a voice in developing solutions. But she urged CBS to do the same within its own organization.

"Those who have lived through the issues have some of the best solutions. This is not a conversation about the perpetrators. CBS needs to do its own work there," Oliveira said.

Other grant recipients include Time's Up, a Hollywood-based group promoting gender equity in the workplace, and Press Forward, an organization of women dedicated to fighting sexual harassment in the news industry.

Time's Up Entertainment said it will use its \$500,000 from CBS to launch an initiative to increase the presence of people of color and of different social backgrounds in the entertainment industry's producing and executive ranks.

Carolyn McGourty Supple, co-founder of Press Forward, said the new funding would accelerate her group's programs, which include a partnership with the Poynter Institute to develop innovative sexual-harassment

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training and a study on the state of women in America's newsrooms.

She said Press Forward has been "very encouraged" by the willingness of CBS News' leadership "to engage with us."

"We have faith that we will work side by side to make sure our newsrooms are places where journalists do their best work," McGourty Supple said.

The entertainment business of CBS, however, is facing new outcry over the revelations about "Bull" star Weatherly, which were first reported by The New York Times.

Shaunna Thomas, executive director of the women's rights organization UltraViolet, said CBS tried to sweep "his abuse under the rug" and "must immediately move to fire Michael Weatherly."

Melissa Silverstein, founder of the "Women and Hollywood" initiative, tweeted that she was "still wondering why" Weatherly has a job.

Neither UltraViolet nor Silverstein's group received funds from CBS.

Weatherly, who appeared on the CBS series "NCIS" for 13 years before "Bull" began in 2016, said in an email to the Times that he had apologized to Dushku after she confronted him. Weatherly's manager, Doug Wald, has not responded to Associated Press requests for additional comment.

In a September interview with the AP, Weatherly said his long history with CBS made it difficult to comment on the Moonves scandal.

"Not to get into any of the ifs, ands or buts about what is right or wrong and where it comes from," Weatherly said then. "Professionally I owe a great part of my career to the decision-making of the higher-ups at the company. It's a complicated place to be."

Serbia talks up armed intervention as Kosovo OKs new army

By FLORENT BAJRAMI and LLAZAR SEMINI, Associated Press

PRISTINA, Kosovo (AP) — Serbia threatened a possible armed intervention in Kosovo after the Kosovo parliament on Friday overwhelmingly approved the formation of an army. Belgrade called the move a "direct threat to peace and stability" in the Balkans and lashed out at the United States for supporting it.

While NATO's chief called the action by Kosovo "ill-timed," the U.S. approved it as "Kosovo's sovereign right" as an independent nation that unilaterally broke away from Serbia in 2008.

All 107 lawmakers present in the 120-seat Kosovo parliament voted in favor of passing three draft laws to expand an existing 4,000 Kosovo Security Force and turn it into a regular, lightly armed army. Ethnic Serb lawmakers boycotted the vote.

Serbia insists the new army violates a U.N. resolution that ended Serbia's bloody crackdown on Kosovar separatists in 1998-1999. It has warned bluntly that it may respond with an armed intervention in its former province, with Prime Minister Ana Brnabic saying that's "one of the options on the table."

On Friday, Nikola Selakovic, an adviser to the Serbian president, said the country could send in armed forces or declare Kosovo an occupied territory. Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said Serbia will seek an urgent session of the U.N. Security Council over the issue.

The Security Council held closed consultations late Friday on the format of a meeting, possibly on Monday or Tuesday. Council diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity because talks were private, said Russia, a close ally of Serbia, wants an open meeting to be addressed by Serbia's president while European nations want a closed session.

The decision will be made by Ivory Coast's U.N. ambassador, the current council president, the diplomats said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres affirmed the U.N.'s desire to maintain the Kosovo Force as the body that ensures the safety of Kosovo, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said late Friday.

He said "the secretary-general calls on all parties concerned to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could raise tensions and cause a further setback in the European Union-facilitated dialogue for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina."

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic visited Serbian troops near the border with Kosovo and later Vucic

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addressed the nation, denouncing the United States for its apparent support of a Kosovo army and praising allies Russia and China for their opposition to the move.

He said that Kosovo and its "sponsor" — the U.S. — want to "quash" the Serbs, but that he won't allow it. Vucic says Serbia has been "brought to the edge" by Kosovo's decision and now has no choice but to "defend" itself. It was one of the strongest anti-American outbursts by Vucic, a former pro-Russian ultra-nationalist turned alleged pro-EU reformer.

Any Serbian armed intervention in Kosovo would mean a direct confrontation with thousands of NATO-led peacekeepers, including U.S. soldiers, who have been stationed in Kosovo since 1999.

Russia denounced the move to form a Kosovo army, saying the ethnic Albanian force must be "disbanded" by NATO in Kosovo.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, a move not recognized by Belgrade or Russia. Tensions have remained high between the two sides, and NATO and the European Union — which has led yearslong talks to improve ties between the Balkan neighbors — expressed regret that Kosovo decided to go ahead with the army formation.

"I reiterate my call on both Pristina and Belgrade to remain calm and refrain from any statements or actions which may lead to escalation," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

He said the alliance remains committed "to a safe and secure environment in Kosovo and to stability in the wider Western Balkans." He said they will "re-examine the level of NATO's engagement with the Kosovo Security Force."

The new army will preserve its current name — Kosovo Security Force — but now has a new mandate. In about a decade the army expects to have 5,000 troops and 3,000 reservists, and a 98 million-euro (\$111 million) annual budget. It will handle crisis response and civil protection operations — essentially what the current paramilitary force, which is lightly armed, does. Its main tasks would be search and rescue, explosive ordnance disposal, firefighting and hazardous material disposal.

It's not immediately clear how much more equipment or weapons the new army will have or need compared with the current force.

Seeking to reassure Serbia and the international community, Kosovo's Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said the new army "will never be used against them (Serbs)."

He added: "Serbia's army will now have a partner — Kosovo's army — in the partnership for peace process."

Serbia fears the move's main purpose is to chase the Serb minority out of Kosovo's Serbian-dominated north, a claim strongly denied by the government in Pristina.

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said that the new army will be "multiethnic, professional and will serve all citizens, peace in Kosovo, the region and wherever in the world, when asked."

He called on a return to dialogue for normalizing ties with Serbia.

The United States hailed Kosovo's parliament vote to form a new army as a first step and reaffirmed "its support for the gradual transition ... to a force with a territorial defense mandate, as is Kosovo's sovereign right."

A U.S. embassy statement in Pristina urged Kosovo to continue "close coordination with NATO allies and partners and to engage in outreach to minority communities."

"Regional stability requires that Kosovo make genuine efforts to normalize relations with its neighbor Serbia, and we encourage both sides to take immediate steps to lower tensions and create conditions for rapid progress on the dialogue," it said.

In a sign of defiance, Serbs in northern Kosovo displayed Serbian flags on their streets and balconies. NATO-led peacekeepers deployed on a bridge in the ethnically divided northern town of Mitrovica to keep the peace.

Kosovo's 1998-1999 war ended with a 78-day NATO air campaign in June 1999 that stopped a bloody Serbian crackdown against ethnic Albanian separatists.

Semini reported from Tirana, Albania. Dusan Stojanovic and Jovana Gec in Belgrade, Serbia, and Edith

M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

Follow L Lazar Semini on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/lsemini>

Priest takes pope's mandate - good deeds for all - across US

By JOHN ROGERS, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Father Jim Sichko has a 50-state congregation and a simple mandate from the pope: Go forth and do good deeds.

That's why the Roman Catholic priest found himself standing by the drive-thru of a popular Hollywood fast-food joint on a recent windy, rain-swept afternoon buying lunch for everyone who stopped by. The next day he'd be at a gas station in Kentucky, topping off people's tanks. Then it would be on to Arizona where he would — well, he wasn't quite sure what he'd do there, but he'd think of something.

At a Starbucks last Christmas, he tipped each of the baristas \$100 after learning the annual brouhaha over whether the coffee chain's holiday cups are Christmassy enough had caused tips to plummet.

Sichko is a papal missionary of mercy, a rarified group of 700 from around the world, including 100 from the United States, who were appointed directly by Pope Francis in celebration of a "Jubilee of Mercy" that began in December 2015 and has since been extended indefinitely.

Missionaries were assigned to travel the world spreading kindness, forgiveness, joy and mercy to everyone they encountered. Some responded by using their newly granted authority from the pope to perform confession and forgiveness of sins basically anywhere at any time. Others took to radio airwaves or retreats to offer messages of joy.

Sichko, a Kentucky-based preacher, came up with an idea different from the others and got his bishop at the Diocese of Lexington to sign off on it: He'd travel his country performing random acts of kindness in all 50 states.

He's provided groceries for half a year to a man with HIV and paid for medical services for a struggling Muslim family. This Christmas, he's headed to an elementary school in Corbin, Kentucky, where more than a quarter of the population lives in poverty. There he'll surprise the school's 100 second-graders with shiny new bicycles.

"The first question people ask is, 'Why are you doing this?'" Sichko says between bites of his double-double cheeseburger at the crowded In N' Out restaurant down the street from the Hollywood Walk of Fame where he'd just bought lunch for everybody.

"My question," the balding, bespectacled 51-year-old cleric adds with a smile, "is why not?"

"My approach is not so much speaking about the word of God, although I do a lot of that, but showing the presence of God through acts of kindness that kind of shock the individual and kind of cause them to, maybe cause them to stop for a little bit," he said. "Or maybe, which I hope, to again bring kindness to others."

He is candid in saying the church itself has much work to do in restoring its image after years of priestly sex and pedophilia scandals that he calls "horrific and tragic and disgusting."

"We have a lot of atonement to be doing," he says, adding that shocking people with random acts of kindness can be a first step in that direction.

To say he shocked his lunchtime In N' Out crowd would be a bit of an understatement.

One woman, overlooking his white clerical collar, asked Sichko if he was a politician.

"No, I'm not a politician. I'm a priest," he replied, nearly doubling over with laughter.

"How did this happen," a stunned Hardy Patel asked.

"Just decided. I'm in a good mood."

"Early Christmas?"

"You got it. Pay it forward."

"I will do, I will do," Patel told him before driving off with his cheeseburger, then circling back to thank Sichko and take a selfie with him.

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"Here's my selfie with the pope," Sichko told Luis Tostado a few minutes earlier as they posed for one by Tostado's Chevy Silverado.

Sichko's selfie shows him standing next to Francis as the pontiff cradles a bottle of 23-year-old Pappy Van Winkle Kentucky bourbon the priest gave him during a visit to the Vatican. He isn't sure if the pope is a bourbon man, but if not, the smile on Francis' face indicates he does have a sense of humor.

Sichko says he still doesn't know why the pontiff, who had never met him until 2015, chose him as a papal missionary of mercy. Ordained 20 years ago — "I always wanted to become a priest, ever since I was a little kid" — he was the pastor at St. Mark Catholic Church in Richmond, Kentucky, when he got the call.

Now he spends five days a week on the road paying for burgers and bicycles and handing out hundred-dollar bills, like the one he slipped 17-year-old Nicholas Vadi when he learned the teenager and his mom were celebrating Vadi's birthday at the fast-food restaurant.

"I raise my own salary, living expense, insurance, everything," Sichko says, adding he sends out "appeal letters" twice a year to parishioners and raises the rest from paid inspirational speaking engagements.

"And then I give it away," he says, laughing.

Recently he's started marketing "Miss Marie's All Natural Spaghetti Sauce" online and hopes to get it into stores shortly. But even the money from that goes to help others. It's divided among a Texas hospice that cared for his late mother, for which the sauce is named, and a church program to benefit the poor in Appalachia.

It was his mother and her sauce, Sichko says, that likely ingrained in him the desire to help others. Every Tuesday she'd whip up a batch and serve it over pasta for lunch to the hungry garbage collectors who worked the route in their neighborhood.

Now he's using it to keep her memory alive and to help spread the Gospel to Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

"This is not just a Catholic thing," he says. "This is a human event."

Stocks plunge to 8-month lows on growth fears; J&J nosedives

By MARLEY JAY, AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks staggered to eight-month lows Friday after weak economic data from China and Europe set off more worries about the global economy. Mounting tensions in Europe over Britain's impending departure from the European Union also darkened traders' moods.

Major U.S. indexes fell about 2 percent and the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped as much as 563 points. On the benchmark S&P 500 index, health care and technology companies absorbed the worst losses.

Johnson & Johnson plunged by the most in 16 years after Reuters reported that the company has known since the 1970s that its talc Baby Powder sometimes contained carcinogenic asbestos. The company denied the report.

China said industrial output and retail sales both slowed in November. That could be another sign that China's trade dispute with the U.S. and tighter lending conditions are chilling its economy, which is the second-largest in the world. Meanwhile, purchasing managers in Europe signaled that economic growth was slipping.

Sameer Samana, senior global market strategist for Wells Fargo Investment Institute, said investors are concerned that weakness will make it way to the U.S. They're wondering if the U.S. economy is likely to run out of steam sooner than they had thought.

"Market consensus has been that the next recession is probably in 2020 or beyond," he said. Now, he said, the market is "really testing that assumption and trying to figure out whether it's sooner."

Rising interest rates and tighter credit conditions are adding to investors' nervousness because they both tend to slow down economic growth. This week the European Central Bank said it is ending a bond-buying program that has pumped trillions into Europe's economy. The Federal Reserve is expected to increase U.S. rates again on Wednesday, as it's been doing for the last three years. It may also shed light on whether it plans to raise rates further in 2019.

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For more than 20 years, China has been one of the biggest contributors to growth in the global economy, and when investors see signs the Chinese economy is weakening, they expect it will affect other countries like the U.S. that sell things to China.

In Europe, the index of purchase managers fell in France, which is racked by protests, to a level that points toward economic contraction. Germany's reading still pointed to growth, but it fell to its lowest level in four years.

Those reports canceled out some potential good news on trade: the Chinese government announced a 90-day suspension of tariff increases on U.S. cars, trucks and auto imports. It's part of a cease-fire that China and the U.S. announced earlier this month to give them time to work on other issues.

December is typically the best month of the year for stocks as a "Santa Claus rally" often adds to the year's gains. With 10 trading days left this month, however, the S&P 500 is down 5.8 percent. That followed a small gain in November and a steep 6.9 percent drop in October.

The S&P 500 index lost 50.59 points, or 1.9 percent, to 2,599.95, its lowest close since April 2. The Dow retreated 496.87 points, or 2 percent, to 24,100.51. The Dow has fallen 10 percent from its record high in early October, reaching a mark known on Wall Street as a "correction." The other major U.S. indexes were already in "corrections."

The Nasdaq composite slid 159.67 points, or 2.3 percent, to 6,910.66. The Russell 2000 index of smaller-company stocks fell 21.89 points, or 1.5 percent, to 1,410.81.

Johnson & Johnson dropped 10 percent to \$133 in very heavy trading. Its market value fell by \$40 billion.

Reuters reported that court documents and test results show Johnson & Johnson has known for decades that its raw talc and finished Baby Powder sometimes contained asbestos, but that the company didn't inform regulators or the public. The company called the story "false and inflammatory."

In July the company lost a lawsuit from plaintiffs who argued that its products were linked to cases of ovarian cancer and mesothelioma. A St. Louis jury awarded plaintiffs \$4.7 billion. Johnson & Johnson faces thousands of other lawsuits.

Among technology companies, Apple dipped 3.2 percent to \$165.48. Adobe skidded 7.3 percent to \$230 after its fourth-quarter profit disappointed investors and it also forecast lower-than-expected earnings in the current fiscal year. Industrial companies sank as well. Boeing lost 2.1 percent to \$318.75.

Oil prices again turned lower, as a slower global economy would weaken demand for oil and other fuels. Benchmark U.S. crude fell 2.6 percent to \$51.20 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price international oils, dropped 1.9 percent to settle at \$60.28 a barrel in London.

European Union leaders rejected British Prime Minister Theresa May's request to make changes to their deal covering Britain's departure from the EU on March 29. British legislators aren't satisfied with the terms May negotiated, and she canceled a scheduled vote earlier this week because it was clear Parliament wouldn't approve it. Britain's economy and financial markets across Europe face severe disruption without an agreement.

In other trading:

—European bond prices rose and yields fell. Both the British pound and the euro weakened. The pound slipped to \$1.2579 from \$1.2660 and the euro fell to \$1.1303 from \$1.1367.

—Germany's DAX declined 0.5 percent and the CAC 40 in France declined 0.8 percent. Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.5 percent.

—Japan's Nikkei 225 index slid 2 percent and the Kospi in South Korea lost 1.3 percent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng was down 1.6 percent.

—Bond prices edged higher. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note fell to 2.89 percent from 2.90 percent.

—In other commodities trading, wholesale gasoline lost 3 percent to \$1.43 a gallon. Heating oil fell 1.7 percent to \$1.85 a gallon and natural gas dropped 7.2 percent to \$3.83 per 1,000 cubic feet.

—Gold fell 0.5 percent to \$1,241.40 an ounce. Silver dipped 1.5 percent to \$14.64 an ounce. Copper was little changed at \$2.77 a pound.

—The dollar fell to 113.29 yen from 113.60 yen.

Associated Press Writer Josh Boak contributed to this report from Washington.

AP Markets Writer Marley Jay can be reached at <http://twitter.com/MarleyJayAP>

Wisconsin's Walker signs sweeping lame-duck GOP bills

By TODD RICHMOND and SCOTT BAUER, Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker signed a sweeping package of Republican legislation Friday that restricts early voting and weakens the incoming Democratic governor and attorney general, brushing aside complaints that he is enabling a brazen power grab and ignoring the will of voters.

Signing the bills just 24 days before he leaves office, the Republican governor and one-time presidential candidate downplayed bipartisan criticism that they amount to a power grab that will stain his legacy.

Just two hours later, a group run by former Democratic U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced it planned legal action to block the limitation on early voting.

Walker's action Friday came as Michigan's Rick Snyder, another Midwestern GOP governor soon to be replaced by a Democrat, signed legislation in a lame-duck session that significantly scales back minimum wage and paid sick leave laws that began as citizen initiatives. Michigan's Republican legislators also are weighing legislation resembling Wisconsin's that would strip or dilute the authority of incoming elected Democrats.

The push in both states mirrors tactics employed by North Carolina Republicans in 2016.

Speaking for 20 minutes and using charts to make his points, Walker detailed all of the governor's powers, including a strong veto authority, that will not change while defending the measures he signed as improving transparency, stability and accountability.

"There's a lot of hype and hysteria, particularly in the national media, implying this is a power shift. It's not," Walker said before signing the measures during an event at a state office building in Green Bay, about 130 miles (209 kilometers) from his Capitol office that has frequently been a target for protesters.

Walker was urged by Democrats and Republicans, including Democratic Gov.-elect Tony Evers and former Republican Gov. Scott McCallum, to reject the legislation. Walker, who was defeated by Evers for a third term, had earlier said he was considering partial vetoes, but he ultimately did not strike anything.

Evers accused Walker of ignoring and overriding the will of the people by signing the bills into law. He held a five-minute news conference in Madison shortly after the signing to accuse Walker of ignoring the will of the voters.

"People will remember he took a stand that was not reflective of this last election," Evers said. "I will be reviewing our options and do everything we can to make sure the people of this state are not ignored or overlooked."

Evers didn't elaborate and left without taking questions.

Walker, speaking after he signed the bills, brushed aside what he called "high-pitched hysteria" from critics of the legislation. He said his legacy will be the record he left behind that includes all-but eliminating collective bargaining for public workers, not the lame-duck measures.

"We've put in deep roots that have helped the state grow," Walker said. "You want to talk about legacy, to me, that's the legacy."

Holder's group, the National Redistricting Foundation, along with the liberal One Wisconsin Now, promised a swift legal challenge to one provision Walker signed limiting early voting.

Holder, in a statement, called it a "shameful attack on our democracy."

One Wisconsin Now successfully sued in federal court in 2016 to overturn similar early voting and other restrictions enacted by Walker.

The Wisconsin bills focus on numerous Republican priorities, including restricting early in-person voting to two weeks before an election, down from as much as nearly seven weeks in the overwhelmingly Democratic cities of Milwaukee and Madison.

The legislation also shields the state's job-creation agency from Evers' control until September and limits

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his ability to enact administrative rules. The measures also would block Evers from withdrawing Wisconsin from a multistate lawsuit challenging the Affordable Care Act, one of his central campaign promises.

The legislation imposes a work requirement for BadgerCare health insurance recipients, which Walker won federal approval to do earlier this year, and prevents Evers from seeking to undo it.

It eliminates the state Department of Justice's solicitor general's office, which outgoing Republican Attorney General Brad Schimel used to launch contentious partisan litigation. Doing away with it ensures Democratic-Attorney General-elect Josh Kaul can't use the office to challenge Republican-authored laws.

The bills also allow lawmakers to intervene in lawsuits, ensuring Republicans will be able to defend their policies and laws in court if Kaul refuses to do it. Kaul also would need approval from the Legislature's budget-writing committee before he can reach any settlements, further increasing the power of that GOP-controlled panel.

The Republican-controlled Legislature introduced and passed the bills less than five days after unveiling them late on a Friday afternoon two weeks ago. Outraged Democrats accused the GOP of a power grab that undermined the results of the November election. Evers and others have argued Walker will tarnish his legacy by signing the bills, and Kaul has predicted multiple lawsuits challenging the legislation.

Republican legislative leaders countered that they were merely trying to balance the power of the executive and legislative branches. They said they wanted to ensure Evers must negotiate with them rather than issue executive orders to undo their policy achievements.

Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said by signing the bills, Walker was "acknowledging the importance of the Legislature as a co-equal branch of government."

Walker's signing of the bills comes a day after he announced a \$28 million incentive package to keep open a Kimberly-Clark Corp. plant in northeast Wisconsin. One of the lame-duck bills would prevent Evers from making such a deal, instead requiring the Legislature's budget committee to sign off.

Associated Press writer David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan, contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to reflect that One Wisconsin Now was not part of the original early voting lawsuit.

Climate talks extended as island nations demand action

By **FRANK JORDANS** and **MONIKA SCISLOWSKA**, Associated Press

KATOWICE, Poland (AP) — Weary officials from almost 200 countries faced another day of negotiations at the U.N. climate talks to bridge their last remaining differences as small island nations on Friday demanded an ambitious stance against global warming.

The talks in Poland were supposed to end Friday, but Michal Kurtyka, a senior Polish official chairing the negotiations, told delegates to resume talks on a revised draft text at 4 a.m. Saturday (0300 GMT).

The effort was bringing results in the form of preliminary texts for fine tuning, according to Kurtyka's statement late Friday.

"Polish Presidency informs that a preliminary version of the package implementing the Paris Agreement has been worked out. Several days of intensive work has produced results in the form of closing particular areas," the statement said.

The text was being consulted upon with various negotiating groups, the statement said.

After two weeks of talks in the southern Polish city, diplomats were coming closer to agreeing on the rules that govern the 2015 Paris climate accord. These include how countries should transparently report both their greenhouse gases emissions and their efforts to reduce them.

Scientists say global emissions need to drop dramatically by 2030 and reach near-zero by 2050 in order to prevent the potentially catastrophic consequences for life on Earth.

A recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that it's possible to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) higher by the end of the century compared

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to pre-industrial times. That's the lower end of the 1.5-to-2 degrees C (2.7-3.6 degrees F) scale mentioned in the Paris accord.

But this would require a drastic overhaul of the global economy, including ending the use of almost all fossil fuels.

The United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have refused to "welcome" the IPCC report, angering other countries and environmentalists.

Former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed warned that nations such as his, which consider themselves on the front lines of global warming, would veto the current draft because it lacks a clear commitment to the 1.5 C-target.

"If necessary, we will rebel against the negotiations," Nasheed told reporters.

Another issue haunting negotiators is the rules for an international market in carbon credits.

The clash pits emerging economies such as Brazil — which amassed large piles of carbon credits under the 1997 Kyoto treaty's rules — against industrial countries such as those in the European Union, which believe the older credits aren't worth the paper they were printed on.

Economists believe a functioning carbon trading system could be an effective way to drive down emissions and raise large amounts of money for measures to curb global warming.

Alex Hanafi, lead counsel at the New York-based Environmental Defense Fund, said Brazil was trying to weaken the rules in such a way that would allow countries to count their emissions reductions twice, undermining the carbon markets.

"This loophole needs to be closed so zombie credits from the old (Kyoto) Clean Development Mechanism cannot infect the climate integrity of the Paris Agreement," he said.

Brazil's delegation rejected the claim.

"Brazil is currently working with other parties on a bridging proposal," said the country's chief negotiator, Antonio Marcondes.

Aid for poor countries, and whether they could benefit from a levy on the carbon market, is another key issue at the talks.

Poor countries insist they should get financial support not just to lower emissions and adapt to climate change, but also to make up for the global warming damages that have already occurred, largely because of emissions from industrial nations.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday waded into the debate over the costs of tackling climate change, telling Fox News that if he had remained in the Paris climate accord the U.S. "would be paying trillions of dollars, trillions of dollars for nothing, and I wouldn't do that."

Trump announced last year that the U.S. is pulling out of the Paris climate accord unless he can get a better deal — a possibility that others such as the EU and China have dismissed.

Germany's environment minister said the failure to curb climate change would cost the world a lot more than the trillions Trump claims that he's saving.

"If we let entire stretches of this planet become uninhabitable, then it will trigger gigantic costs," Schulze told reporters, adding that developing technology to lower emissions would give Germany a competitive economic advantage.

With climate delegates hoping to clinch a deal on Saturday, they were able to agree on one thing Friday: that next year's climate talks will be held in Chile.

Monika Scislowka contributed to this report.

Read more stories on climate issues by The Associated Press at <https://www.apnews.com/Climate>

Detentions raise fears, cast doubt on China's policies

By PAUL WISEMAN, ROB GILLIES and JOE MCDONALD, The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — By detaining two Canadians in an apparent act of retaliation, China is looking like the country its harshest critics say it is: one unbound by the laws, rules and procedures that govern other major industrial nations.

Canada's arrest of a top Chinese technology executive at the request of the United States has set off a diplomatic furor with Beijing.

And the way the countries have acted in the controversy draws a clear distinction between their political and legal systems — at a time when the United States, Canada and other advanced economies are rethinking the way they do business with China.

Canada gave Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou — daughter of the telecom giant's founder — three days of public hearings before releasing her on bail to the cheers of members of Vancouver's large Chinese community who came to court to show their support.

By contrast, the Chinese secretly detained two Canadians on vague suspicions of "engaging in activities that endanger the national security" of China. Beijing didn't allow Canadian officials to see Michael Kovrig, a former diplomat in China, for four days. And it has yet to allow them access to detained entrepreneur Michael Spavor.

On Friday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke out against the arrests and called on China to release them. "The unlawful detention of two Canadian citizens is unacceptable. They ought to be returned," Pompeo said after meeting with his Canadian counterpart.

"What does this say to Canadians?" David Mulroney, Canada's former ambassador to China, said of China's move. "It says to Canadians that China isn't a country that respects the rule of law. This means that when we engage China, we do it carefully and probably in a limited way."

"They are trying to teach us a lesson, and I don't think we should put up with it," agreed Robert Bothwell, a University of Toronto historian. "Sadly, we have to diminish contact with China."

Bothwell concedes that disengaging with China "obviously has economic implications." Like consumers in the United States and elsewhere, Canadians have come to rely on cheap imports from China — everything from sneakers to electronics.

The Huawei clash comes at a tense time. The United States has slapped tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese exports to punish Beijing for its sharp-elbowed drive to challenge American technological dominance.

The U.S. says China uses predatory tactics, including outright cybertheft and coercing U.S. and other foreign countries into handing over their technology as the price of admission to the Chinese market. China has lashed back with retaliatory tariffs on \$110 billion in U.S. goods.

Over dinner in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping agreed to a 90-day cease-fire in the trade dispute, buying time to resolve their differences.

In a sign of progress, China on Friday announced a 90-day suspension of planned tariff hikes on U.S. cars, trucks and auto parts. And China has resumed buying American soybeans, which had plunged as trade tensions worsened.

The Dec. 1 Trump-Xi meeting came on the same day Canadian officials, acting at the request of the U.S., detained Meng during a layover at the Vancouver airport. Washington wants her extradited to the U.S. to face bank fraud charges. The U.S. accuses Huawei of using a Hong Kong shell company to deceive banks and do business with Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions.

On Monday, China took the two Canadians into custody.

"They're innocent. She's probably guilty of fraud. So in that sense, China has arrested innocent people, or relatively innocent people, as a way to pressure Canada to let someone who may be guilty of a crime go free," said David Zweig, a Canadian political scientist at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and director of its Center on China's Transnational Relations.

But, Zweig noted, "the Americans moved first" in issuing the warrant for Meng's arrest and therefore

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must share blame for the fallout.

And Trump may have surrendered the moral high ground by saying he would consider intervening in Meng's case if it would help clinch a good trade deal with Beijing. His comments in an interview with Reuters suggested that he might view Meng as a political pawn.

"What you can't do is make our rule of law negotiable with China," said Derek Scissors, a China specialist at the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

The backdrop to the controversy is a growing disillusionment in Washington with U.S.-Chinese relations. When China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001, many American policymakers expected it to open its markets and perhaps its political system as its economy and its global integration expanded. That hasn't happened.

The Chinese government continues to restrict foreign investment and imports and to closely oversee commerce in the world's second-biggest economy. And under President Xi, the Communist Party has tightened its grip on politics.

The detention of the Canadians "telegraphs once again China's refusal to follow the rule of law and reform its system," said Michael Wessel, a member of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a congressional watchdog on China policy.

"We have to come to grips with the fact that China is a nonmarket economy ruled by a party and president who have solidified if not expanded their grip on power. ... We have to stop thinking that China wants to be more like us."

The Chinese response to Meng's arrest is also having practical repercussions.

Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics, said China's tough tactics could jeopardize its effort to woo countries like Germany, France and South Korea into an alliance against Trump's protectionist trade policies.

"These arrests, if they do have an impact, I imagine it would be a negative one, undermining that campaign to try to win over other developed economies," he said.

"It feeds into the notion that China's arrests are not based on the rule of law but on other factors," said Amanda DeBusk, chair of trade practice at the Dechert law firm and a former U.S. Commerce Department official. "Some of our clients have cancelled trips to China. Business executives are reluctant to go China right now because there is uncertainty as to who will be targeted. ... The arrests are a new escalation in the trade war with China."

They could backfire on Beijing, she said, by discouraging trade and foreign investment in China.

In Hong Kong, professor Zweig, a friend of detainee Kovrig, said: "My 96-year-old mother phoned and told me, 'Don't go to China! You're going to be arrested!'"

Gillies reported from Toronto and McDonald from Beijing.

Macron urges calm, Paris police prepare for more violence

By ELENA BECATOROS, Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emanuel Macron called Friday for calm as authorities prepared to deploy armored vehicles and thousands of security forces for a possible fifth-straight weekend of violent protests on the streets of Paris.

The "yellow vest" movement, which began its demonstrations Nov. 17 initially to protest an increase in fuel taxes, soon morphed into an expression of rage about the high cost of living in France and a sense that Macron's government is detached from the everyday struggles of workers.

"Our country needs calm. It needs order. It needs to function normally again," Macron said in Brussels, where he attended a European Union summit.

Later, he traveled to Strasbourg to express his condolences in the eastern French city where a gunman killed four people and wounded a dozen more after opening fire Tuesday near a Christmas market. The suspected attacker was killed Thursday in a shootout with police. Macron thanked some of the hundreds

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of security forces that had helped in the Strasbourg manhunt.

Macron acknowledged in a speech earlier this week that he's partially responsible for the anger displayed by the "yellow vest" protesters — whose movement takes its name from the safety garb that all French motorists must carry. He has announced measures aimed at improving workers' spending power. But he has so far refused to reinstate a wealth tax that was lifted to spur investment in France.

"I don't think our democracy can accept to function with a dialogue that is carried out only with the occupation of the public domain, only by elements of violence," Macron said.

He insisted he had heard the protesters' concerns and defended his promises to speed up tax relief. He has ignored calls for his resignation, which is now among the protesters' various demands.

Paris Police Chief Michel Delpuech told RTL radio that security services intend to deploy about 8,000 officers and 14 armored vehicles in the capital, the same numbers as last weekend. Since the start of the protests, six people have died in protest-related incidents and 1,407 people have been injured, 46 of them seriously, according to government figures.

For the second straight weekend, several weekend French league soccer matches were postponed at the request of authorities.

Some trade unions are now calling for rolling strikes across the country.

"The best action is to go on strike," said Philippe Martinez, the head of leftist trade union CGT. "There are inequalities in this country and we need to make big company bosses pay."

Delpuech said more groups of officers will be deployed this weekend to deter vandals, who last weekend roamed the elegant Champs-Elysees area, smashing store windows and looting stores. On Friday, shops were boarding up their store windows ahead of the protests and many planned to close.

"Last week, we pretty much handled the 'yellow vests,' but we also witnessed scenes of breakage and looting by criminals," Delpuech said. "Our goal will be to better control this aspect."

Police arrested more than 1,000 people in Paris last weekend, and 135 people were injured, including 17 police officers.

Amnesty International also urged authorities to use restraint, describing the security forces' response to the protests as "extremely heavy-handed."

"Police used rubber bullets, sting-ball grenades and tear gas against largely peaceful protesters who did not threaten public order and the organization has documented numerous instances of excessive use of force by police," the group said in a statement.

"Whilst policing demonstrations is a difficult task and some protesters have committed unlawful and violent acts, it is essential that both French law and international human rights law is respected," the statement quoted Rym Khadhraoui, Amnesty International's West Europe researcher, as saying.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner urged protesters to demonstrate peacefully, citing the Strasbourg attack and the work of the security services that were mobilized in the manhunt for the suspect, 29-year-old Cherif Chekatt, who was shot and killed by police.

"I can't stand the idea that today people applaud police forces and that tomorrow some people will think it makes sense to throw stones at us," Castaner said from Strasbourg.

One group of demonstrators has urged a nonviolent protest on the Place de la Republique in Paris under the slogan "Je Suis Strasbourg" ("I am Strasbourg") to show solidarity with the victims of the attack. The slogan evokes the "Je Suis Charlie" motto used by supporters of freedom of speech after a 2015 attack in which 12 people were killed at the French satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo.

Associated Press writers Samuel Petrequin and Raphael Satter in Paris and Angela Charlton in Brussels, Belgium, contributed.

See the AP's coverage of France's protests at: <https://apnews.com/FranceProtests>

Are we done here? Nope. Cranky Congress still has work to do

By LAURIE KELLMAN, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer leaned back in his seat and propped up his feet on the leather chair next to him as he listened to a colleagues farewell address this week. It was a casual vibe in the normally stuffy chamber and just one sign that the end of an ugly 115th Congress can't come soon enough, even for its own members.

There's been shouting on the Senate floor. Both chambers rang with customary farewell speeches from members who are moving on, some forced out by the midterm elections. And in the House, a few lawmakers have ghosted the whole scene as the sun sets on the only session of Congress so far under President Donald Trump.

Parties and Christmas cookies only soothe so much in the chilly Capitol after two years of Trump's provocations, dramas like Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation and the elections that flipped the House majority to Democrats. Everyone — especially members leaving for good — wants to go home.

"We have had two votes in 54 minutes," griped retiring Sen. Bob Corker as the Senate on Thursday edged toward what would become its rebuke to the Trump administration over Yemen and Saudi Arabia. But the Senate was not in order. Everyone, it seemed, was talking — loudly.

"Can we not just vote?" Corker hollered finally.

"Yes!" other senators yelled back, in rare unison.

"Lame duck" sessions of Congress are so reviled even in less-rancorous times that leaders past have used the discontent to finish business. This year, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has threatened to keep the Senate in session to the bitter end of 2018 under Trump's threat to shut the government down over the budget and his border wall. But McConnell also is holding out hope for some Christmas "magic" to speed business along and allow Congress to adjourn earlier.

So far, there is no sign of that happening. Both chambers are scheduled to be in session next week over hefty matters, including the budget and criminal sentencing reform. Votes remained scheduled.

That doesn't mean votes will be cast by all 535 members of the waning Congress. In the House, eight members didn't even bother to vote in December, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

Many outgoing members' offices are essentially shuttered. They run their waning operations out of the "Departing Members Center" in the basement of a House office building.

"Hello. You're reached the office of Congresswoman Kristi Noem, at-large member for the state of South Dakota," says a recording that answers the South Dakota Republican's House office. "Because Rep. Noem is retiring at the conclusion at the 115th Congress, our physical offices have closed."

Noem, South Dakota's governor-elect, was in town this week. While she was in town, she voted on two measures, including the farm bill.

There were warm moments. Plenty of departing lawmakers showed up to cast votes, say goodbye to their colleagues and staffers and do the hard work of moving out of their offices.

They included Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., who lost re-election to Republican Josh Hawley and scolded the Senate for allowing one party to do most of the legislating. Her staffers fanned out behind her and at least two dozen colleagues came to the chamber when it was her turn to her speak. Schumer, D-N.Y., appeared to listen intently, both legs stretched out and his ankles crossed on the seat of the leather chair alongside him.

"I would be lying if I didn't say I was worried about this place," McCaskill said. At the end of her speech, Schumer and the other senators gave McCaskill a standing ovation and lined up to hug her.

And in the House, the Republicans in the California delegation who were turned out of office on Election Day lined up Wednesday night to say goodbye and thanks. They included Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, first elected to Congress in 1988, who began his speech by naming two officers who were killed at the Capitol in 1998 by a gunman who had forced his way in.

"A lot of people gripe about the hours and sometimes some of the friction that happens among debates over important issues," he said. "But I am so grateful to have this chance ... there are many people who

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are serving their country who are not anywhere near having the wondrous life that we have.”

Outside Rohrabacher’s office across Independence Avenue, his name plate remained on the wall by the doorway. But further along the hallway sat an assortment of discarded furniture and other detritus from his office, including a big map of what appeared to be his district around Huntington, California, with a note stuck to it:

“Please remove.”

Follow Kellman on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>

This story has been corrected to reflect that eight members have not voted in December, not nine. Rep. Kristi Noem voted on two measures.

May aims to rescue Brexit plan; EU says ball’s in UK’s court

By JILL LAWLESSS and LORNE COOK, Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — British Prime Minister Theresa May launched a rescue mission for her ailing Brexit deal Friday, after the European Union rebuffed her request to sweeten the divorce agreement so she can win over hostile lawmakers at home.

EU leaders meeting in Brussels showed little appetite to resolve May’s Brexit impasse for her, saying the U.K. Parliament must make up its mind. The choice was either back the Brexit agreement or send Britain tumbling out of the bloc in March without a deal and into unknown economic chaos.

“There is one accord, the only one possible,” French President Emmanuel Macron told reporters at the end of a two-day summit. He said it was “the British parliament’s time” to decide whether to accept or reject it.

The Brexit gridlock has left Britain’s future looking like a high-stakes gamble with a dizzyingly wide range of possible outcomes. There could be an orderly or a disorderly Brexit. May’s Conservative government could fall and an early election be held. Britain could make a last-minute request to the EU to give it more time and not leave the bloc on March 29. Some people are even pressing for the U.K. to hold a second referendum on Britain’s EU membership.

So many possibilities, so little time.

May came to the EU summit seeking legally binding changes to the agreement, which is opposed by a majority of British lawmakers.

But the 27 other EU leaders offered only reassurances. They said they would seek to move swiftly on forging a new trade deal after Britain leaves the bloc, and promised that a legally binding insurance policy to keep the Irish border open would only be used temporarily.

They rejected British pressure to put a fixed end date on the border guarantee, and refused to re-negotiate the Brexit agreement, a 585-page legal text settling issues including the size of Britain’s divorce bill and the future rights of Europeans living in Britain and Britons living in the EU. It also includes a document laying out the two sides’ hopes for future relations, which isn’t legally binding.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker accused Britain of failing to give detailed proposals on Brexit, saying it was “up to the British government to tell us exactly what they want.”

May was filmed speaking sternly to Juncker as leaders arrived at Friday morning’s session of the summit. She said they had had a “robust” exchange.

Nonetheless, May told reporters in Brussels that she welcomed the EU’s reassuring words — and that, as formal conclusions of an EU summit, they “have legal status.”

“There is work still to do. And we will be holding talks in coming days about how to obtain the further assurances that the U.K. Parliament needs in order to be able to approve the deal,” May said.

European Council President Donald Tusk, however, said no talks with Britain were scheduled.

“I have no mandate to organize any further negotiations,” Tusk told reporters. “But of course, we will stay here in Brussels, and I am always at Prime Minister Theresa May’s disposal.”

But May’s against-the-odds optimism contrasted with a pessimistic tone from many on the EU side. EU

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leaders expressed deep doubts that May could live up to her side of their Brexit agreement and vowed to step up preparations for a potentially-catastrophic "no-deal" scenario for Britain's departure.

"We are going to be sure to prepare for all hypotheses, including the hypothesis of a 'no deal,'" said Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, who expressed a "gigantic doubt" that May could get her Brexit deal passed by British lawmakers.

But there was also sympathy for a leader who has endured the toughest week of her career.

Juncker said May was "a good friend, and I am admiring her, because this is a woman of great courage doing her job in the best way possible."

May canceled a Brexit vote in the U.K. Parliament this week after it became clear that lawmakers would resoundingly reject the Brexit deal she concluded with the EU last month. Anger at that postponement helped trigger a no-confidence vote in May from members of her own Conservative Party. She won, but was left weakened after more than a third of her lawmakers rebelled.

Still, May insists she will secure enough changes to get Parliament's approval in a vote before Jan. 21. May says failure to support her deal could lead to a "no-deal" Brexit, which officials warn could bring economic recession, gridlock at U.K. ports and shortages of essential goods.

The problem is that May's deal is loathed both by pro-Brexit lawmakers, who think it keeps Britain bound too closely to the bloc, and pro-Europeans, who see it as inferior to staying in the EU.

Opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said the EU's refusal to renegotiate meant May's Brexit plan was "dead in the water." But Labour not yet triggered a no-confidence vote in May's government.

Many in the EU feel the problem lies with Britain's divided Parliament, which largely dislikes May's deal but doesn't agree on a better option. Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel said the problem was not Britain's leader.

"We know what Theresa May wants, and she wants to have the possible deal passing Westminster, but the problem is the MPs in London," he said.

AP writers Raf Casert and Angela Charlton in Brussels, Gregory Katz in London and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed.

The debt threat: Business debt, and worries about it, are up

By STAN CHOE, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Homeowners appear to have learned the lesson of the Great Recession about not taking on too much debt. There is some concern that Corporate America didn't get the message.

For much of the past decade, companies have borrowed at super-low interest rates and used the money to buy back stock, acquire other businesses and refinance old debt. The vast majority of companies are paying their bills on time, thanks in large part to profits that have surged since the economy emerged from the Great Recession nine and a half years ago.

But with interest rates rising and U.S. economic growth expected to slow next year, worries are building from Washington to Wall Street that corporate debt is approaching potentially dangerous levels. U.S. corporate debt has grown by nearly two-thirds since 2008 to more than \$9 trillion and, along with government debt, has ballooned much faster than other parts of the bond market. Investors are most concerned about companies at the weaker end of the financial-strength scale — those considered most likely to default or to get downgraded to "junk" status should a recession hit.

"I've been more worried about the bond market than the equity market," said Kirk Hartman, global chief investment officer at Wells Fargo Asset Management. "I think at some point, all the leverage in the system is going to rear its ugly head."

Consider General Electric, which said in early October it would record a big charge related to its struggling power unit, one that ended up totaling \$22 billion. Both Moody's and Standard & Poor's subsequently downgraded GE's credit rating to three notches above "speculative" grade, which indicates a higher risk of default.

GE, with about \$115 billion in total borrowings, is part of a growing group of companies concentrated at

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the lower end of investment-grade. Other high-profile names in this area within a few notches of junk grade include General Motors and Verizon Communications. They make up nearly 45 percent of the Bloomberg Barclays Credit index, more than quadruple their proportion during the early 1970s.

Credit-rating agencies say downgrades for GE, GM or Verizon aren't imminent. But the concern for them, and broadly for this swelling group of businesses, is if profits start falling or the economy hits a recession.

If those companies do drop below investment grade, they'd be what investors call "fallen angels," and they can trigger waves of selling. Many mutual funds and other investors are required to own only high-quality, investment-grade bonds — so they would have to sell any bonds that get cut to junk.

The forced selling would lead to a drop in bond prices, which could result in higher borrowing costs for companies, which hurts their ability to repay their debts, which could lead to even more selling.

Even the chairman of the Federal Reserve has taken notice of the rise in corporate debt. Jerome Powell said in a recent speech that business borrowing usually rises when the economy is growing. But he said it's concerning that, over the last year, the companies increasing their borrowing the most are those already with high debt and interest burdens.

To be sure, many bond fund managers say companies were smart to borrow hefty sums at low rates. And at the moment, there are no outward signs of danger. The default rate for junk-rated corporate bonds was 2.6 percent last month, which is lower than the historical average, and S&P Global Fixed Income Research expects it to fall in upcoming months.

Even if the economy does fall into a recession, fund managers say losses won't be to the same scale as 2008 when the financial crisis sent the S&P 500 to a drop of nearly 37 percent and the most popular category of bond funds to an average loss of 4.7 percent.

In his speech, Powell said he doesn't see the weaker parts of the corporate debt market undermining the financial system in the event of an economic downturn, at least "for now."

Other investors see the market's growing worries as premature. Companies are still making record profits, which allow them to repay their debts, and consumer confidence is still high.

"There is a story out there that there's a recession coming very soon, and you had better head for the hills," said Warren Pierson, deputy chief investment officer at Baird Advisors. "We think that's a pretty early call. We don't see recession on the horizon."

That's why he and Mary Ellen Stanek, who run bond mutual funds at Baird, haven't given up on corporate bonds, even if they've moderated how much they own.

But critics see some echoes of the financial crisis in today's loosening lending standards. Consider leveraged loans, a section of the market that makes loans to companies with lots of debt or relatively weak finances. These loans have been popular with investors in recent years because they often have what are called floating rates, so they pay more in interest when rates are rising.

Paul Massaro, portfolio manager for floating-rate strategies at T. Rowe Price, says he's still positive about this market in general. But his team of analysts has been finding more warning flags in offerings, where the terms of the deal may be overly friendly to borrowers and allow them to amass more debt than they should.

It's gotten to the point where Massaro is participating in about 15 percent of all offerings today, down from 30 percent a few years ago.

Investors have largely been willing to stomach higher risk because they've been starved for income following years of very low interest rates.

As a result, some bonds that by many accounts look like risky junk bonds are trading at prices and yields that should be reserved for higher-quality bonds, say Tom McCauley and Yoav Sharon, who run the \$976.3 million Driehaus Active Income fund. To take advantage, they're increasingly "shorting" corporate bonds, which are trades that pay off if the bonds' prices fall.

They recently began shorting bonds of a packaged goods company with a "BBB" rating that borrowed to help pay for a large acquisition, for example. A "BBB" rating is at the lower end of investment grade, and a drop to "BB" would send it into junk status.

With so much debt, McCauley and Sharon believe that it's at risk of getting downgraded to junk and is

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not paying enough in yield to compensate for its risk.

"As we get into the later stages of the cycle, the sins of the early stages of the cycle tend to start showing up," said Sharon. "We think that's where we are today."

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 15, the 349th day of 2018. There are 16 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 15, 1791, the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, went into effect following ratification by Virginia.

On this date:

In 1890, Sioux Indian Chief Sitting Bull and 11 other tribe members were killed in Grand River, South Dakota, during a confrontation with Indian police.

In 1938, groundbreaking for the Jefferson Memorial took place in Washington, D.C. with President Franklin D. Roosevelt taking part in the ceremony.

In 1944, a single-engine plane carrying bandleader Glenn Miller, a major in the U.S. Army Air Forces, disappeared over the English Channel while en route to Paris.

In 1960, Teflon-coated skillet first went on sale, at Macy's flagship store in New York City.

In 1961, former Nazi official Adolf Eichmann was sentenced to death by an Israeli court for crimes against humanity. (Eichmann was hanged 5 1/2 months later.)

In 1965, two U.S. manned spacecraft, Gemini 6A and Gemini 7, maneuvered toward each other while in orbit, at one point coming as close as one foot.

In 1967, the Silver Bridge between Gallipolis (gal-ih-puh-LEES'), Ohio, and Point Pleasant, West Virginia, collapsed into the Ohio River, killing 46 people.

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter announced he would grant diplomatic recognition to Communist China on New Year's Day and sever official relations with Taiwan.

In 1989, a popular uprising began in Romania that resulted in the downfall of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (chow-SHES'-koo).

In 1995, European Union leaders meeting in Madrid, Spain, chose "euro" as the name of the new single European currency.

In 2000, the long-troubled Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine was closed for good.

In 2001, with a crash and a large dust cloud, a 50-foot tall section of steel — the last standing piece of the World Trade Center's facade — was brought down in New York.

Ten years ago: President-elect Barack Obama said a review by his own lawyer showed he'd had no direct contact with Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (blah-GOY'-uh-vich) about the appointment of a Senate replacement, and that transition aides "did nothing inappropriate." Illinois lawmakers took the first steps toward removing Blagojevich, a Democrat, from office.

Five years ago: Nelson Mandela was laid to rest in his childhood hometown, ending a 10-day mourning period for South Africa's first black president. Michelle Bachelet easily won Chile's presidential runoff. Academy Award-winning actress Joan Fontaine, 96, died in Carmel, California. Harold Camping, 92, a California preacher who'd used his radio ministry and thousands of billboards to broadcast the end of the world and then gave up when his date-specific doomsdays did not come to pass, died in Oakland, California.

One year ago: Republicans revealed the details of their huge national tax rewrite; the 35 percent tax rate on corporations would fall to 21 percent, and the measure would repeal the requirement under President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act that all Americans have health insurance or face a penalty. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said the middle class would "get skewered" under the GOP tax measure, while the wealthy and corporations would "make out like bandits." A huge wildfire in coastal mountains northwest of Los Angeles continued to surge west, endangering thousands of homes; the fire was the

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fourth-largest in the state's history.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Tim Conway is 85. Singer Cindy Birdsong (The Supremes) is 79. Rock musician Dave Clark (The Dave Clark Five) is 76. Rock musician Carmine Appice (Vanilla Fudge) is 72. Actor Don Johnson is 69. Actress Melanie Chartoff is 68. Movie director Julie Taymor is 66. Movie director Alex Cox is 64. Actor Justin Ross is 64. Rock musician Paul Simonon (The Clash) is 63. Movie director John Lee Hancock is 62. Democratic Party activist Donna Brazile is 59. Country singer Doug Phelps (Brother Phelps; Kentucky Headhunters) is 58. Movie producer-director Reginald Hudlin is 57. Actress Helen Slater is 55. Actor Paul Kaye (TV: "Game of Thrones") is 54. Actress Molly Price is 53. Actor Garrett Wang (wahng) is 50. Actor Michael Shanks is 48. Actor Stuart Townsend is 46. Figure skater Surya Bonaly is 45. Actor Geoff Stults is 42. "Crowd-hyper" Kito Trawick (Ghostown DJs) is 41. Actor Adam Brody is 39. Actress Michelle Dockery is 37. Actor George O. Gore II is 36. Actress Camilla Luddington is 35. Rock musician Alana Haim (HYM) is 27. Actress Maude Apatow (AP'-ih-tow) is 21. Actress Stefania Owen is 21.

Thought for Today: "Silence is more musical than any song." — Christina Rossetti, British poet (1830-1874).